

P9

DJOKOVIC SURVIVES 'TOUGHEST MATCH' TO BEAT ALCARAZ



P11

PHOTOGRAPHIC ODYSSEY OF A YOUNG OMANI



P13

2,700 INVESTOR RESIDENCY CARDS ISSUED TILL DATE



MUSCAT

CRUDE PRICE UP BY \$1.49 A BARREL

Oman oil price for October delivery on Monday reached \$86.94, comprising a rise by \$1.49 from the price of last Friday which stood at \$85.45. The average price of Oman oil for August delivery has stabilised at \$74.78 per barrel, thus 16 cents per barrel lower than July delivery. World oil prices rose as much as \$1 after snapping a seven-week winning streak last week on concerns about Chinese demand. Brent crude was last at \$85.74 a barrel, while US crude was at \$82.37. The ascent of the dollar and yields was weighing on gold at \$1,894 an ounce, after it touched a 5-month low last week.

BENGALURU

MOON LANDING HOPE BUILDS FOR INDIA

India's space agency on Monday released images its spacecraft took of the far side of the moon as it headed for an attempted landing on the lunar south pole, just days after the failure of a Russian lander. The Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft had been in a race with Russia to be the first to land on the lunar south pole, a region whose shadowed craters are thought to contain water ice that could support a future moon settlement. As news of the failure of Russia's Luna-25 mission broke on Sunday, ISRO said that Chandrayaan-3 was on course to land on August 23. All systems on the spacecraft are working "perfectly" and no contingencies are anticipated on the landing day, the space agency said on Monday. The mission — Chandrayaan — is India's second attempt to land on the south pole of the moon.



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AL HOOTA CAVE TRAIN TO RUN AGAIN

Al Hoota Cave Company of Omran Group said negotiations are on with a company to re-operate Al Hoota Cave electric train after a long gap. According to Ibrahim bin Said al Wahaibi, Projects Director at the company, the train service was suspended due to a glitch reported in the railway, affirming that the company is looking for the best company to restore the services. **DETAILS ON P3**

Oman condemns acts of sabotage against churches in Pakistan

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman on Monday expressed its denunciation and condemnation of brutal acts of vandalism that targeted churches and homes in the city of Faisalabad, eastern Pakistan.

In a statement by the Foreign Ministry, Oman lauded the steps taken by the Pakistani government to address those acts which, Oman said, contravene religious teachings and human values. Oman reiterated its rejection of all practices of violence, hatred and intolerance against religions and beliefs.

Meanwhile, Pakistani Christians held services at churches that were vandalised and torched by a mob last week.

The services at a handful of churches in the city of Jaranwala in eastern Pakistan were led by the bishop of the diocese, Christian



community leader Akmal Bhatti said. He attended one of the services, which drew hundreds of Christians whose homes were partly or completely destroyed when the mob burnt and looted them on Wednesday.

The government said in a statement that compensation of Rs 2 million (\$6,751.05) has been approved for each of the affected families. — **Agencies**

BACK-TO-SCHOOL ESSENTIALS

Major drive to keep prices under control

AHMED AL KAAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 21

In preparation for the forthcoming academic year, a large number of parents are expressing concern over the escalating cost of school supplies. The financial strain falls particularly on household breadwinners, whose monthly earnings might not align with the demands imposed by educational institutions.

Addressing these concerns, the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has intensified its campaign on establishments selling textiles, footwear, and school essentials across various governorates. This initiative is timed to coincide with the back-to-school season. The authority's inspection teams ensure availability of all school supplies, and scrutinise price conformity.

Emphasising proactive measures, the authority underscores the significance of early procurement of school necessities for children. Doing so allows parents to compare options, and make reasonable choices before the academic year commences.

Following the conclusion of vacation and the absence of funds earmarked for the school season, some individuals have deferred financial planning. Consequently, establishments dealing in school supplies are witnessing a surge in activity, often accompanied by grievances from citizens regarding the escalating cost of such items.

Saif al Zaabi, a father of three, attests to the noticeable

Price hikes are predictable, as certain retailers capitalise on the opportunity with the back-to-school period and parents should actively report any instance of price manipulation

SAID AL HARTHY
An economic analyst

rise in school supply prices. He notes that this inflation perplexes families and presents a substantial hurdle to budgeting for household essentials and other related expenditures. Al Zaabi's experience exemplifies the problematic situation faced by many parents.

To explain this matter, Said al Harthy, an economic analyst, explains that such price hikes are predictable, as certain retailers capitalise on the opportunity surrounding the back-to-school period. He further indicates that measures are being implemented by consumer protection bodies to curb excessive inflation. Al Harthy emphasises that parents should actively report any instance of price manipulation.

Al Harthy proposes several strategies to alleviate financial pressure. He advises meticulous planning by creating a checklist tailored to each child's age group and educational needs. This list forms the basis for a calculated budget.

100 per cent population in Oman enjoy basic services: Report

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

A report by the GCC Statistical Centre regarding 'poverty eradication' showed that GCC countries had crossed the international poverty line of \$2.15 per day.

The Sultanate of Oman has achieved high levels of coverage of basic services provided to the

population by about 100 per cent, the percentage of expenditure on these services has reached 25.4 per cent, and the daily per capita share for groups eligible for social security pensions has risen to \$6.8 from the level of the international poverty line, which was set at \$2.15 per day.

The percentage of the population covered by minimum limits benefiting from social



protection systems in the Sultanate of Oman reached 4.8 per cent, according to the data monitoring progress in achieving sustainable development goals in 2030 in the GCC.

All GCC countries have crossed the threshold of international poverty line, and the GCC countries enjoy the presence of social protection systems that target a broad segment of

society with limited incomes, the report said.

The lower-income groups in the society obtain special privileges, such as the right to own land without fee, obtain housing assistance such as loans, and direct ownership of housing units.

The average per capita share of social security pensions in Oman in 2019 was about \$6.8 per day.

TURN TO P3





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Drone competition launched under digital initiative

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 21

To train youths in artificial intelligence driven drones, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) will conduct a drone competition with the support of Sultan Qaboos University's College of Engineering and Ooredoo.

The programme, which comes under the National Initiative to Qualify Digital Competencies (Makeen), will include workshops and training courses to develop and refine skills of participants. The best performing participants will also qualify for the annual competition that will be held in February 2024 at Sultan Qaboos University.

The programme targets students of colleges and universities who are looking to acquire new technical skills – particularly in the field of drones – that will enable them to actively participate in implementing technical solutions and contribute to building the national economy.

It also aims to prepare and support the winning participants to compete in regional and international competitions. MoTCIT has set conditions to accept participants, including



nationality (Omani), being a student pursuing a Bachelor's degree or a graduate having knowledge of programming languages.

The training programme combines theory and practice with a greater emphasis on practical aspects. The accepted students will be divided into six batches, each batch consisting of 20 participants. Each batch will undergo a training programme consisting of four training modules. The candidate must have knowledge of programming, and knowledge of Python language is preferred.

The candidate must be familiar with the English language to enable him/her to understand the content and pass the exams.

The registration deadline is August 31. For registration visit <https://makeen.gov.om/Register>

MoHT to launch mortar mixed with palm fronds, Omani cotton

MUSCAT: Mortar mixed with palm fronds will soon be on the market by the end of this year. These bricks are more durable and reduce agricultural waste by recycling of palm fronds. The Sarooj project is jointly implemented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in association with cooperation with Oman Cement Company.

The MoHT is also planning to revive Khadarangi cotton, which gives unique brownish fibre. The first phase of the Omani cotton project costing RO 30,000 is under way.

The clothes made out of these cotton were used in ancient times in Oman. Khadarangi cotton was mostly cultivated in Samayil in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, and Al Mudhaibi in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate among other places.

A top MoHT official said the ministry and the Industrial Innovation Centre are working out on these projects to boost the handicrafts sector and add value to tourism.

Alia bint Salem al Hinaiyah, Director of Handicraft Heritage Department at the MoHT, said: "Handcraft heritage has historical, cultural and social importance. Knowledge and skills pass across many generations be it in wood, silver ware, copper ware, perfumes, leather, ceramics or pottery."

She added that the ministry takes all efforts to document craft heritage for future generations and



register some crafts as intangible heritage in UNESCO list. Omani khanjar (dagger) was included in the UNESCO list this year.

Another project in the leather industry aims to provide high quality natural leather to tanners from slaughterhouses in Dhofar

and Al Buraimi.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism undertakes these projects to maximise investment opportunities and support crafts people.

The MoHT is working on documenting craft industries

through a number of publications, including the monthly publication of the Treasures of Craftsmanship Heritage series. Data was also collected for crafts based on palm fronds, copper and silver ware, leather, wood and cotton.

Al Hinaiyah emphasised that the ministry is exerting efforts to support the craft heritage by assisting artisans, implementing studies and inventorying the crafts carried out by the ministry, coming up with recommendations and proposals and coordinating with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development to prepare programmes that will strengthen the craft sector.

— ONA

Embassy of India's Mission Life concludes

MUSCAT: The Embassy of India has concluded a week-long awareness campaign as part of the Mission Life (Lifestyle for Environment) initiative, aimed at encouraging behavioural changes in individuals to combat climate change. The campaign, which ran from August 13 to August 19, included a series of impactful activities and events that highlighted the importance of transitioning from wasteful consumption to responsible resource utilisation.

The initiative seeks to address the pressing challenges of climate change and global warming by inspiring individuals to adopt Eco-friendly practices in their daily lives. Ambassador Amit Narang highlighted the urgency of addressing climate change and emphasising the role of Mission LiFE in achieving this goal.

On August 16, Indian School Wadi Kabir (ISWK) hosted a remarkable mega event as part of their commitment to promoting Mission Life.

Law highlights employer-employee relations

VINOD NAIR
vinot_nair

The New Labour Law issued by Royal Decree 53/2023 has underlined the role of an employer vis-à-vis the employee.

Article 52 of the law states that the employer is obligated to create a special file for each worker that includes his full personal and even professional details, which include the date of joining, leaves, penalties, performance, and the termination of the contract.

The employer will be required to keep the employee file for a period of at least one year from the date of termination of the employment relationship.

In all cases, the employer must maintain the confidentiality of the information provided by the worker or seen by the employer in accordance with the provisions of this law, and the worker shall be given a receipt for the papers and certificates he may have deposited with the employer.

Article 53 states that the employer may not violate the contract's provisions or assign the worker to work other than agreed upon unless necessary to prevent



the occurrence of an accident, repair the consequences thereof, or in case of force majeure, and on a temporary basis.

The employer may assign the worker to work that is not agreed upon if that work is not fundamentally different from the original work, provided that this does not prejudice the rights of the worker and that it does not result in serious harm or financial burdens without fair consideration.

Article 57 states that the

employer is obligated to provide the means of first aid for his workers in the establishment, and in the event that the number of his workers in one place exceeds 200 workers, he must appoint a qualified nurse to provide medical aid, or contract with a specialised institution to provide these services. If the worker is treated in a government or private hospital and health insurance coverage is not available, the employer must bear the expenses of treatment, medicine, and hospital stay in

accordance with the financial regulations and systems in force in those hospitals.

Article 58 states that an employer who carries on work in the areas specified by the Minister shall provide his workers with appropriate means of transportation and shall provide them with adequate housing, meals, and drinking water in places he prepares for this purpose.

Article 59 states that the employer may, when necessary and in agreement with the worker, transfer the worker from his original work site to any other work site in the same establishment or from his original work to any other job in one of his other establishments after being authorised to do so by the Ministry in this case.

In all cases, the employer shall bear all the costs incurred.

Article 60 states that the employer must provide a place for women to rest in the premises of the establishment in which the number of female workers exceeds 25 female workers.

Article 61 states that without prejudice to the provisions

of Article (48) of this law, the employer must, at the end of the working relationship of workers who do not benefit from the provisions of the Social Protection Law, pay the worker a reward for his period of service, not less than a basic wage for each year of his service.

Article 62 states that the employer is obligated to hand over to the worker, at his request and free of charge, an end-of-service certificate indicating the date of his entry into the service, the date of his exit from it, the type of work he was performing, the wage and other rewards and other privileges, if any.

The employer shall return to the worker whatever papers or certificates he may have deposited with him, and the worker shall sign on receiving his papers and certificates.

Article 63 states that the employer may not impose any penalty on the worker except after notifying him in writing of what has been attributed to him, hearing his statements, investigating his defence, and recording them in writing in a report prepared for this purpose.



Development projects in Shinas on track

SHINAS: The Municipality of Al Batinah North Governorate completed many road projects in the Wilayat of Shinas. These include tarring and repairing of roads. Seventy five per cent of works at the sea facing promenade is complete. These include kiosks for small enterprises, interlock walkways, toilets, waiting room for taxi drivers. It is worth noting that the municipality of Al Batinah North assigned a number of projects in the Wilayat of Shinas during the second half of this year, including a project for designing and paving 11 km of roads another project to build parking lots and storm water channel.



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 21

The Ministry of Education honoured more than 100 outstanding students in the general diploma in the schools of the Sultanate of Oman for the academic year 2022/2023, on Sunday. The ceremony was held at the Al Bustan Palace Hotel under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and in the presence of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, and with the support of Occidental Oman (OXY).

The ceremony began with an introductory film, after which Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, delivered the ministry's speech, then Occidental Oman, the sponsoring company, gave a presentation on social responsibility, followed by the company's speech delivered by Nasser bin Issa al Maskari, Director of the Social Responsibility Department.

The students, Al Jawhara al



Hasani, Afnan al Zadjali, Osama al Nawfali, and Faisal al Amri recited 'Outstanding, Bright with Joy' a poem by Munira bint Khamis al Maamariyah. The speech of the outstanding students was delivered followed by the actual honouring of the excellent students.

Dr Ambusaidi stressed in his speech on the importance of caring for the excellent students: "Caring for the excellent and supporting them as the real wealth of this country is one of the priorities of the wise government, so everyone must motivate them and provide them with all aspects of care to achieve excellence and continue to compete at

their university level, and in all fields of science and knowledge. We call on our outstanding students who were able to pass this stage successfully, and excel, to continue their excellence in the next educational stages, and to strive to achieve success no less than what they achieved in this stage, and we also call on them to invest their excellence in what supports this country and achieves its goals. We can only extend our highest thanks and gratitude to everyone who contributed to reaching this goal, and everyone who persevered in achieving it, including parents, school administrations, teachers, and everyone who had a hand and

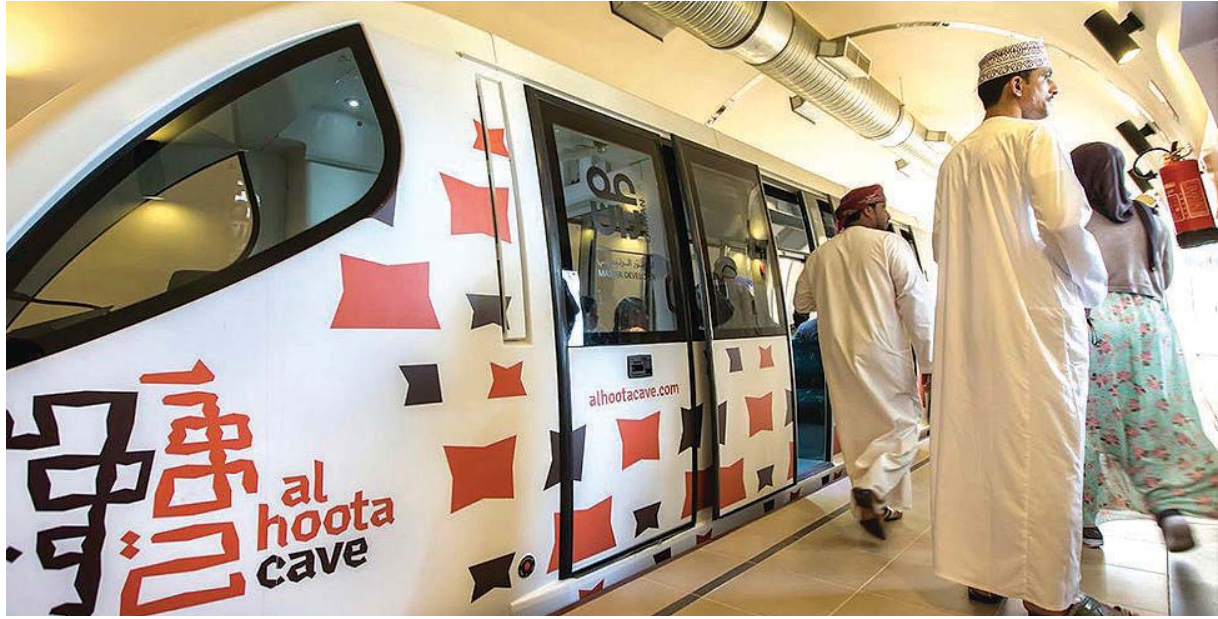
avenue for this excellence."

Occidental Oman's Al Maskari said: "At Occidental Oman, through our strategy in the field of social responsibility, we attach great importance to supporting and investing in education, as it is a sustainable investment whose positive impact is reflected on generations. This is in line with the royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, which aims to provide education with all the means of empowerment in line with the requirements of the next stage, and with Oman Vision 2040, which placed education and strengthening national capabilities at the top of its priorities."

Plan to restart Al Hoota Cave electric train

MUSCAT: Al Hoota Cave Company of Omran Group said discussion are going on with a company to restart Al Hoota Cave electric train. According to Ibrahim bin Said al Wahaibi, Projects Director at the company, operation of the train has been suspended due to a glitch reported in the railway, affirming that the company was hunting for a best bargain to restore the service.

"We are waiting for technical and financial evaluation to be sent by an Iranian company that visited the site earlier", he added. Al Wahaibi reiterated that the cave is open to its visitors despite the train suspension, noting that the distance travelled by the train covers 500 to 550 metres from the Visitor's Centre to the man-made tunnel. The delay in fixing the glitch was attributed to various circumstances triggered by Covid-19, including travel ban,



lockdowns and other preventive measures, Al Wahaibi said. "As ensuring the safety of our visitors is a top priority, the company had taken its time to search for the best speciality company in this domain." Extending over 4.5 km (2.8 miles), Al Hoota is located at

the foot of Jabal Shams, Oman's highest mountain. The cave has been formed and shaped by natural process over millions of years, creating stalactites hanging from the ceilings and stalagmites reaching up from the floor. Silence engulfs you as

you enter the cave, stepping foot into its impressive chambers. All year round, water runs through Hoota Cave, providing a habitat for tiny blind cave fish. As a tourist attraction, a train ride is a must to provide an unforgettable comprehensive experience.

100 per cent population enjoy basic services

FROM PAGE 1

Data from the GCC countries indicate that the percentage of the population living above the international poverty line - less than \$2.15 per day - is about 100 per cent. For groups entitled to social security pensions, which are among the lowest-income groups in these countries, where the average daily income of these groups exceeds about \$29 per day, which is about 13 times higher than the level of the international poverty line, and at the international level, the number of poor people living in poverty increased extreme in 2020, to range between 75 and 95 million people.

The data indicates a clear gap between the GCC countries in the percentage of the population

covered by the minimum levels of social protection systems, which ranges between 0.7 per cent and 10 per cent of the population, and the Sultanate of Oman recorded 4.8 per cent of the population. With regard to the indicator of the percentage of the population which can access basic services, it has reached about 100 per cent of all GCC countries in 2020. The percentage of government spending on basic services in GCC countries ranged between 21.3 per cent and 37.3 per cent in 2021, it said. Spending on the agricultural sector is less than one per cent in all Gulf countries.

Meanwhile, Oman's spending on basic services stood at 25.4 per cent, with education accounting for 15.5 per cent, health 7.4 per cent, and social protection 2.5 per cent.

Passenger traffic surges at Salalah Airport in Khareef

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The passenger movement at Salalah increased by 32 per cent to 183,167 in July 2023 compared to 137,741 in June 22.

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

It may be noted that 84 per cent (305,350) of the total 396,108 khareef visitors to Salalah this year (until July 31, 2023) came via road, compared to 90,758 visitors who took the flights.

These may include travellers from neighbouring countries.

The number of visitors to khareef season from June 21 to July 31 stood at 396,108, an increase of 12.8 per cent compared to the corresponding period in 2022.

According to the NCSI, the number of Omani visitors to Khareef Dhofar during the abovementioned period grew by 13 per cent to 296,135, while 59,555 visitors from other GCC states showed up at Khareef Dhofar season this year, compared to 52,807 in 2022.

At the same time, the passenger movement

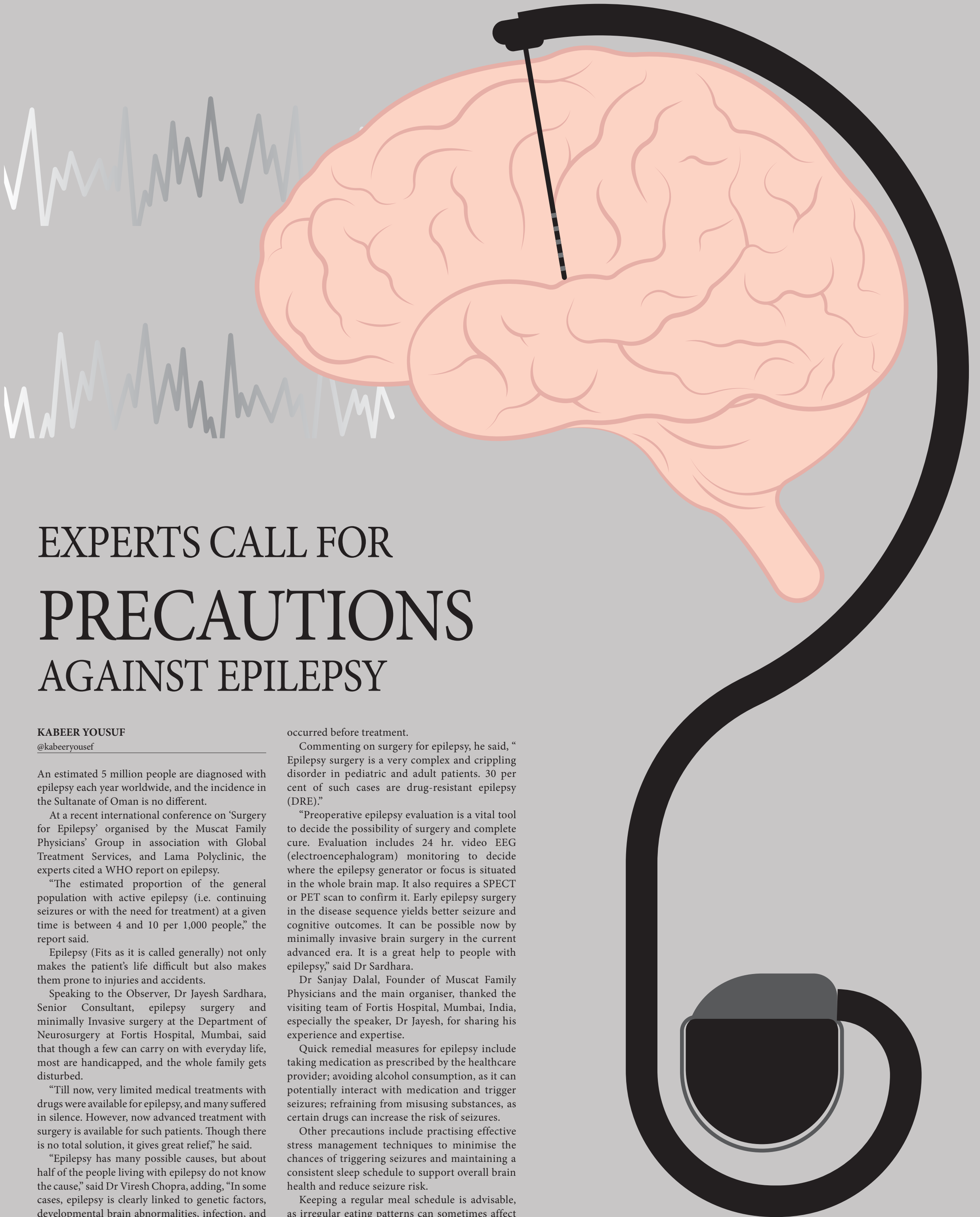
at Muscat International Airport increased 42 per cent to 1,235,067 in July 2023 compared to 868,318 in July 2022, while aircraft movement increased by 38 per cent to 9,890 from 7,160 in July 2022.

The passenger movement at Sohar Airport increased 62 per cent in July 2023 to 12,707, with aircraft movement going up by 153 per cent to 195 from 77 a year ago.

The Duqm Airport saw an increase of 13 during the same period.

The number of planes using Omani airspace increased 23 per cent to 40,839 in 2023 from 33,110 in 2022.





EXPERTS CALL FOR PRECAUTIONS AGAINST EPILEPSY

KABEER YOUSUF
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An estimated 5 million people are diagnosed with epilepsy each year worldwide, and the incidence in the Sultanate of Oman is no different.

At a recent international conference on ‘Surgery for Epilepsy’ organised by the Muscat Family Physicians’ Group in association with Global Treatment Services, and Lama Polyclinic, the experts cited a WHO report on epilepsy.

“The estimated proportion of the general population with active epilepsy (i.e. continuing seizures or with the need for treatment) at a given time is between 4 and 10 per 1,000 people,” the report said.

Epilepsy (Fits as it is called generally) not only makes the patient’s life difficult but also makes them prone to injuries and accidents.

Speaking to the Observer, Dr Jayesh Sardhara, Senior Consultant, epilepsy surgery and minimally Invasive surgery at the Department of Neurosurgery at Fortis Hospital, Mumbai, said that though a few can carry on with everyday life, most are handicapped, and the whole family gets disturbed.

“Till now, very limited medical treatments with drugs were available for epilepsy, and many suffered in silence. However, now advanced treatment with surgery is available for such patients. Though there is no total solution, it gives great relief,” he said.

“Epilepsy has many possible causes, but about half of the people living with epilepsy do not know the cause,” said Dr Viresh Chopra, adding, “In some cases, epilepsy is clearly linked to genetic factors, developmental brain abnormalities, infection, and other identifiable problems.”

Epilepsy may develop because of many conditions that disrupt normal brain activity, known as “co-occurring conditions”. Once these conditions are treated, individuals may no longer have seizures. However, whether the seizures stop varies based on the type of disorder, the affected brain region, and how much brain damage

occurred before treatment.

Commenting on surgery for epilepsy, he said, “Epilepsy surgery is a very complex and crippling disorder in pediatric and adult patients. 30 per cent of such cases are drug-resistant epilepsy (DRE).”

“Preoperative epilepsy evaluation is a vital tool to decide the possibility of surgery and complete cure. Evaluation includes 24 hr. video EEG (electroencephalogram) monitoring to decide where the epilepsy generator or focus is situated in the whole brain map. It also requires a SPECT or PET scan to confirm it. Early epilepsy surgery in the disease sequence yields better seizure and cognitive outcomes. It can be possible now by minimally invasive brain surgery in the current advanced era. It is a great help to people with epilepsy,” said Dr Sardhara.

Dr Sanjay Dalal, Founder of Muscat Family Physicians and the main organiser, thanked the visiting team of Fortis Hospital, Mumbai, India, especially the speaker, Dr Jayesh, for sharing his experience and expertise.

Quick remedial measures for epilepsy include taking medication as prescribed by the healthcare provider; avoiding alcohol consumption, as it can potentially interact with medication and trigger seizures; refraining from misusing substances, as certain drugs can increase the risk of seizures.

Other precautions include practising effective stress management techniques to minimise the chances of triggering seizures and maintaining a consistent sleep schedule to support overall brain health and reduce seizure risk.

Keeping a regular meal schedule is advisable, as irregular eating patterns can sometimes affect seizure control.

Such patients should avoid flashing lights, as they can trigger seizures in some individuals, and there should be measures to protect yourself from head injuries, as these can potentially provoke seizures.

Fever needs to be taken care of as they can sometimes lower the seizure threshold.



Nigeria’s Tinubu swears in 45 ministers amid concerns over insecurity



Nigerian President Bola Tinubu waves at a crowd, during his swearing-in ceremony in Abuja, Nigeria. – Reuters file photo

ABUJA: Nigerian President Bola Tinubu on Monday swore in 45 ministers to a new cabinet that must get to grips with tackling the problems of sluggish growth, a weak currency and high inflation in Africa’s largest economy.

The country also faces widespread insecurity, including the theft of crude oil by criminal gangs.

The ceremony took place nearly three months after Tinubu took office on May 29 after winning a disputed presidential election in February which is being challenged by his main opponents in court.

The new cabinet will have to confront sluggish growth, caused by a previous collapse in oil prices that weakened the currency, slashed government revenues and drove up inflation. It must also try to win back foreign investors.

International community cheers Guatemala anti-graft candidate’s landslide victory

GUATEMALA: International leaders celebrated the overwhelming victory on Sunday of Guatemalan presidential aspirant Bernardo Arevalo, a win which had long seemed out of reach for the anti-graft candidate in an elections process shaken by accusations of government intervention.

“A salute to the people and government of Guatemala for an exemplary election day, a true civic celebration,” said Organization of American States (OAS) chief Luis Almagro.

Arevalo, a 64-year-old former diplomat and son of Guatemala’s first democratically elected president, nabbed 58 per cent of votes versus former first lady Sandra Torres’ 37 per cent, with nearly all votes counted late on Sunday.



Guatemalan anti-graft presidential candidate Bernardo Arevalo and Guatemalan vice presidential candidate Karin Herrera celebrate following the victory in the presidential run-off election, in Guatemala City

“The outcome of the vote is already very clear,” European Union’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement. “It is crucial for all state institutions and all sectors of society to support and join in this effort in the interests of the country.”

Arevalo, who ran on a campaign of fighting corruption, faced an uphill battle at the polls. He came in a surprise second place in a first-round vote earlier this year, triggering a run-off.

His competitor Torres alleged irregularities in the first round of voting and Arevalo’s party, Semilla, was briefly suspended at the request of a top prosecutor.

By Monday morning, Torres had yet to accept her loss publicly. In a press conference on Sunday afternoon, the candidate, an ally to outgoing President Alejandro Giammattei, said she was “worried” about the integrity of the vote.

Her UNE party said in a statement late on Sunday it would take a position once the elections results were put out “with total

transparency.”

An OAS representative, with a team of 86 election observers in Guatemala, said voting had gone smoothly and the election “fulfilled all the demanding obligations.”

An EU mission will put out a preliminary statement with its findings on Tuesday.

President Giammattei has vowed to ensure an orderly transition of power. He said that he had congratulated Arevalo, and invited him to meet “the day after election results were finalised.”

Arevalo will face challenges once in office, as Guatemala is roiled by violence and food insecurity. Guatemalans now represent the largest number of Central Americans seeking to enter the US. — Reuters

Jakarta orders civil servants work from home to improve air quality

JAKARTA: Thousands of public employees in Indonesia’s capital, or half of its civil servants, were told to work from home starting on Monday in a two-month trial aimed at improving the city’s air quality, a government notice said.

Jakarta and its surrounding cities form a megalopolis of about 30 million people, and its airborne concentration of the tiny particles.

Activists blame the high levels of toxic smog on clusters of factories and coal-fired power plants near the capital, but the government has dismissed such claims, arguing that Jakarta’s

recent worsening air pollution was mainly due to weather and traffic.

The official notice says that the work-from-home scheme was related to efforts to reduce traffic congestion in the city during the ASEAN summit next month as well as to “decrease air pollution levels in Jakarta”.

It ordered 50 per cent of civil servants employed by the Jakarta administration to work from home between August 21 and October 21, and said up to 75 per cent of the capital’s government workers would work from home



An aerial view shows buildings and houses under hazy skies in Jakarta. – AFP

during the ASEAN summit between September 4 and 7.

Jakarta employed around 50,000 civil servants as of July, according to the regional civil service agency.

Acting Jakarta governor Heru Budi Hartono told reporters on

Sunday that local governments in satellite cities surrounding Jakarta were also considering similar work-from-home arrangements for civil servants, although for a shorter period.

The Jakarta government would monitor the policy’s implementation, and could scrap it earlier than planned if it’s deemed unsuccessful, he added.

“If it’s effective, then I have to report to the Home Ministry,” said Hartono. The trial scheme is one of several government measures aimed at improving Jakarta’s air quality. — AFP

Tense calm in divided Cyprus after UN peacekeepers attacked



A UN vehicle parks in Pyla village, which lies between the internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish north. – AFP

NICOSIA: A tense calm held on Monday in Cyprus after the United Nations accused Turkish Cypriot forces of assaulting peacekeepers attempting to block construction of a road in the buffer zone.

It was one of the most serious incidents for years on the divided Mediterranean island and drew widespread international condemnation.

The confrontation occurred on Friday in Pyla, an ethnically mixed village in the UN-patrolled buffer zone between the internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus in the south and a breakaway Turkish Cypriot statelet in the north.

The UN said four peacekeepers were injured and its vehicles were also damaged as they tried to block the “unauthorised construction work” near Pyla.

“All is calm in Pyla this morning,” Aleem Siddique said, spokesman for the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

“The mission remains on standby to block any resumption of construction works,” he said, adding that the injured peacekeepers have been released from hospital.

Cyprus government spokesman Konstantinos Letymbiotis told reporters that meetings have been held internally and with permanent members of the UN Security Council since Thursday over the tensions.

“At this time, very delicate and specific handling is required,” he said on Monday.

Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Colin Stewart, is to brief the UN Security Council later about the

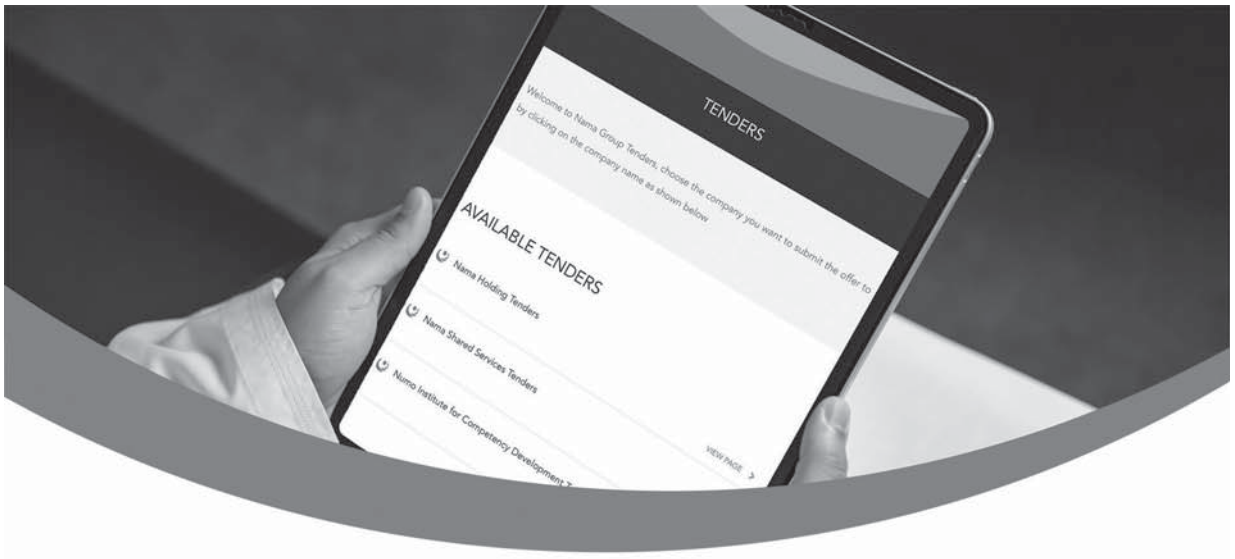
Pyla incident, Siddique said.

Authorities in the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, who say the road project is aimed at easing the plight of its people, dismissed the UN mission’s allegations as “baseless”.

Veysal Guden, the Turkish Cypriot mayor of Pyla, said construction on the road would continue on Monday in Turkish Cypriot controlled areas, but workers would not enter the UN-controlled zone.

The European Union condemned the incident, and in a joint statement Britain, France and the United States expressed “serious concern at the launch of unauthorised construction” of the road. Local media reported that talks would take place between TRNC and the UN on Monday.

— AFP



TENDERS

Nama Holding invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
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- Interested party may purchase the tender through the company website (www.nama.om/ar/new-tenders). Supplier user guide is available to be downloaded at the same page.
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- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for the offer submission. Bids that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered. The original hard copy of the bid bond should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception area.
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Zelenskiy says F-16s make him ‘confident’ that Russia will lose

COPENHAGEN: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy told a crowd in Denmark on Monday that promised deliveries of US-made F-16 fighter jets had made him confident Ukraine could end Russia’s war.

Denmark and the Netherlands on Sunday announced they would supply the first F-16s to Ukraine, with the initial six due to be delivered around New Year. Washington had approved the delivery of the jets ahead of Zelenskiy’s trip to Copenhagen.

“Today we are confident that Russia will lose this war,” Zelenskiy told thousands of people who gathered outside the Danish parliament to hear his speech.

Russia warned earlier that supplying the jets to Ukraine would only escalate the war, which has dragged on for almost 18 months. Russian forces are occupying almost a fifth of Ukraine’s territory and Kyiv is battling hard to push them out.

“The fact that Denmark has now decided to donate 19 F-16 aircraft to Ukraine leads to an escalation of the conflict,” Russian Ambassador Vladimir Barbin said in a statement cited by the Ritzau news agency.

“By hiding behind a premise that Ukraine itself must determine the conditions for peace, Denmark seeks with its actions and words to leave Ukraine with no other choice but to continue



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy (2nd R) reacts after addressing the crowd next to the speaker of the Danish Parliament Soren Gade (2ndR) in front of the Danish Parliament in Copenhagen, Denmark. — AFP

the military confrontation with Russia,” he said.

The Ukrainian military said the jet was vital to the success of its counteroffensive, which has proceeded slowly since its launch in early June, as it would prevent Russian fighter jets attacking advancing forces.

“Superiority in the air is key to success on the ground,” air force spokesman Yuriy Ihnat was quoted as saying by Ukrainian media.

Danish Defence Minister Jakob Ellemann-Jensen said Ukraine may only use the donated F-16s within its own territory.

“We donate weapons under the condition that they are used

“
We donate weapons under the condition that they are used to drive the enemy out of the territory of Ukraine. And no further than that

JAKOB ELLEMANN-JENSEN
Danish Defence Minister

to drive the enemy out of the territory of Ukraine. And no further than that,” Ellemann-

Jensen said on Monday.

“Those are the conditions, whether it’s tanks, fighter planes or something else,” he said.

Denmark will deliver 19 jets in total. The Netherlands has 42 F-16s available in all but has yet to decide whether all of them will be donated.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy has called the decision a “breakthrough agreement”.

Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said on Saturday that Ukrainian pilots had begun training, but it would take at least six months and possibly longer to also train engineers and mechanics. — Reuters

British child-killer nurse given whole-life prison sentence

LONDON: A British nurse was jailed for life on Monday, with no prospect of release, for murdering seven newborn babies and attempting to kill six others while they were in her care.

Lucy Letby, 33, was convicted of killing five baby boys and two baby girls, making her the UK’s most prolific child serial killer in modern history.

She was arrested following a string of baby deaths at the neonatal unit of the Countess of Chester Hospital in northwest England between June 2015 and June 2016.

The prosecution said Letby attacked her vulnerable prematurely born victims, often during night shifts, by either injecting them with air, overfeeding them with milk or poisoning them with insulin.

“Today’s sentence means Letby will never again be able to inflict the suffering she did while working as a neonatal nurse,” said Senior Crown Prosecutor Pascale Jones.

Following a trial that started in October, a jury at Manchester Crown Court ended more than 100 hours of deliberations on Friday.

Letby was in the dock as the jury returned the first guilty decisions earlier in August.

But she refused to come up from the cells for her sentencing on Monday.



A van believed to be carrying the convicted hospital nurse Lucy Letby leaves the Manchester Crown Court in Manchester, Britain. — Reuters

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said it was “cowardly that people who commit such horrendous crimes do not face their victims”.

The leader of the main opposition Labour party, former chief prosecutor Keir Starmer, promised to close the “shamefully exploited loophole” if elected to government.

However, legal experts suggested that practical issues involved in bringing unwilling defendants to court could scupper such plans.

After the death of the two triplets in June 2016, Letby was removed from the neonatal unit and placed on clerical duties.

She was arrested for the first time in July 2018. On her third arrest in November 2020, Letby was formally charged and placed in custody.

The government has announced an independent inquiry into the case. — AFP

Cooler conditions bring some hope as Canada wildfires rage on

KELOWNA: Wildfires ravaging Canada’s British Columbia province are showing some signs of easing and the weather conditions should improve through Monday into Tuesday, through crews are still battling “epic” blazes, emergency officials said.

More than 35,000 people have been driven out of their homes over the past four days as flames spread in the western region, forcing the federal government to deploy the military.

Blazes are also raging further north as Canada reels from its worst wildfire season on record, which many experts have blamed on climate change. Other fires, exacerbated by severe drought, have been reported closer to the US border and in the US Pacific Northwest.

British Columbia, which sits on Canada’s Pacific coast, could get some rains this week from Tropical Storm Hilary, which hit California on Sunday, forecasters have said.

Jerrad Schroeder, deputy manager at the Kamloops Fire Centre, said late on Sunday he was expecting “really good” firefighting conditions over the next 24-36 hours with temperatures down in the mid-20s degrees Celsius and humidity rising.

The air quality index in many fire-affected areas - including Central Okanagan, Eastern Fraser Valley, Kamloops - hit above 10 on Monday, signalling a high risk, the British Columbia government said.

About 140,000 square km of land, roughly the size of New York state, have been scorched



Police check point to keep people out of the fire zone is seen near Kelowna, British Columbia. — AFP

nationwide, with smoky haze extending as far as the US East Coast. Government officials

project that the fire season could stretch into autumn because of widespread drought-like

conditions.

About 2,000 km to the north, a wildfire burning out of control

in Yellowknife, the capital of Northwest Territories (NWT), has turned the remote city into a smoky, ghost town with almost all the of its 20,000 residents evacuated.

Some 400 armed forces personnel are helping the NWT government deal with the fire, Canada’s Department of National Defence said on Sunday.

Jason Brolund, Fire Chief of West Kelowna in British Columbia, one of the worst affected areas by the fires, said conditions have improved which is helping firefighters to put “boots on the ground”.

“We haven’t been challenged with extraordinary fire behaviour. We are dealing with things like we are used to seeing. However, we are dealing with them on an epic scale,” Brolund told the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. — AFP

PARIS

France issues ‘red alert’ over heatwave

France on Monday afternoon issued a “red alert”, its most serious warning, for four southern regions amid a spell of excessively hot weather, with temperatures expected to peak at 41 degrees Celsius in the Rhone valley.

The departments targeted by the alert, which allows local authorities to call off events and close public facilities if needed, are the Rhone, Drome, Ardeche and Haute-Loire, Meteo France said. The alert became effective at 1600 local time.



It was the sixth time the meteorological service triggered the red alert -part of the government’s programme to protect the population during extreme weather. — Reuters

WASHINGTON

Biden heads to Hawaii to view damage

President Joe Biden heads to Hawaii on Monday to view the widespread damage from recent Maui wildfires, meet with survivors and fend off criticism that his government was too slow to respond to the disaster.

Biden and First Lady Jill Biden will arrive nearly two weeks after ferocious, wind-whipped blazes ripped through the historic town of Lahaina, claiming at least 114 lives — and likely many more as over 1,000 people are still missing.



Biden said in a statement that “I know nothing can replace the loss of life. I will do everything in my power to help Maui recover and rebuild from this tragedy.” — AFP

VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis to update landmark document

:Pope Francis said on Monday that he was writing a follow-up to his landmark 2015 encyclical on the protection of the environment and the dangers of climate change “to bring it up to date”.

He made the surprise announcement in a brief, unprepared addition in a speech to a group of lawyers from Council of Europe countries.

“I am writing a second part to Laudato Si to bring it up to date with current problems,” Francis told the group.



The encyclical was seen to have influenced the decisions taken later that year at the Paris climate conference that set goals to limit global warming. — Reuters

The journey of photography

The Sultanate of Oman in the 70s had photography enthusiasts capturing the moments and sceneries after which the film roll would be mailed off to UK or Germany.

At least that is what my father did. Next, it was a wait that was full of anticipation. It was not just about getting the film roll developed to see the pictures. The photographs had to be presented well and so we needed albums. And there were beautiful albums with fascinating cover pictures that could make one go on a day dream.

The 70s were very creative. In the 60s it was still black and white and the albums thick covers, but the sheets were light paper black in colour in most cases and they were separated with a sort of tracing paper lest the photographs got stuck. We had to turn the pages gently to ensure that we don't tear them.

Looking through these old albums and pictures one must admit that the clarity was remarkable. The best part is to gaze at the photographs and think about the days, the laughter, the thoughts and concerns. They in return had given their best pose allowing us to take a glimpse at the fashionable trends of those days.

The 70s we're bringing in the colour era. It looks like shades of yellows and browns were trendy. People liked candid pictures too. Cameras had become lighter and friendlier. There was a tone and tint in the pictures. There was freshness and a free style that was unique to the 70s. That decade saw musical albums - not at all what you are thinking about.

By this decade the photo album had become imaginative, each sheet was strong and the photographs were placed in and then covered with a transparent, sheet that was self adhesive. This kept the pictures protected from dust at the same time in place.

The self adhesive photo albums had become a possession everyone must have. It was something a person would reach out, flip through the pages and reflect.

So what was that paper that was used



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The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

MOBILE PHONES HAVE TAKEN US TO AN ERA WHERE PHOTOGRAPHS ARE NOT JUST PERSONAL BUT SHARED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

in albums?

It was glassine paper and used to store the negatives as well in addition to being used as and interleaving paper in photographic albums. But it had a problem and that was according to the professionals it could become acidic over time and that could easily cause damage to the photographs.

Now the musical album was fascinating because it applied the same principle of the music box. Open it and the music would begin. Thankfully it was not battery operated one had to just wind it and keep it ready.

One would go through the pictures numerous times.

The hot shot cameras were just making their entry, but by the 80s the light was brighter, and the colours were shining. There was plenty of attitude and everyone liked to be in a frame. The studios which developed films were many. The duration to develop them had become shorter, it was even minutes and the studios gave fancy gifts as give always. The studios were mainly in Ruwi.

The nineties were still caught between the trends and then the digital age swept the world along with photography. The Y2K confusion was like a graduation. There was no looking back and we have been clicking away pictures like no one's business. And that is because the photo taking device is being held in our hands.

Mobile phones have taken us to an era where photographs are not just personal but a data that is liked and shared on social media. We do not go for albums but rather choose between SD cards, desk drives and clouds.

And we look at the albums of yesteryears with nostalgia and some of the photographs bring smiles and others bring tears as few of the subjects are not around us anymore.

They have been providing their services in recollecting memories and keeping them intact.

We have just celebrated the World Photography Day and it just reminds us how much this medium has been part of our lives.

‘CHANDRAYAAN-3’ MODEL



A Student from an international school exhibits a model of spacecraft LVM3-M4 used in launching of 'Chandrayaan-3', on the outskirts of Ahmedabad on Monday. India on July 14 launched its latest attempt at an unmanned moon landing, the next frontier of a burgeoning, cut-price aerospace programme rapidly closing in on the milestones set by global superpowers. If successful, the mission would make the world's most populous nation only the fourth country after Russia, the United States and China to achieve a controlled landing on the lunar surface. – AFP

BRICS expansion hopefuls seek to rebalance

An expansion of the BRICS bloc under consideration at a summit this week has attracted a motley crew of potential candidates — from Iran to Argentina — with one thing in common: a desire to level a global playing field many consider rigged against them.

The list of grievances is long. Abusive trade practices. Punishing sanctions regimes. Perceived neglect of the development needs of poorer nations. The wealthy West's domination of international bodies, such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank.

Amid widespread dissatisfaction with the prevailing world order, the pledge of BRICS nations — currently Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — to make the grouping a leading champion of the “Global South” has, despite a dearth of concrete results, found resonance.

Over 40 countries have expressed interest in joining BRICS, say officials from South Africa, which is hosting the August 22-24 summit. Of them, nearly two dozen have formally asked to be admitted.

“The objective necessity for a grouping like BRICS has never been larger,” said Rob Davies, South Africa's former trade minister, who helped usher his country into the bloc in 2010.

“The multilateral bodies are not places where we can go and have an



Joe Bavier

The writer is Africa Business Correspondent at Reuters

OVER 40 COUNTRIES HAVE EXPRESSED INTEREST IN JOINING BRICS, SAY OFFICIALS FROM SOUTH AFRICA, WHICH IS HOSTING THE SUMMIT

equitable, inclusive outcome.”

Observers, however, point to an underwhelming track record they say does not bode well for BRICS's prospects of delivering on the lofty hopes of prospective members.

Though home to some 40 per cent of the world's population and a quarter of global GDP, the bloc's ambitions of becoming a global political and economic player have long been thwarted by internal divisions and a lack of coherent vision.

Its once booming economies, notably heavyweight China, are slowing. Founding member, Russia, is facing isolation over the Ukraine war. President Vladimir Putin, wanted under an international warrant for alleged war crimes, will not travel to Johannesburg and only join virtually.

“They may have over-inflated expectations of what BRICS membership will actually deliver in practice,” said Steven Gruzd from the South African Institute of International Affairs.

While BRICS has not divulged a full list of expansion candidates, a number of governments have publicly stated their interest. Iran and Venezuela, punished by sanctions, are seeking to reduce their isolation and hope the bloc can offer relief to their crippled economies.

“Other integration frameworks existing on a global level are blinded by the hegemonic vision pushed by the US government,” Ramón Lobo, the former finance minister and central bank governor of Venezuela, said.

Gulf states Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates see BRICS as a vehicle for a more prominent role within global bodies, analysts say.

African candidates Ethiopia and Nigeria are drawn by the bloc's commitment to reforms at the United Nations that would give the continent a more powerful voice. Others want changes at the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

“Argentina has insistently

called for a reconfiguration of the international financial architecture,” an Argentine government official involved in the negotiations to join BRICS said.

BRICS public positions already reflect many of these concerns.

And as it seeks to become a counterweight to the West, amid China's tensions with the United States and the fallout of Russia's war on Ukraine, growing its membership could lend the bloc and its global reform message more clout.

In the run-up to the summit, however, the grouping's shortcomings are in the spotlight.

While BRICS leaders at the summit are expected to discuss a framework for admitting

new members with China and Russia keen to forge ahead with expansion, others, notably Brazil, are worried about rushing the process.

The tangible benefits to joining, meanwhile, are waning.

The bloc's most concrete achievement, the New Development Bank, or “BRICS bank”, has seen its already sluggish pace of lending further hobbled by sanctions against founding member Russia.

Small countries hoping for an economic boost from BRICS membership might look to South Africa's experience.

Its BRICS trade has indeed increased steadily since it joined, according to an analysis by the country's Industrial Development Corporation.

But that growth is largely down to imports from China, and the bloc still accounts for just a fifth of South Africa's total two-way trade. Brazil and Russia together absorb a mere 0.6 per cent of its exports and by last year, South Africa's trade deficit with its BRICS partners had ballooned four-fold to \$14.9 billion compared to 2010.

Such outcomes should give candidate nations pause, Gruzd said.

“Concrete achievements for BRICS are difficult to find. Lots of talk. Much less action.”



People walk past the Sandton Convention Centre, which will host the upcoming BRICS Summit, in Johannesburg, South Africa. – Reuters

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DJOKOVIC SURVIVES ‘TOUGHEST MATCH’ TO BEAT ALCARAZ

CINCINNATI: Novak Djokovic needed five match points and nearly four hours to pull off a gritty victory over Carlos Alcaraz and claim a third ATP Cincinnati Open title on Sunday.

A titanic struggle between the world’s top two players saw Djokovic — who looked out on his feet in the second set — save a match point before coming through on his own fifth match point for a 5-7, 7-6 (9/7), 7-6 (7/4) triumph.

“It’s crazy, I don’t know what I can say,” said 23-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic, who was seen by the doctors early in the second set for heat illness in a battle that lasted three hours and 44 minutes.

“It’s tough to describe. It was the toughest I’ve ever played in my life.

“From start to finish we both went through highs, lows, incredible points, bad games, heatstroke, comebacks.

“Overall this was the toughest and most exciting match I’ve ever been a part of.

“It’s matches like these that I continue to work for.”

It was another epic chapter to the budding rivalry between 20-year-old top-ranked Alcaraz and the 36-year-old Serb star, who avenged his loss to the Spaniard in a five-set Wimbledon final last month.

The two — who have traded the number one ranking six times this year -- are now level on two wins apiece in their head-to-head rivalry.

“I feel proud of myself, honestly. I don’t know why I was crying because I fight until the last ball,” Alcaraz said.

“I almost beat one of the greatest of all time in our sport. I left the court really happy with what I did.”

The 20-year-old unleashed everything he had at Djokovic and found it wasn’t enough.

“It was really, really difficult playing. Novak returns five, six, seven balls on every point,” Alcaraz said.

“So fighting and running from one corner to the other one on every point is really tough to deal with for almost the whole match.

“I left everything on court. I’m working

very well. But today, it was tough to deal with everything that Novak had.”

Djokovic, who earned a record-extending 39th victory at the elite Masters 1000 level, secured the first break of the opening set at love for a 4-2 lead.

Alcaraz broke back and broke again for a 6-5 lead then held to take the set before Djokovic left the court for a seven-minute change of clothes.

Djokovic, clearly affected by the hot, muggy conditions, was visited by the trainer and doctor in the second set.

He was broken to trail 2-1, Alcaraz grabbing a 4-2 edge with a drop shot that Djokovic couldn’t touch. But the 23-time Grand Slam winner broke Alcaraz to pull level 4-4 on the way to a tie-breaker.

Djokovic saved a match point at 5-6 and forced a third set when Alcaraz dumped a shot into the net on Djokovic’s second set point.

NEVER IN DOUBT

Djokovic headed off to the locker room for another clothing change while Alcaraz pounded his right hand on his bench in frustration as he sat down.

The Spaniard — who then needed to have a finger taped up — was broken in a nine-minute seventh game that featured five break points.

The back-and-forth battle continued, Djokovic unable to convert serving for the match at 5-4 but putting it away two games later after the longest best-of-three set final in ATP Tour history. A weary Djokovic dropped to the court in relief, then bounced up and ripped his shirt down the middle as he let out a roar of triumph or agony — or perhaps a bit of both.

— AFP



Himam wraps up exciting race at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar

MUSCAT: The Himam Trail Run Race wrapped up an exciting race that was held as part of the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate Festival, the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival. A field of 345 runners from 23 countries participated in the event during the weekend, infusing an electrifying vibrancy into the festivities.

Dubbed as the ‘Taster Runs’ ahead of the main Himam Trail Run Race in November, the event consisted of two races both for adults and kids, allowing all segment of the community to take part. The 10-kilometre race for adults commenced from the Amir of Qatar castle, nestled above the village of Sayq.

The route led participants to a mountain trail meandering through Al Shareija’s farms and culminating at the charming village. Continuing through a falaj path, the trail ascended to the village of Al Ain, subsequently reaching Al Aqr village. Participants embraced a competitive spirit as they



navigated a dirt path to Dusit2 resort, triumphantly crossing the finish line close by.

In the 10 km race, Abdullah al Quraini (Oman) secured the first place with a time of 51:04, followed by Mohsen al Hatmi (Oman) in second place at 52:13 and Amjad al Jamoudi (Oman) in

third with a time of 52:48.

In the female category, Ruth Sebastian Alonso (Spain) claimed the top spot, clocking in at 1 hour 23 minutes and 15 seconds, followed by Rahela Abdolamir (Yemen) at 1:28:27, and Natalia Rozario (UK) at 1:29:07.

The second race covered a

4-kilometre distance, inviting children to embark on an adventure from Hail Al Yaman. As nature embraced the trail, participants culminated their journey amidst an exuberant crowd at the park, where cheers echoed in celebration of their achievements.

The closing ceremony also served as a moment of homage to veteran champions hailing from Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, who have etched their legacy in mountain running. Khaseef al Zakwani, Ali al Falahi and Zaki al Jamoudi were honoured for their profound contributions in the design and making of traditional and new trails.

Beyond showcasing athleticism, the Taster Runs captured the essence of camaraderie, unity and shared passion, uniting runners from diverse corners of the globe. As anticipation builds, the Himam Trail Run Race eagerly awaits participants for its main event in November 23–25, inviting all to embrace the spirit of adventure and exploration amidst the awe-inspiring panorama of Al Hajar Mountains.

TASTER RUNS RESULTS

10KM Race – Top Female
(Oman unless specified)

1. Ruth Sebastian Alonso (Spain) 1:23:15, 2. Rahela Abdolamir (Yemen)

1:28:27, 3. Natalia Rozario (UK) 1:29:07, 4. Suad al Nasibi (1:31:04), 5. Zoe Rafferty (Ireland) 1:32:08, 6. Florencia Manzano (Argentina) 1:36:32, 7. Reem al Riyami (1:37:28), 8. Amani al Fulaiti (1:38:35), 9. Suhair al Harthi (1:41:28), 10. Julie Johnstone (UK) 1:42:42

10KM Race – Top Male

1. Abdullah al Quraini (51:04), 2. Mohsen al Hatmi (52:13), 3. Amjad al Jamoudi (52:48), 4. Ahmed al Fahde (54:08), 5. Majid al Jahdami (55:33), 6. Muath al Shuraiqi (56:15), 7. Mousa al Subaihi (56:39), 8. Yousuf al Subaihi (57:52), 9. Mohammed al Mandhari (58:32), 10. Asaad al Saqri (58:39)

4KM Race – Top Female

1. Manasik al Mahrouqi (25:58), 2. Mariam al Riyami (27:46), 3. Mitha al Saqri (30:55), 4. Intisar al Riyami (33:28)

4KM Race – Top Male

1. Nooh al Battashi (15:45), 2. Yousuf al Riyami (16:24), 3. Mudrik al Hatmi (17:22), 4. Al Hawari al Amri (17:45), 5. Abdulrahman al Fahdi (17:57), 6. Mishaal al Riyami (17:58), 7. Mohammed bin Ahmed al Maamari (18:24), 8. Turki al Maamari (18:28), 9. Yousuf al Fahdi (18:54), 10. Mohammed bin Nabil al Amri (19:12).

Al Fairouz launches Tent Pegging World Cup trophy in South Africa

Royal Cavalry win race in Slovakia



ITPF President Mohammed bin Issa al Fairouz during the trophy unveiling of the 2023 Tent Pegging World Cup.

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, AUG 21

The Royal Cavalry of Oman has won the first place in the two-star Samorin Slovakian endurance race, which was organised by the International Equestrian Federation for a distance of 120 km.

Seven countries took part in the race including the Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Germany, Italy, Norway and Poland.

The race was containing 4 stages, the first stage was for 40 km, while the second stage was for 30 km, the third stage was 25 km and the fourth and final stage was for 25 km.

After high competition during all race stages, Saleh bin Salem al Balushi won the first place on the horseback of 'Salam' owned by Royal Cavalry Oman, the second

place was claimed by Abdullah al Shamsi from UAE and the Italian jockey Patrizia finished third.

On the other hand, Oman national tent pegging team will take part in the fourth edition of the Tent Pegging World Cup in South Africa, organised by the International Tent Pegging Federation (ITPF), from August 23 to 26.

Oman team will compete along with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Yemen, South Africa, Egypt, India, Pakistan and Norway.

Mohammed bin Issa al Fairouz, ITPF President, handed over the 2023 World Cup to the Organising Committee, in the presence of Haitham bin Mohammed bin Jawad al Lawati, ITPF Secretary-General.

Al Fayrouz confirmed that "all preparations have been completed to launch fourth edition, after the Sultanate of Oman hosted the first



Royal Cavalry of Oman won the first place in the two-star Samorin Slovakian endurance race for 120 km.

edition, Egypt hosted the second, and the UAE hosted the third tournament."

Oman tent pegging team arrived in South Africa to compete in the World Cup 2023. The national team is led by head coach Mansour bin Ali al Mahrouqi. The Oman delegation is headed by Hamoud bin Salem al Riyami, and Hilal bin Hassan al Balushi is the team manager. The team is represented by Hamad bin Nasser al Riyami, Safwan bin Zaid al Maamari, Hamad bin Saif al Raisi, Waleed bin Zahir al Shuraiqi and Ahed bin Khamis al Balushi.

On the sidelines of the tournament, training courses will be held for referees, coaches and veterinarians, organised by the ITPF. Mohammed al Fairouz, ITPF President, inaugurated the training courses.

More than 30 participants from different countries will participate

in the training programme, led by Brandon Mayo, Mansour al Mahrouqi, Moftah al Harassi and Raafat Abdelrahman Bella.

Recently, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, issued a ministerial decision to reconfigure the Board of Directors of the Oman Equestrian Federation for the next four years 2023/2027.

Sayyid Munther bin Saif al Busaidy was selected as the chairman, Abdul Razzaq bin Abdulqadir al Shahwarzi as vice-chairman, Hamoud bin Ali al Naseri as secretary, Issa bin Abdulkhaleq al Maimani as treasurer. The board members included Sayyid Saud bin Harib al Said, Salem bin Saad Bahwan al Mukhaini, Taher bin Saud al Khalili, Dhabya bint Sami al Busaidiyah and Al Muhannad bin Saeed al Hashar.

Big spenders Chelsea flop to Hammers

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, AUG 21

West Ham inflicted an unlikely 3-1 defeat on Chelsea causing the first major upset result of the new premier league season. Having spent nearly a billion pounds on new players since taking over, the new American owners would not have expected this from their players even following their disappointment last season.

Chelsea's new manager, Mauricio Pochettino said: "I was disappointed and so were the players at the way we conceded the first goal. We started the game knowing West Ham are so dangerous at set-pieces. We conceded the corner and then the goal. I was really upset at half-time.

"We did really well in the first half and should have had the game won by half-time. In the second half we reshaped the team because of the injury to Carney and we had to find a way to play. We didn't, and then conceded another goal to West Ham's only other chance.

"Then we started to make rushed decisions. That's football. Teams like us, we need to get the right balance. If we scored that penalty, we'd have been 2-1 up and could have been talking about a different situation. I don't think it was mentality. The result doesn't reflect the performance but we have to accept this can happen."

The Hammers took an early lead when new signing James Ward-Prowse delivered a superb corner. Aguerd rose at the back post beating his marker Conor Gallagher and headed home. But in the 29th minute Chelsea hit back with the equaliser. Ben

Chiwell's cross was not cleared well and Carney Chukwuemeka beat Thomas Soucek with a clever dummy and powerfully shot into the net.

Four minutes before half-time Raheem Sterling won a corner when he was brought down by Soucek but Enzo Fernandez – who cost Chelsea over £100 million in January – took the spot kick and his tame effort was easily saved by Alphonse Areola.

Just eight minutes into the second half, Hammers took the lead again.

Axel Desasi lost the ball to Ward-Prowse on the half-way line and the latter's through pass down the right was taken by Michail Antonio who easily went past Levi Colwell and drove his shot into the bottom corner.

Chelsea failed to take advantage of a 10-man team when with half-an-hour remaining Aguerd was sent off for a second yellow card when he lunged at Nicolas Jackson. The visitors looked ragged as the game went on, Mudryk and Moises Caicedo, who was signed from Brighton for £115 million a week earlier, were brought on as substitutes but it failed to lift Chelsea's performance.

Any hope of Chelsea drawing level again faded in added-on time when Caicedo brought down Emerson in the box and Lucas Paqueta calmly converted the penalty for the third goal.

Hammer's delighted manager, David Moyes said: "I'm thrilled with how the team showed resilience and stuck at it against a really good Chelsea team. Lots of things went in our favour today and another time Chelsea may get on the end of a couple of those crosses."



West Ham United's Lucas Paqueta celebrates scoring their third goal against Chelsea at the London Stadium. – Reuters

Oman U23 team suffers defeat against Al Khor SC

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 21

The Oman Olympic (under-23) football team's external camp is under way in Turkiye under watchful eyes of national head coach Akram Habreesh. The camp will run until Thursday.

The Omani boys played two friendly games against Qatar's Al Waab SC and Al Khor SC. The first warm-up match against Al Waab SC was not completed due to an injury to a Qatari club player in the 25th minute.

Later on Sunday, the Oman Olympic team suffered a 2-1 loss against Al Khor SC in the following fixture. Oman's goal was netted by Al Faraj al Kumi while Ahmed al Mohanadi and Locas Rebero scored for Al Khor SC. Despite



the defeat, the coaching staff took the desired technical outcomes from this game as coach Habreesh tested many players in the match with numerous substitutions to ensure their match readiness for the major assignments.

The closest official event for Olympic team will be taking part

in the AFC U23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024 Qualifiers in Jordan from September 4 to 12. Oman were drawn in Group A alongside to Jordan (hosts), Syria and Brunei .

Habreesh's men will target to secure one of the direct tickets to the finals which will be held during April 15 and May 3, 2024.

The qualifiers format will be in a single round-robin at a centralised venue with the 11 group winners and four best second-placed teams going through.

Ahead of Turkiye camp, the Oman players had a domestic camp in Muscat. Also, the team tested their readiness against the champions of the HM Cup and Omantel League, Al Nahda club and the match ended 1-1. Oman's goal was scored by Ahmed al Mushkehi while Al Nahda's goal was netted by Essam al Subhi.

The camp in Turkiye featured absence of some key players including striker Ahed al Mushaikh, Mazin al Harrasi and Omar al Salti due to their club commitments. They will join the national team ahead of the qualifiers start in early September.

Fit-again Iyer, Rahul back in India squad for Asia Cup



KL Rahul

NEW DELHI: India on Monday recalled fit-again batters KL Rahul and Shreyas Iyer to their one-day set-up for the Asia Cup, inching closer to finalising the squad for the home World Cup later this year.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Rahul (thigh) and middle order batter Iyer (back) returned from injuries to join the 17-member squad led by Rohit Sharma for the Asia Cup to be co-hosted by Pakistan and Sri Lanka from August 30.

While Iyer's return is expected to end India's search for a set batter at number four, Rahul's ability to bat anywhere in the top and middle order, as well as his glove-work, make him a limited-overs asset.

With pace spearhead Jasprit



Shreyas Iyer

Bumrah having made a successful comeback from back surgery in the current T20 series in Ireland, India have now gathered all their frontline players ahead of the World Cup.

Chief selector Ajit Agarkar said it was a "no-brainer" that the 17-member squad picked for the Asia Cup pretty much included the 15 who would play in the World

Cup in October to November.

"A few important guys are coming back from injuries and I hope all goes well for them," Agarkar said in a press conference called by the Indian board, which usually announces squads in terse statements without explaining inclusions and omissions.

"Shreyas has been declared fit, but Rahul has suffered a niggle though we are expecting him to be fit for the second or third game in the Asia Cup."

Rohit's team will begin their Asia Cup campaign against Pakistan on September 2 at Pallekele. "As far as our preparations are concerned, this is the right tournament for us to test ourselves and perform under pressure," the India captain said.

Rohit said flexibility would be key to winning the World Cup on home soil, like India did in 2011 under Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

"I want to make sure that everyone is fine with batting anywhere. It's very critical in any format," the opener said.

"Cricket is moving in a different direction. You need flexibility, you need guys who can step up in any position. That is the message that has been conveyed to every individual." — Reuters

INDIA SQUAD

Rohit Sharma (captain), Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, Suryakumar Yadav, Tilak Varma, KL Rahul, Ishan Kishan, Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Shardul Thakur, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna; **Stand-by:** Sanju Samson



ART
Esma Gljiva,
an 11-year-old
Bosnian girl,
shows dolls
that she dresses
in traditional
Bosnian costumes,
hoping that her
folklore Barbie
will reach many
—REUTERS



ENTERTAINMENT

Soapbox cart riders race downhill during the 10th edition of the Rolima do Abacate event during the Virada Cultural festival in Belo Horizonte, state of Minas Gerais, Brazil — AFP

**FILM**

Susan Sarandon arrives for a gala presentation of *Blackbird* at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) in Toronto, Ontario, Canada —REUTERS



BOLLYWOOD

A man rests on his bike in front of a wall painted with Indian Hindi-language film 'Gadar 2' scenes, during morning hours in Mumbai — AFP



MUSIC

**Egyptian singer
Amr Diab performs
at the Beirut
Waterfront Arena
in the Lebanese
capital late —AFP**

art & life

TUESDAY | AUGUST 22, 2023 | SAFAR 5, 1445 AH

 OMAN OBSERVER www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om

The photographic odyssey of a young Omani



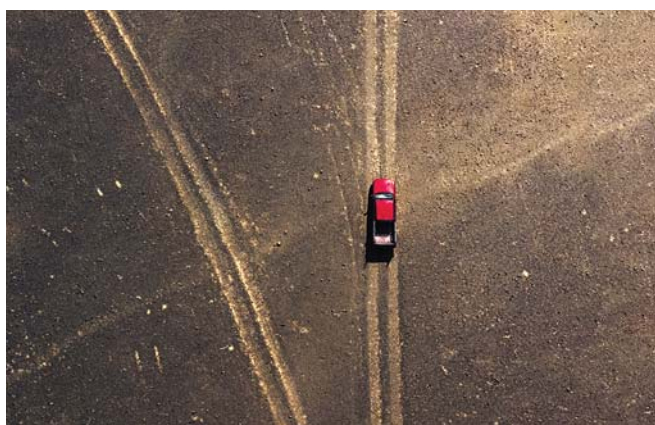
BY ZUWAINA AL SULIMANI

There's no better way to describe Ammar Bin Salim al Amri than as a nomad photographer trying to capture the soul of Oman through his lens.

He is among the young creative Omanis who have developed their own unique voices in photography, his work reverberating with the hues of the ochre deserts, vibrant souqs, and tranquil coastal villages.

Hailing from the Wilayat of Izki in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, Ammar is currently a student taking journalism at Sultan Qaboos University. Despite his young age, he is already a member of some photographic groups in Oman and has been successful in clinching photography awards directed at youth.

In 2019, he won third place in the youth creativity competition held at the



wilayat level, and in 2023, he also gained third place in the 26th Photography Week Competition held by SOU.

Talking about his experience in photography, Ammar said, "Being an Omani photographer distinguishes me as a unique individual, and growing up in Oman, surrounded by the diverse and beautiful terrain of my beloved country, I believe that I have gone through remarkable experiences and adventures. These diverse terrains clearly helped me capture different, artistic, and beautiful photos."

He added, "Photography has been a passion for me since my early childhood. As a young child, I was amazed by the power of cameras and how they worked. It has become one of my favourite hobbies since 2014."

He shared, "My first experience in



photography, which made me realise the love I have for this craft, was when my older brother requested me to document his wedding day. Learning from that experience torched a deep passion in me, inspiring me to learn more about how to be a good photographer," he said.

He added, "My biggest development in photography happened when I became a member of the photography group at Sultan Qaboos University, which has great credit for refining and developing my talent and making me who I am now."

He shared, "My unforgettable shot was an overhead photo in the Niyabat of Tiwi in the Wilayat of Sur on the

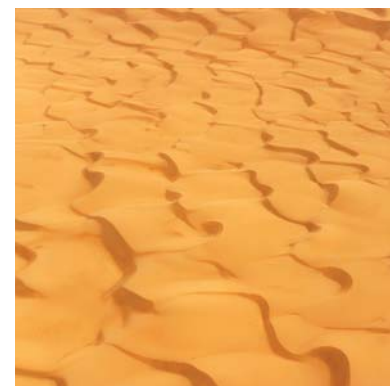


overrun".

Ammar added, "This shot is special to me because it reminded me of the power of the Almighty Creator."

From north to west, Oman is considered a treasure for creative photographers due to its beautiful and outstanding natural places. Ammar, like other photographers, is on a mission to bring these amazing landscapes to life.

"In my personal opinion, there are several qualities that a good photographer must have. They might always seek continuous growth, plan trips, enhance their skills, love what they do, and love discovering new things, as well as love life and possess the curiosity to look at it from different perspectives. It is important, of course, to be consistent, but despite all achievements, one must still have the beautiful trait of humility," he said.





INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Losing Old Sanaa:
historic city
reels from
Yemen war

DOAA AL-WASEAI SPENT many happy years working as a tour guide in the Old City of Yemen's capital Sanaa, showing foreigners its hidden hammams and markets teeming with silver and spices.

After nearly a decade of war, that life feels like a distant memory. The Old City itself — Waseai's childhood home — feels cut off from the world, its warrens of thousand-year-old rammed-earth buildings falling into disrepair.

"Tourism opened my eyes to my

own culture," Waseai, 40, said, reflecting on how she had gained a deeper appreciation for Yemeni clothing and food by explaining them to outsiders.

She once comfortably spoke English and German, but now her foreign language skills are wasting away, though she reckons it's just as well.

"There are no words to express our catastrophe — in English or German or even French."

A Unesco World Heritage site for nearly four decades, the Old City has

been classified as "in danger" since 2015, shortly after Saudi Arabia spearheaded a military intervention to prevent the complete collapse of Yemen's beleaguered government.

Inhabited without interruption for more than 2,500 years, the area's iconic mosques and burnt-brick tower-houses have faced both direct threats from air strikes and indirect threats associated with lack of upkeep.

As she waits impatiently for the war to end, Waseai has kept pains-

taking records of the Old City's decline, her spreadsheets listing collapsed homes and battered hotels.

Determined to make use of her downtime, she is pursuing a master's degree in tourism at Sanaa University in hopes she can one day aid the Old City's recovery — which can't come soon enough.

"We're losing Old Sanaa," she said. "I'm so sad to say that."

DESTROYING OUR HISTORY
In the war's early months, air

strikes rained down on the Old City, reducing houses and gardens to rubble.

Waseai had heard stories of bombing raids during an earlier civil war in the 1960s but never thought she would one day witness them herself.

"Why are they attacking our city?" she recalls thinking. "There are no weapons in Old Sanaa, and it's forbidden to attack our history. They are destroying our history."

The Saudi-led coalition fighting the Iran-backed Huthi rebels who control the capital denied responsi-

including the public preservation body tasked with saving historic sites.

Like other government bodies, it is starved of funds.

The growing desperation was on grim display in April when more than 80 people were killed in a crush at a cash handout for the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan at an Old City school.

The handout amount was 5,000 rials, or about \$8.

WE WILL RECOVER
These hardships aside, Old City



bility at the time.

The hazards have grown as the war has dragged on.

The Old City's houses, with their distinctive white gypsum trim, "are very fragile and require constant maintenance," said Unesco associate project officer Mohammed al Jaber.

But that has proved impossible for many families during a wartime economic crisis marked by unpaid salaries and rising food prices.

"Traditionally the homeowners would carry out the maintenance," Jaber said.

"People are making a hard choice between putting food on the table and maintaining the roof over their heads."

Drainage infrastructure has also suffered from neglect, making Old City buildings vulnerable to collapse during flash floods.

Fighting has dropped off considerably in much of Yemen since a truce took effect in April 2022, even though it expired last October.

The absence of a lasting ceasefire, however, has left many of the country's institutions at a standstill,

residents hold out hope its past glories can be revived.

"This farm was once like a heaven... you couldn't even walk through it because of the grass, it was all green before the war," said 28-year-old Abdullah Asaba, gesturing towards his rows of tomatoes, leeks, shallots and basil.

The field sits near a block levelled by an air strike in 2015, but Asaba, whose family has raised crops on it for decades, says they are "trying to rehabilitate it, step by step."

Near the Old City's historic Yemen Gate, in the shop where he sells traditional healing oils, Salah Aldeen labours underneath a picture of then French president Francois Mitterrand visiting the Old City in the 1990s — a time when foreigners were a common sight.

He said he was confident those days would return, and compared the Old City to a hospital patient.

"Sooner or later, it will recover, you know. War is a disease, but we will recover." — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

An Arabic
Adaptation
of 'Chicago'
Razzle
Dazzles
Lebanon

AS THE ORCHESTRA began vamping for roughly a thousand festivalgoers at a 19th-century palace in a mountainous town in Lebanon, Selma Fehmi — the Velma Kelly character in a new Arab version of the musical "Chicago" — started to croon lyrics to the tune of "All That Jazz."

But this reimaging of the show's opening song quickly provided a Lebanese twist: "Hurry, pick me up and let's take a drive/to a small place hidden in the centre of Beirut."

The Arabic adaptation of "Chicago," the longest-running show currently on Broadway, debuted at the Casino du

Liban in May with a sold-out run that extended to five nights. The team returned with three performances in August at an art festival in Beiteddine, a town some 20 miles southeast of Beirut — where this adaptation takes place — and now hopes to take the show abroad, within the Middle East and beyond.

Despite dealing with American cultural references and wildly different syntax, translating the musical into Arabic came pretty smoothly, said Roy ElKhouri, the writer, choreographer and director of the adaptation. The context particularly speaks to present-day Beirut, said Anthony Adonis, who adapted the lyrics.

"It's like it was written to be a commentary on the judicial system in Lebanon," Adonis said, referring to the mismanagement and corruption that spurred the nation's economic crisis and an investigation into the 2020 port explosion in the capital that has been muddled by obstruction and interference.

That ability for a show set in 1920s Chicago to speak to modern affairs in the Middle East was attractive to ElKhouri. "You can relate to it in every aspect," he said, pointing to its universal themes of corruption, media manipulation and the power of showbiz.

Barry Weissler, who produced the 1996 Broadway revival alongside his wife, Fran, was not surprised that artists in Lebanon were revisiting the story. "Everyone gets it," Weissler said. "It doesn't matter which language it's in —

the reaction's still the same."

Yet even with the commonalities, reinterpreting the musical was a complicated process because of the strict guidelines that accompany licenses



from Concord Theatricals. The Arabic version had to stay true to the original story line. Characters could not be added nor removed, and neither could songs. And the Lebanese team was required to give the adaptation entirely new choreography — originally by Bob Fosse — and direction.

Once those parameters were laid out, ElKhouri's team got to work.

The first step was coming up with

relevant Arabic names for characters, including Selma (Mirva Kadi), whose name rhymed with Velma. Roxie Hart, whose killing of her lover sets the story in motion, became Nancy Nar (Cynthia Karam), alluding to the Lebanese pop star Nancy Ajram.

Other changes involved wordplay: The smooth-talking lawyer Billy Flynn, who frees murderers from prison, became Wael Horr (ElKhouri), his last name meaning "free." Roxie's loyal husband, Amos, became Amin (Fouad Yammine, who helped adapt the script), which means "faithful." And the sympathetic journalist Mary Sunshine became

Nour El Shams (Matteo El Khodr), whose full name translates to "the light of the sun."

Translating the songs was a bigger challenge. The legal and showbiz jargon of "Razzle Dazzle" — "Shubeik Lubeik" in Arabic ("Your Wish Is My Command") — were especially tricky. Adonis wrote at least three versions until the team settled on the one that most aligned with the music. "It was like doing very, very complicated math," he said.

Lebanese references were trickled throughout the musical. In "Cell Block Tango," or "Kan Yistahal" ("He Deserved It"), the prisoners' dialects reflected the country's diversity. The character of Hunyak, who is Hungarian in the original, became Armenian, a reference to Lebanon's Armenian population.

Though the country is considered one of the most liberal in the Arab world, many pockets of society lean conservative. But the team did not shy away from the musical's sensuality, whether it was the wide-open legs in the dance numbers or the revealing costumes and suggestive squeals.

ElKhouri did have other fears, though, primarily that "Chicago" would not find an audience in the country. The sold-out shows proved otherwise.

"You rarely see this in Lebanon — this level of performance," said Yahya Fares, a nurse who watched the first performance at the festival. His girlfriend, Maribelle Zoueini, was also impressed.

"They incorporated Lebanon's culture," she said. "They made it relatable."

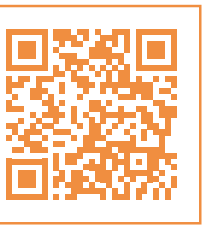
Both Fares and Zoueini lamented that Lebanese theater, and art in general, is growing more difficult to produce despite its cultural reputation in the region.

In the mid-1800s, Maroun Naccache introduced Western-style theater to Lebanon by adapting European plays into Arabic musicals, said Aliya Khalidi, the founder of the Foundation for Arab Dramatic Arts. After the arrival of the Baalbeck International Festival in 1956, theater flourished. And even during Lebanon's civil war, from 1975 to 1990, the composers and playwrights known as the Rahbani brothers, the singer Fairuz and her son Ziad produced musicals and plays that remain cultural mainstays.

The past few years have delivered a setback because of the coronavirus pandemic, the financial meltdown and the port explosion, Khalidi said. "Usually, in times of crisis, the most affected medium is the theatre," she said.

In the past year, more and more modest productions have begun to pop up in Lebanon, Khalidi and ElKhouri said. But the "Chicago" adaptation stood out for its scale, even though financial constraints meant the cast and crew had only two months to rehearse before the debut. Some actors and dancers had to keep their day jobs.

"We've done this out of pocket," Nayla El Khouri, the producer of the show, said. "Imagine what they can do if they had the proper resources and the proper support from the country." — **NYT**



2,700 investor residency cards issued to date

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUG 21

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has launched an engaging promotional campaign in support of its investor residency programme. This campaign aims to highlight the programme's benefits and services, particularly the Invest in Oman lounge at Muscat and Salalah international airports.

The investor residency programme allows foreign investors and retirees to secure long-term residence in the Sultanate of Oman for 5 or 10 years, with the option to renew.

To acquire an investor residency card, interested individuals must submit their applications through the official website: <https://tejarah.gov.om/InvestorResidency>.

Holders of the investor residency card enjoy numerous privileges.

They are granted the right to own property outside the integrated tourism complexes (ITC) for various purposes, excluding restricted land ownership. Furthermore, investors can reside in Oman with



their immediate families, without restrictions on the number of family members or their ages.

Cardholders also benefit from designated paths at airports and ports, issue visitor visas for relatives, conduct economic activities, and work in the country without requiring a sponsor for a private work visa. Domestic

workers in private professions can also be brought in.

Since its inception until August 21, 2023, over 2,700 investor residence cards of various nationalities have been issued in both the 10-year and 5-year categories, including retirees.

In addition, Oman offers comprehensive investment

opportunities across various sectors through the Invest in Oman hall. The official platform (<https://investoman.om>) presents well-structured investment options aligned with incentives and facilities provided to investors.

Sectors covered include logistics, manufacturing,

education, technology, information technology, health, circular economy, mining, fisheries, renewable energy, agriculture, and tourism. Dedicated investor relations managers cater to each investor's needs, facilitating smooth procedures, approvals, and efficient investment services.

Oman issues treasury bills totalling RO 106 million

MUSCAT: The total value of the government treasury bills allocated for this week was RO 106 million. The amount of the allotted authorisations for a period of 28 days has been recorded as RO 5 million.

With an average acceptable price of RO 99.660, the lowest acceptable rate was RO 99.660 per RO 100. The average discount rate was 4.4324 per cent, and the average return was 4.44726 per cent.

While the 91-day allowance amount was RO 101 million, with an average acceptable rate of RO 98.710, the lowest acceptable rate was RO 89.705 per RO 100, the average discount rate was 5.17616 per cent, and the average return was 5.24383 per cent.

A statement issued by the Central Bank of Oman yesterday indicated that the interest rate on repo operations is 6.00 per cent, while the discount rate with the Central Bank on Treasury's permit facilities is 6.50 per cent.

Treasury bills are a guaranteed short-term financial instrument issued by the Ministry of Finance to provide investment outlets to licensed commercial banks, with the Central Bank of Oman acting as issuer of such bills.

Treasury bills enjoy fast liquidation by discounting them with the Central Bank of Oman and by making 'repo' repurchase deals with the Central Bank as well.

Licensed commercial banks can conduct 'repo' operations among them on treasury bills in the interbank market.

This tool contributes to the creation of an indicative index of short-term interest rates for the domestic financial market, which the government can use to finance some of the expenses smoothly and flexibly. — ONA

Oman's total oil production tops 223 million barrels until July

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUG 21

The Sultanate of Oman's total oil production (including condensates) until July 2023 reached 223.544 million barrels. This represents a slight increase of 0.2% from 223.176 million barrels during the same period last year, preliminary data from National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) shows.

The country's daily average production stood at 1.054 million barrels, demonstrating Oman's continued commitment to meeting global demand for oil.

Crude oil production in Oman reached 174.642 million barrels, which reflects a modest decrease of 1.5% compared to the same period last year with 177.307 million barrels. Despite this decline, it is noteworthy that the country has



maintained a substantial output level, showcasing its resilience in the face of various challenges in the global oil market.

Oman's condensate production, on the other hand, experienced a notable increase of 6.6%, reaching 48.902 million barrels until July 2023 from 45.869 million barrels

during the same period last year.

This growth highlights Oman's efforts to tap into alternative sources of hydrocarbons and diversify its energy portfolio.

In terms of oil prices, Oman witnessed a decline in the average price per barrel. The average oil price stood at \$80.5 per barrel,

representing a decrease of 13.3% from last year's average price of \$92.8 per barrel.

Oman's oil exports to major countries experienced mixed trends. Exports to Japan decreased by 20% to 5.845 million barrels, while exports to South Korea saw a significant decline of 77.8% to 1.951 million barrels.

However, Oman's oil exports to China surged by 12.8% to 163.167 million barrels, showcasing the country's growing importance as a supplier to the world's second-largest economy.

Meanwhile, exports to India experienced a substantial decline of 90.1% to 2.716 million barrels from 27.378 million last year.

Other countries witnessed a remarkable increase in imports from Oman, with a growth rate of 227.8% compared to the previous year from 1.609 million barrels to

5.275 million barrels until July this year.

Total oil exports from Oman reached 178.956 million barrels, representing a decrease of 5.7% compared to the previous year's exports of 189.776 million barrels.

Despite the decline, Oman remains a significant player in the global oil market, contributing to the stability of the energy sector.

In the natural gas sector, Oman's combined import and local production of natural gas until July 2023 reached 30.914 million barrels of oil equivalent (mmboe), marking a slight increase of 1.4% from last year's production of 30.485 mmboe.

The production of associated gas rose by 7.4% to 6.201 mmboe from 5.774 million, while non-associated gas production remained unchanged at 27.71 mmboe.

Potential for beach resort, boat club seen in Liwa Fishery Project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 21

A concession for the development and operation of a fishery harbour at Liwa on Oman's Al Batinah North coast will include a sizable plot of land suitable for an array of commercial investments, including potentially a beach resort, boat club and a gated community.

The Ministry of Finance, jointly with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, launched last week a competitive process leading to the award of the Liwa Fishery Port project via the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) route.

The successful bidder will secure a 30-year concession covering the development, management, operation and maintenance of the fishery harbour.

But in line with a broader national strategy to enlist private sector investment and expertise in the long-term development of the harbour project, the government has included a roughly 54,000 sq metre plot for a range of support services, as well as commercial investments. The latter type of investments include residential (gated community, for example), hospitality-related (beach resort), recreational (boat club), commercial (retail complexes), and industrial (warehousing, for



example), the ministry noted in a Request for Expressions of Interest (REoI) issued last week.

Already in place at the site are the trappings of a modern fishery

harbour with breakwaters, quay wall, pontoon and beachfront for the landing of boats. These investments were made by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries

and Water Resources during a construction wave that saw as many as eight fishery harbours established at key points along Oman's lengthy coastline — aimed at supporting the growth of the fisheries sector.

Importantly, the concession agreement commits the successful private developer to investing in certain facilities deemed "essential" to the development and operation of a full-fledged fishery harbour. Included in the list are: Fish Auction & Market Complex, Cold Storage, Admin Building, Shops & Storage Rooms, Ice Plant, Fuel Supply Unit, Repair Yards, First Aid Room, and Security Room. Located barely 15

kilometres from Sohar Port and Freezone, the Liwa Harbour is already a thriving hub for fishery activities involving around 1,000 Omani fishermen and over 300 fishing boats. Fish landings at the harbour totalled over 4,000 tonnes in 2021, representing a four-fold increase over the previous decade.

Interested parties have until September 2, 2023 to submit their EoIs in response to the PPP initiative — part of the Omani government's bid to position fishery harbours as destinations for leisure and marine tourism as well. A concession award is likely by around April 2024 per a tentative timeline envisioned by the Ministry of Finance.

Salalah forum to empower water regulation in the GCC

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 21

Water regulators of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are due to gather here to take part in the Independent Water Regulatory Forum, which takes place during August 22 – 23, 2023.

The two forum, which opens under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, seeks to facilitate the exchange of expertise, share pioneering experiences, and discuss developmental visions in water regulation.

The event is being co-hosted by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) of the Sultanate of Oman and the General Secretariat of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

Notably, a distinguished assembly of experts from Oman and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf will grace the occasion with their presence.

Spanning a span of two days, the forum aspires to achieve two key objectives: enhancing mutual understanding among industry



stakeholders and refining the policies that govern the water sector.

The discussions will revolve around four pivotal domains, each crucial to advancing water regulation.

These encompass the regulatory landscape of the water sector in GCC countries, the art of water quality management, strategies to augment efficiency and performance within the sector, and the critical theme

of fostering sustainable water management.

As part of the proceedings there will be 13 research papers, each casting a spotlight on autonomous water regulation within GCC nations.

Bank Muscat inaugurates relocated corporate branch in Suhar

SUHAR: Aiming to enhance its network of branches across the Sultanate of Oman's governorates and provide the best banking services and facilities to individuals and corporates, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, celebrated the inauguration of the relocated corporate branch in Falaj Al Qabail in the Wilayat of Suhar.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Shihab al Balushi, Deputy Wali of Suhar, with the attendance of Ahmed bin Faqir al Balushi, Chief Banking Officer, Bank Muscat, and other executive officers from the Bank.

The inauguration of the Bank Muscat's relocated customised branch aims at keeping pace with the recent developments witnessed in Al Batinah North generally and the Wilayat of Suhar specifically, as it has been experiencing significant investment and economic shifts making it the focus of attention of many local and international investors, which contributes to the development of the public and private sectors through providing the best banking services and solutions.

The relocated branch is characterised by a modern design and distinctive space that provides corporate and government-institution customers with comfort and financial inclusion seen in the wide range of services provided to the public and private sectors.

The branch is managed by a team of Omani experts ready to effectively provide various financial options and services. Customers can benefit from the services the new branch provides from Sunday to Thursday starting from 8:00 am until 2:00 pm .

It is to be noted that Bank Muscat has other customised branches that offer different services and solutions to corporates and government institutions, and they are located in different locations such the commercial district branch in Ruwi, Al Nahdha Towers branch in Bausher, and Salalah branch in Dhofar.

Ahmed bin Faqir al Balushi, Chief Banking Officer, Bank Muscat, declared that Bank Muscat's relocated branch that provides customised services and facilities to corporate and institutional customers started in 2014 in the Wilayat of Suhar.



ahlibank introduces new children's account

MUSCAT: As part of its wide array of innovative and inclusive products and services, ahlbank has introduced its new children's account. This is in line with the bank's efforts to raise its customers' and their children's financial stability.

The children's account from ahlbank offers many features, such as debit card issuance for account holders aged 13-18 years, and cash deposit facility.

Parents or guardians, both Omani nationals and expatriates, can open the account for their children below the age of 18 with a quick and simplified process, and can easily monitor the account via the mobile banking app. It is worthy to note that there are no minimum monthly balance fees.

Muneer al Balushi, AGM - Head of Retail Distribution at ahlbank, said, "At ahlbank, we believe that empowering



the dreams of the younger generation is essential for progress. As we unveil our new children's account, we commit to nurturing financial wisdom from an early age. Through such products we will help cultivate lifelong financial strength and stability.

Together, we can plant the seeds of fiscal responsibility and watch our children's aspirations flourish into a prosperous future."

"We hope to pave the way for

a future with a foundation that will inspire a generation, and many to come. We are nurturing a savings culture in a majority of the community. ahlbank works towards a more financially inclusive future for the Omani youth, and moving forward, we will proudly remain one of the most favoured banks in the country," Al Balushi added.

In a world that is progressing at a faster pace every day, ahlbank remains committed to fostering financial literacy and responsibility from an early age.

The launch of the new children's account marks a significant step towards empowering the next generation with essential money management skills. By providing a safe and engaging platform for parents & their children to learn about saving, ahlbank is creating a financially secure future for them.

OAB's LaunchPad programme set to propel students' career prospects

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) launched its latest programme, LaunchPad, an initiative designed to help students get a jump start in their careers, under the auspices of Shaikh Nasr bin Amer bin Shuwain al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour. The training programme comprises of a series of free workshops to develop participants' skillsets and empower them to enter the workforce with confidence.

Open to college students, as well as fresh graduates and professional Omanis with less than five years of work experience, it aims to further support and inspire the next generation of Oman's workforce.

Sulaiman al Harthi, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, said: "The Sultanate of Oman's future



workforce lies in the capable hands of the next generation, who hold the responsibility of steering the nation forward, bolstering our thriving economy, and fulfilling the objectives set forth in Oman's Vision 2040. At OAB, we are firmly committed to developing

the youth of our country – and LaunchPad is the latest stage of a carefully designed programme in which we continue to invest in giving back to the community, with the initiative also forming part of our ongoing 50th anniversary celebrations.

NBO wins best mobile banking app Oman award

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) won the prestigious 'Best Mobile Banking App Oman 2023' award by the Global Business and Finance Magazine, recognising NBO as a class-leader in the industry.

Representing the bank's digital transformation strategy, NBO's Mobile App keeps up with the latest technologies and offers customers a seamless experience and solutions that meet their needs.

Speaking on the award, Dr Ali al Shekaili, Assistant General Manager – Head of Digital & E-Channels at NBO commented, "We are delighted to receive this award, which joins a growing list



of accolades the app has received since its launch in 2015.

This recognition validates our strategic focus on providing

customer-centric digital solutions that surpass our customer's aspirations. Moreover, it also acts as a powerful motivation

for us to persistently innovate and accelerate technology deployment in line with our digital transformation approach."

Over the years, NBO has diligently cultivated its mobile app through meticulous market analysis and continuous integration of the most recent trends as the bank aspires to be at the forefront of inventive solutions.

The award-winning mobile app boasts advanced features that simplify its customers' experience.

These include a convenient digital onboarding service, allowing individuals to open a new account seamlessly and collect their card from any NBO multi-

functional kiosks. Customers can also open additional accounts, pay utility and credit card bills, apply for products and make transfers.

Embracing modern technology, the app also offers a scan and pay feature for making quick payments at QR enabled terminals across Oman.

NBO has been committed to creating real value and achieving progress through unlocking opportunities.

The bank made significant strides in its digital transformation journey, marked by the establishment of Oman's first Digital Corner at both the bank's head office in Azaiba and Qurayat branches.

These serve NBO and non-NBO customers alike, offering round-the-clock services.

Among their many notable ventures is Oman's first multi-purpose banking kiosk, which enables customers to interact directly with the bank and access its services throughout the week, thereby eliminating the need to visit a physical branch.

Additionally, the bank launched the Badeel Prepaid App, which facilitates efficient management of existing prepaid cards.

On the Corporate Banking side, NBO has offers a range of digital solutions through its Corporate Internet Banking (CIB) and also curated a merchant app.

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Hamoud bin Ahmed al Habsi (pictured), Chairman of the Supreme Court Sayyid Khalifa bin Said bin Khalifa al Bussaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court Shaikh Al Musahhar bin Abdullah bin Issa al Harthi, took the oath of office at Al Barakah Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW YORK: António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultan supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen. In a virtual video call to countries backing the global ceasefire initiative, Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultan of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed to establish peace and security in Yemen. "The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said. Guterres added that if "Sulhane represents a unique model, not only the Middle East, but also the world." He urged of countries to follow the example of the Sultan advocating and support peace and stability. — G

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SAMUEL KUTTY

MUSCAT: The frequent orders and fervent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are falling on deaf ears. A drive around the downtown Ruwi and its adjoining areas reveals how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder. While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not. "In those critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves," said Samuel Kutty, a social distancing expert. While expressing his concern, he said, "The attitude of some people is not acceptable; they paved the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can scare them away from spreading the virus," he told the Observer. — G

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and in commemoration of the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman CBO issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behaviour of other people as well," said Samuel Kutty, who stopped his car to

Oil up on tighter supplies and heating oil prices

LONDON: Oil prices rose more than 1% on Monday as tighter supply reflected in fewer exports from Saudi Arabia and Russia and high heating oil prices outweighed concern over global demand growth.

Brent crude climbed 86 cents, or 1%, to \$85.66 a barrel by 1205 GMT and US West Texas Intermediate crude was up \$1.01, or 1.2%, at \$82.26.

The September WTI contract expires on Tuesday and the more active October contract gained 88 cents, or 1.1%, to \$81.54 a barrel.

Both front-month benchmark prices

snapped a seven-week winning streak last week with a weekly loss of 2% on concern that China's sluggish economic growth will curb oil demand while the possibility of further increases to US interest rate also continues to cast a shadow over the demand outlook.

"We still see a tight oil balance for the remainder of the year, which suggests that prices still have some room to run higher," said Warren Patterson, ING's head of commodities research, adding that the dollar is also providing support.

A weaker dollar makes oil purchases less expensive for holders of other



A gas pump is seen hanging from the ceiling at a petrol station in Seoul. — AFP

currencies, potentially boosting demand. Another bullish factor is the high

price of heating oil, which is in focus as the northern hemisphere approaches darker months, said John Evans of oil broker PVM.

However, what is like trying to hit a "flying insect with a bazooka" is determining whether the buoyant heating oil market is enough to rally the oil complex or just hold it in the face of broader macroeconomic concerns, he said.

Despite its economic woes, China is drawing on record inventories amassed earlier this year as refiners scale back purchases after prices were driven above

\$80 a barrel by supply cuts implemented by the Opec+ group comprising the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and allies including Russia.

Saudi Arabia's July shipments to China fell 31% from June while Russia, with its discounted crude, remained the Asian giant's largest supplier, Chinese customs data showed. "Unless there's a recession and demand slows or drops, Opec+ is in control," said Stefano Grasso, a senior portfolio manager at 8VantEdge in Singapore.

— Reuters

German central bank forecasts little economic growth



A man, wearing a mask, is seen at the Volkswagen assembly line in Wolfsburg, Germany. — Reuters

FRANKFURT: Germany's central bank on Monday said that economic growth in the country will likely remain stagnant through the third quarter.

Growth has remained flat in Europe's largest economy since the spring after recovering from a brief two-quarter technical recession over the winter months.

The German Bundesbank said in its latest monthly report that economic output would remain largely unchanged into the autumn.

The Frankfurt-based central bank, however, forecast inflation in Germany to continue declining in the coming months due to falling energy prices.

An energy price shock last year caused by the fallout from Russia's attack of Ukraine caused an energy crisis in Germany and

helped fuel surging inflation globally.

The Bundesbank's latest report said private consumption will likely be strong in Germany due to stable employment figures, strong wage growth and lower inflation. However, weak foreign demand for German goods will likely continue to weigh on industrial production in Germany's export-oriented economy.

In addition, the Bundesbank said higher interest rates have dampened demand in the construction sector and for capital goods.

Weak foreign demand combined with higher financing costs also weighed down Germany's economy in the second quarter, thwarting hopes for a spring revival of Germany's sputtering economy. — dpa

China LNG buyers expand trading after adding more contracts

BEIJING: China's liquefied natural (LNG) gas importers are starting up or expanding trading desks in London and Singapore to better manage their growing and diversified supply portfolios in an increasingly volatile global market.

The beefed-up trading presence of Chinese importers puts them in direct competition with such global heavyweights as Shell, BP, Equinor and TotalEnergies for a market that the International Energy Agency says doubled in value to \$450 billion last year.

About a dozen Chinese companies have been expanding trading teams or adding new desks, with privately run ENN Natural Gas and state-run China National Offshore Oil Corp (CNOOC) the latest to plan London offices, and utility China Gas Holdings setting up a Singapore operation, company officials and traders said.



A Chinese worker checks the valve of a gas pipe at a natural gas plant in Suining, in southwest China's Sichuan province. — Reuters

Chinese gas importers have also boosted long-term LNG contracts with Qatar and US suppliers by nearly 50% since late 2022 to more than 40 million metric tons per year (mtpy), with plans to add more volumes from those two countries, as well as from Oman, Canada and Mozambique, traders and analysts said.

"We're going to see a paradigm shift in Chinese companies from being total net importers to (being) more international and domestic trading players," said Toby Copson, Shanghai-based head of global trading for Trident LNG.

Already, state-run PetroChina, Sinopec, Sinochem Group and CNOOC are actively trading

volatility to capitalise on their long portfolios, Copson said. China vies with Japan to be the world's largest LNG importer, although it's not clear how much surplus or other volumes Chinese companies might have available to trade.

PetroChina International (PCI), trading arm of PetroChina and China's largest gas trader with a 100-strong global team in Beijing and four other international offices, imported or traded about 30 million tons of LNG last year.

Zhang Yaoyu, PCI's global head of LNG trading, declined to comment on the company's traded

volume, but said trading was part of the company's overall strategy. "Supply security is still at the heart of our business activities. Trading capability is one of the enablers ... to help us better deal with market swings," Zhang said.

By 2026, Chinese companies are expected to have contracted LNG supplies of more than 100 million tons a year. That could mean a surplus of up to 8 million tons that year, according to consultancy Poten & Partners, or a deficit of 5 million to 6 million tons based on estimates from pricing agency ICIS.

Either way, China's growing domestic output and more piped

gas from Central Asia and Russia provide enough of a fuel base that Chinese gas companies can trade or swap US and other portfolio cargoes when arbitrages open or it makes market sense.

"I could see China becoming a seasonal seller to places like Southeast Asia, South Korea and Japan, as well as into Europe," said Jason Feer, head of business intelligence at Poten & Partners.

US LNG contracts are done on a free-on-board, open basis with no restrictions on destination, and consultants estimate US volume will make up a quarter of China's long-term contracts by 2030. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

LONDON

Britain clears \$61 bn Broadcom-VMware merger

Britain gave its final approval on Monday to Broadcom's planned \$61-billion takeover of cloud computing firm VMware, which the US chipmaker said should be completed by the end of October.

The Competition and markets Authority last month gave its provisional approval to the deal announced in May 2022, and said on Monday that "its final decision is that the deal does not substantially reduce competition — clearing it to proceed in the UK".

Broadcom is seeking to expand into the software market to boost its server business and has already acquired two complementary firms, CA



Technology and Symantec.

VMware's key product allows different clients to share computer servers by creating what is called a virtual server.

British regulators conducted a more in-depth probe into whether the merged company would have an interest in hobbling rivals by making its products work less well or be incompatible. — AFP

WASHINGTON

Dollar retreats from 2-month high

The dollar fell from a two-month high on Monday following five straight weeks of gains, as risk sentiment improved in Europe, with attention already turning to the Federal Reserve's Jackson Hole symposium which kicks off on Friday.

The dollar index, which measures the currency against six other majors, was last down 0.2% at 103.18, but still close to Friday's two-month high of 103.68.

"Risk appetite seems a lot steadier than it has done in the last few weeks which seems to be weighing on the dollar," said Michael Brown, market analyst at Trader X, noting that European



shares are higher and Wall Street futures point to a positive open.

"In the grand scheme of things, moves are pretty limited ... I'm loathed to read too much into today's trade before Jackson Hole," Brown added.

Fed chair Jerome Powell is set to speak and his comments may set the direction for US Treasury yields, which have driven the rise in the dollar. — Reuters

ANKARA

Hungary's MVM to buy gas from Türkiye's BOTAS

Hungarian energy conglomerate MVM has agreed to buy about 300 million cubic metres (mcm) of natural gas from Turkish energy company BOTAS.

"This strategic arrangement is part of the government's comprehensive initiative to bolster national energy self-sufficiency," Hungarian government spokesman Zoltan Kovacs said on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

"This move aims to enhance energy security and stabilise gas prices, given the international energy crisis caused by conflicts and sanctions."

The proposed purchase was



agreed during the visit of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan to Hungary on Sunday and details are expected to be finalised by the end of the year, Kovacs said.

BOTAS described the deal as a "groundbreaking agreement" marking the first time Türkiye has agreed gas exports with a non-neighbouring country and that it will boost security of European energy supply. — Reuters