

HONOURABLE
LADY GREETINGS
ON OMANI
WOMEN’S DAY

MUSCAT: Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, has sent a message of greetings on the occasion of Omani Women's Day, which falls on October 17 every year.

The message reads as follows: "On the occasion of Omani Women's Day, the 17th of October, I am delighted and honoured to express my pride and commendation for Omani women who demonstrated firm resolve and constant strive to shoulder their responsibilities in shaping family and society and promoting our dear nation's glory.

"The ever-present influence of women on the national arena is manifest and self-explanatory. The Omani women have undertaken outstanding roles across different sectors. Their valuable contributions establish them as an essential partner in building our homeland, Oman, and advancing its Renewed Renaissance.

"On this auspicious occasion, we congratulate ourselves and all Omani women, celebrate their accomplishments and pray for them to pursue the course of success in realising the good of the nation, under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan.

"Yet, on this day, we also express our solidarity with our sisters in Gaza and all of Palestine as they undergo adverse circumstances. We salute their stance and steadfastness amid the bombing and the scourge of destruction. We pray to Allah the Almighty to rid them of all harms and grant them peace, security and stability. We pray to the Almighty to liberate Palestine so that our sisters there could resume their desired role in nation building.

"I wish you all many happy returns of the occasion." – ONA

Calls for efforts to stop violence in Gaza



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday evening to GCC Foreign Ministers, in the presence of the GCC Secretary-General. The audience reviewed the current developments in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territories. His Majesty stressed the importance of intensifying regional and international efforts to stop the escalation and violence, and provide protection for the civilians. His Majesty also touched on the march of the GCC joint action, as well as the fruitful cooperation and coordination among member states and means of promoting it to serve the GCC peoples. During the audience, the GCC Foreign Ministers conveyed the greetings and best wishes of their countries' leaders to His Majesty and the Sultanate of Oman.

On his turn, His Majesty the Sultan asked them to convey his greetings to their countries' leaders. His Majesty also wished the GCC peoples further progress and prosperity. — ONA

\$ 1 0 0 M I L L I O N F O R U R G E N T R E L I E F O P E R A T I O N S I N G A Z A

GCC demands immediate ceasefire, halt to Israel’s aggression

- END TO ISRAEL'S
MILITARY OPERATIONS
IN GAZA AND ILLEGAL
BLOCKADE
- SUPPORT FOR
STEADFASTNESS OF
PALESTINIANS IN THEIR
HOMELAND
- CALLED ON
ALL PARTIES TO THE
CONFLICT TO PROTECT
CIVILIANS
- ABIDE AND IMPLEMENT
INTERNATIONAL
LAW WITHOUT ANY
EXCEPTIONS
- CALL FOR THE
RELEASE OF INNOCENT
HOSTAGES AND
DETAINEES

MUSCAT: The Ministerial Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council of the Arab States (GCC) held its 43rd extraordinary meeting here on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, with the participation of Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates, Dr Abdulatif bin Rashed al Zayani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain, HH Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, Shaikh Salem Abdullah Al Jaber al Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, and Jasem Mohammed Albudaiwi, GCC Secretary-General. **TURN TO P3**



The GCC Ministerial Council held its 43rd extraordinary meeting in Muscat on Tuesday. – ONA



HM gives audience to GCC Foreign Ministers





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(2:00 pm – 8:00 pm)]

22 – 28 / 10 / 2023

The northern entrance of the Grand Hall in the Sultan Qaboos University Cultural Center.





His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday evening to GCC Foreign Ministers, in the presence of the GCC Secretary-General. The audience reviewed the current developments in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territories.

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OMAN'S
1
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GCC foreign ministers during a meeting in Muscat on Tuesday. – ONA

GCC demands immediate ceasefire, halt to Israel’s aggression

FROM P1

The Ministerial Council opened its deliberations by expressing appreciation and gratitude for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, for the gracious audience His Majesty granted to their Highnesses and Excellencies the foreign ministers of GCC member states and the GCC Secretary-General, where they listened to His Majesty’s vision regarding current conditions and his wise and astute instructions towards the good and mutual benefit for all, and for strengthening the foundations of security, stability and prosperity.

The Ministerial Council

discussed developments in the Palestinian territories in light of the escalation of violence and illegal bombing of residential areas in the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in the death and injury of thousands of innocent civilians. The ministers discussed Israel’s intentions to invade the Gaza Strip and displace civilian population, as well as the urgent and serious challenges facing the region as a result of these events. The Ministerial Council agreed on the following: The Council urgently demanded an immediate ceasefire and an end to Israel’s military operations in Gaza and its illegal blockade, to ensure access for humanitarian aid and relief supplies

and other basic necessities, as well as the restoration of electricity, water, medicine, to the people of Gaza.

The Council stressed its support for the steadfastness of Palestinian people in their homeland and warned against any attempts to displace or transfer them.

The Council called on all parties to the conflict to protect civilians, refrain from targeting them and to abide and implement by international law and international humanitarian law in every respect without exception. And called for the release of innocent hostages and detainees, especially women, children, the sick and elderly.

The Council called for providing international protection for the Palestinian people.

The Council reaffirmed its resolve to activate an urgent humanitarian aid operation to help meet the needs of the Palestinian people in Gaza. It announced immediate financial contribution of \$100 million for this relief operations. It stressed the need for this aid to reach Gaza urgently.

The Council reaffirmed its support for the initiative of Saudi Arabia, the European Union and the League of Arab States to revive the Middle East peace process in cooperation with Egypt and Jordan.

The Council reaffirmed its position on ending Israel’s

illegal occupation of Palestinian Territories, affirming the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and their right to establish an independent Palestinian state based on 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with international law, the Arab Peace Initiative and all relevant UN Security Council and UN General Assembly resolutions, stressing the responsibility of the international community to deal with the Palestinian issue without double standards.

The Council reiterated its position of urging the international community to take the necessary measures, within the boundaries of

International law, in response to the Israeli government’s illegal actions, including its policy of collective punishment it inflicts on the civilian population of Gaza and other parts of Palestinian Territories.

The Council concluded its meeting by urging the United Nations Security Council to implement its previous resolutions concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict, and to adopt a new resolution to ensure Israel’s compliance with international law and the United Nations Charter, and rejecting any Israeli plans or intentions to invade Gaza or other Palestinian Territories or displace their Palestinian populations. — ONA

GCC calls for end to illegal Israeli occupation

MUSCAT: Ministerial Council of the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) demanded an immediate ceasefire, halt of the Israeli military operations in Gaza Strip and an end of the Israeli besiege to ensure access of humanitarian aid and relief and provision of the basic necessities, consumption of water and power supply and a permission for entering food, fuel and medicines to Gaza population.

This was stated at a press conference held by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister of the Sultanate of Oman and Jasem Mohammed Albudaiwi, the GCC Secretary-General in Muscat, on Tuesday.

The GCC Secretary-General delivered the final communique of the meeting in which dealt with the ongoing developments in the Palestinian territories in light of the escalation and the indiscriminate illegal bombing of residential neighbourhoods in the Gaza Strip which resulted in the martyrdom and injury of thousands of innocent civilians and Israel’s intentions to invade the Gaza Strip and displace the civilian population.

The statement said that the GCC Ministerial Council affirms its support for the steadfastness of the Palestinian people on their land and warned against any attempts to displace them, calling on all parties to the conflict to protect civilians, and to abide by international law and international humanitarian law without exception. It demanded the release of hostages and innocent detainees including women, children, the sick,



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Jasem Muhammed Albudaiwi, GCC Secretary-General during a press conference in Muscat on Tuesday night. — ONA

and the elderly calling for international protection for the Palestinian people.

In its final statement, the GCC Ministerial Council emphasised the necessity of ensuring an urgent delivery of aid materials to Gaza, stressing support for the initiative proposed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the European Union and the League of Arab States to revive the peace process in the Middle East in cooperation with the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The statement stressed commitment by the GCC countries to a firm stance calling for an end to the illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. It also affirmed the right of self-determination for the Palestinian people and their right to establish an independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as

its capital in accordance with international law, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the United Nations General Assembly. It stressed the responsibility of the international community to deal with the Palestinian cause without double standards.

In its final statement, the GCC Ministerial Council called on the international community to take the necessary measures within the scope of the international law to respond to the Israeli government’s illegal practices and its policy of collective punishment against the defenceless residents of Gaza and the entire Palestinian population. The statement also called on the United Nations Security Council to implement its previous resolutions regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict and to adopt a resolution that guarantees Israel’s compliance with the international law and the United Nations Charter and to categorically reject any Israeli plans and approaches to invade Gaza or the Palestinian territories or displace their residents.

During the press conference, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, stressed a serious demand to end violence and to stop the Israeli military operations and to continue efforts to implement the provisions of the GCC Ministerial Council and to stop Israeli criminality while continuing dialogue with all international and regional parties. He said that the GCC countries act with wisdom and rationality and are progressing gradually with the political and diplomatic efforts. — ONA

Oman condemns attack on Gaza hospital; 500 killed

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman expressed its denunciation and condemnation of the targeting of Al-Ahli al-Arabi Hospital in Gaza City by the Israeli occupation forces resulting in the death of hundreds of civilians, martyred and wounded, which represents a war crime, genocide, and a violation of international humanitarian law, ethics, and international conventions.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman expressed its condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims.

An Israeli air strike on Tuesday killed about 500 Palestinians at the Gaza City hospital crammed with patients and displaced people, health authorities in the besieged enclave said.

The strike was the bloodiest single incident in Gaza since Israel launched an unrelenting bombing campaign against the



An injured child at the hospital in Gaza on Tuesday.

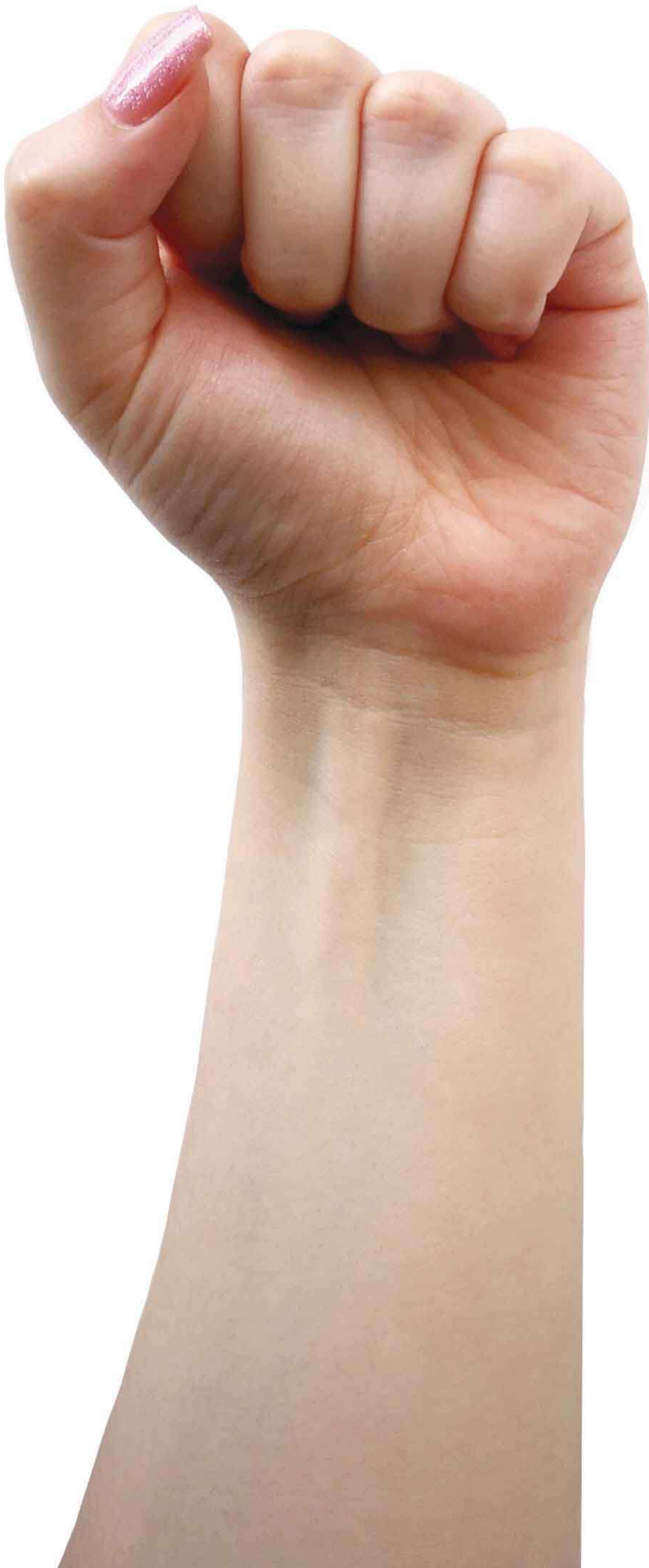
densely populated territory.

Arab countries, Iran and Turkey swiftly condemned the attack.

The Palestinian prime minister called it “a horrific crime, genocide” and said countries backing Israel also bore responsibility. Sources at the Gaza Ministry of Health said that around 500 Palestinians were killed in the air strike on the hospital. — Agencies



OMANI WOMEN ARE PARTNERS IN PROGRESS



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WOMEN in the Sultanate of Oman have come out with flying colours. They are doing well in their positions as ministers, diplomats, entrepreneurs, teachers, doctors, engineers and sportspersons. They have equal opportunities to grow and excel. They are making the nation proud with their contributions to the country in all possible ways. Women in business is a growing trend, and numerous women entrepreneurs in the country play a significant role in the SME sector.

Dr Marwa al Hinai, assistant professor of marketing at the College of Economics and Political Science, Sultan Qaboos University, is on the other spectrum. She has the opportunity to groom and mentor young women and men of today.

She received her PhD degree from the University of Edinburgh in 2018, and her thesis focused on the diffusion and adoption of social marketing practice in public health.

Interestingly, her area of interest is in influencing positive behaviours through social marketing techniques, a relatively new field that uses marketing techniques in addition to behavioural science and psychology to develop campaigns that positively influence societal behaviours.

"I remember when Late Sultan Qaboos first announced Omani Women's Day at Saih al Shamikhat. It was a very memorable event, and we felt honoured as women to have a special day that recognises and celebrates our contributions to the development of the country. It is also a chance for us to reflect on our progress and achievements on a personal level and collectively. I also feel very proud to belong to this country that extensively supports and empowers women in various fields." She pointed out that women are highly represented in all fields, both in the private and public sectors.

"We are also protected, and we feel safe to know that many laws and regulations preserve our rights as women. Omani women are playing an increasingly important role in business in Oman".

"They are starting their own businesses, leading established companies, and holding senior positions in government-owned enterprises, and that is not a surprise given the characteristics of Omani women who have always been ambitious, resilient, hardworking but also kind and compassionate," she explained.

She pointed out that one of the aspects that distinguishes Omani women is that despite having a modern outlook in their careers, the women are still very much strongly attached to their traditions and values.

When asked about the obstacles facing women today, Dr Marwa said, "One of the main challenges for women in all fields is being able to strike a balance between their careers and personal life. While a work-life balance is not always easy, but achieving it is possible through time management, setting priorities and, most importantly, having supporting families who value what you do inside and outside the household.

It is also important for Omani businesswomen and those in the workforce to always stay up to date with the latest developments." Learning to adapt is important, she said, because the business world is constantly changing, and it is important to be open to change and to adapt to new trends and be prepared to adjust your plans as needed.

She said the success of Omani women in various fields also inspires other women in the country.

She also takes time to encourage her students to aspire and get inspired by the success of others.

Dr Marwa stressed the importance of continuous learning.

"The success of Omani women shows that women can achieve anything they set their minds to. I think that women should always work on their personal and professional development by always considering themselves "learners", as there is no limit to what you can learn in all aspects of life. Learning is an ongoing process, and that is what I always tell my students to keep doing, even after completing their university degrees. With all the technological advancements, learning has become accessible to everyone, everywhere, as there are free online workshops, training courses, podcasts, audiobooks, lectures and educational videos. This is also a way of empowering yourself with knowledge and skills," she concluded.

PRIVILEGED TO BE PART OF OMANI WOMEN'S DAY INITIATIVE

Shamsa al Harthi was part of the group working with the former minister of social development Shariffa al Yahyai, who submitted the proposal to the Late Sultan Qaboos to establish the Omani Women's Day.

"I have always felt we were born in the golden era for women as ours was the generation blessed with education for all. The parents might not have had formal education, but they were open-minded to encourage us and educate us with the available facilities by then," Shamsa said.

She added, "It was a privilege for me to be part of the Omani Women's Day initiative and the day when His Majesty declared it was a great day for every woman in Oman." Reflecting on the achievements of women, Shamsa said a woman is an essential element of society in terms of motherhood, being a sister, a friend or in leadership roles.

"In many countries, women have lost their identity, but in Oman, we still enjoy our femininity, and we have the opportunity to become leaders," she pointed out.

She believes that if you want to empower women, educate them; everybody in the family should be educated. With education, we can change the whole nation. Right from the beginning of the Renaissance, education was established as a foundation for the nation.

"We were fortunate because we had supportive parents and government. Our parents had not gone to school, but they supported us in every way," she remembered.

She says that one of the challenges women face today could be competition.

"We can overcome competition with knowledge. As women, we are created with the ability to multitask. Balancing it all is important," she noted.

According to her, emotion is not a weakness, "I think it is more of an intuition on what should be done. We are human, so emotion is natural. Faith, self-motivation, creativity, etc., help develop intuition."

Giving is the most important aspect of life, along with self-development and taking care of mental health.

"Regardless of nationality, every woman with different roles is a human being who requires respect and opportunities to achieve more," she noted.

Shamsa continues to be an active volunteer in society, supporting every initiative and holding the post of Director-General at Dar Al Atta... She is also an artist, and recently, she was part of the voluntary team that just finished the project, 'For You Palestine.'

SPECIAL DAY TO FEEL SPECIAL

The corporate world is conscious of gender equality, even though the debate continues about equal pay.

Muneera al Balushi has been working in the advertising field. She first celebrated Omani Women's Day at her office at Prime Advertising.

"I was happy and realised a woman is special, not just as an Omani woman but all women. There are challenges," she pointed out.

"One of the challenges is competing with men. However, everywhere women are now given equal opportunities today." Asked what is Omani Women's Day to her? she quipped: "It is a special day, and I feel special, and I'm happy to know that women are valued and I am valued. Today, women want to improve themselves in so many ways," she noted.

So, what makes her feel strong? Interestingly, motherhood gave her that special strength, she pointed out.

"Now that I am a mother, I feel strong. I did not feel that way before. It is how they love me, and my role is to protect and raise them right," Muneera reflected.

She feels it is important how and what we speak to daughters.

"We should not tell them you cannot do something because you are a girl. We should tell girls, 'you can do what a boy can do.' I also explain to my sons that their sisters are equal to them in every way and should be treated with respect," she said.

She believes gender equality begins at home. Ask her what is important to a girl, education or wealth, and she is quick to respond, "Education is at most important. Even if she is competing with men in the world, knowledge is what makes her equal. Education empowers a girl, and it will provide her financial independence as well."

MUNEERA AL BALUSHI



SHAMSA AL HARTHI





OMAN’S CRUISE SEASON 2023-24 TO BEGIN FROM NEXT WEEK

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The cruise season 2023 in the Sultanate of Oman will begin next week with the Port of Salalah likely to receive the first cruise ship (Crystal Symphony) of the season on October 22 while the Port Sultan Qaboos (PSQ) will receive the same ship on October 24.

The other ships to arrive at PSQ in the subsequent days are Mein Schiff 2 (October 27), AIDAbella (October 28), and Azamara Journey (November 11).

The big ships that are expected to call at the Port Sultan Qaboos are AIDAcosma (over 6,000 passengers), MSC Virtuosa (over 5,700 passengers), and AIDAprima (over 3,000 passengers). The Khasab Port will receive its first ship on November 1.

The Port Sultan Qaboos attracted 74 cruise ships and 149,000 passengers in 2022, contributing around RO4 million. These ships also contributed to the recovery of the tourism sector in the various governorates of the Sultanate



The big ships that are expected to call at the Port Sultan Qaboos are AIDAcosma (over 6,000 passengers), MSC Virtuosa (over 5,700 passengers), and AIDAprima (over 3,000 passengers)

of Oman through various tour packages that were sold on ships.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has been conducting a study with an international company on the readiness of the ports of the Sultanate of Oman to receive more cruise ships and private yachts as cruise tourism has the potential to generate millions of riyals annually.

According to Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director-General of Tourism Promotion at MoHT, the ministry is working to make the

Sultanate of Oman one of the most important destinations in the world to attract cruise ships by investing in the coastal areas of the country, spread over 3,165 square kilometres.

It may noted that after three years, TUI Airways will operate charter flights to Muscat during the winter tourism season in 2023.

TUI Airways is a British airline, offering flights from the United Kingdom and Ireland to destinations and is regarded as one of the largest world’s largest charter airline.

15 landmarks managed by local companies

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 17

The number of heritage sites that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has assigned to private local companies to manage and harness their advantages as tourist destinations reached 15 historical landmarks.

This step comes within the framework of the ministry’s strategy that aims at employing cultural heritage and enhancing its contribution to economic growth, activating and strengthening community partnership.

It also aims at sustain the national heritage and legacy, enhancing the heritage sector’s contribution to the economic activities , and increasing the sources of tourist attractions and their diversity, while the number of visitors to heritage sites in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of September 2023 reached to about (80,317) thousand visitors.

Zayana bint Mohammed al Harrasiyah, Head of the Rehabilitation and Development Department for Historical Sites at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said : “ The companies



The number of heritage sites assigned to private local companies reached 15 historical landmarks

and establishments which are operating heritage sites always seek to develop and improve the tourism experiences associated with the site, that leads to enrich the visitor cognitively, touristic wise , and recreationally wise , and thus this will strengthen the attractions capabilities of the tourism product in general.

She clarified that the value added of the sector contributes to enriching tourism through projects of local value added that benefit the local community, by providing direct and indirect job opportunities by empowering the private sector, small and medium enterprises, involving productive families in the society and creating marketing outlets for craftsmen,

as well as organising events and activities throughout the year, and involving the artists in all fields that related to their specialities.

The head of the Department of Rehabilitation and Development of Historical Sites added: that managing and harnessing the advantages of heritage sites will contribute to maximising tourism benefits from historical monuments tourism-wise, economically, socially and culturally, as well as strengthening the cultural interaction of the local community that is surrounding the monument to highlight and promote it, that will contribute to enhance the aspects of sustainability and the permanence of preserving all cultural legacies

as competitive advantages that makes it a qualitative leap and attractive tourist destination, while the reviving of these sites through their operation is considered as a preservation for these sites and preventing them against extinction and neglecting, as well as ensuring their sustainability, preservation and protection.

She pointed out that, in addition to the provided incentives for the local companies and enterprises including a grace period of three years for renting, there are a number of standards, criteria and requirements that the investor (operator) of cultural heritage sites must adhere to, including the consideration of the cultural heritage site as a symbol, historical and sovereign significance that must be preserved, while the components of the concerned site, its components and divisions are being used as a historical landmark that highlighting the history of the landmark, the wilayat and the concern governorate, where permits and licenses must be obtained within their deadlines from the competent authorities such as the municipality, the Royal Oman Police and other authorities.

Tropical depression likely during weekend

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Oman Met Office has stated there might be a tropical depression this weekend.

Weather experts have been following up on the weather analyses, maps, and numerical forecasts at the National Center for Early Warning of Multiple Hazards that indicate the continued possibility of a low-pressure area forming southeast of the Arabian Sea during the next 48 hours, with chances of it developing into a tropical depression on Friday and Saturday.

According to weather experts, there are chances of the low-pressure moving westward, southward, or to the middle of the Arabian Sea.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday late afternoon saw scattered thunderstorms and flow of wadis over the mountainous areas of the governorates of Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah,

Al Sharqiyah North and Al Batinah South, with clouds extending over the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman and chances of scattered rain later. Wadis in Al Amerat were flowing by evening.

Seawaves are expected to rise from calm to medium waves 1.5-2. 0 meters on the coasts of Musandam Governorate, Al Sharqiyah South and Muscat on Wednesday and Thursday.

Sea waves are expected to be calm/average (1.25-1.5 metres) on parts of the coast of the Sea of Oman on Thursday.

Earlier in the day on Tuesday, Met Office had alerted that there are chances of cumulonimbus activity on Tuesday with thunderstorms accompanied by active downward winds and chances of hailstones falling during the afternoon and evening on Al Hajar Mountains and their surrounding areas, which may extend to include the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman.

RAO chief meets Pakistani officials



ISLAMABAD: Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), held a meeting on Tuesday with Gen Syed Asim Munir, Chief of the General Staff of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, within the context of his official visit to Pakistan. RAO Commander also met Lt Gen Ahsan Gulrez, Assistant Chief of Staff of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. — ONA

Oman participates in Lebanon International book fair

BEIRUT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, is taking part in Lebanon International Book Fair 2023, held in Beirut from October 13 to 23.

Oman’s participation in the event is intended to enhance cultural bonds within the context of a strategy to disseminate Omani culture. The approach highlights Omani intellectual products and consolidates Oman’s presence in such expositions that attract

many intellectuals, researchers and knowledge seekers.

The book fair identifies Oman’s publications and its cultural, historical and literary heritage. Participation in the event augments the rate of cultural contact between Oman and other countries of the world, while at the same time highlighting the special nature of Omani culture.

On October 19, the ministry will organise, on the sidelines of the fair, an Omani poetry evening



Oman’s participation in the event is intended to enhance cultural bonds within the context of a strategy to disseminate Omani culture

that will see the participation of renowned Omani female poet Aisha al Saifi and Hisham al Saqri. — ONA

Omani women: A beacon of entrepreneurship

For decades, Omani women have been a driving force in various sectors of the country, demonstrating unwavering determination, dedication, and a strong work ethic that has left an indelible mark for generations. Their influence is unmistakable, especially in the surge of businesses led by Omani women.

One exemplary trailblazer is Manal al Maskeri, the founder of 369 Salon. She embarked on her entrepreneurial journey after recognising a dearth of Omani women in the beauty supply sector in Oman. The majority of players in this field were either men or foreign-owned businesses.

With her profound understanding of the beauty industry and its intricacies, Manal sensed the significance of Omani women’s involvement in this market, envisioning it as a means to reduce reliance on external enterprises.

“We aspire to reduce our dependence on global franchises by providing the beauty industry in Oman with its essential needs,” affirmed Manal Al Maskeri, the CEO of 369.

Likewise, Safa al Buraiki, the founder of Tur Jewellery, found inspiration in traditional Omani women. Safa’s brand designs contemporary interpretations of traditional Omani jewellery,



Manal al Maskeri

making these pieces suitable for everyday use. Her vision extends beyond adornment; she wishes to acquaint people with Oman’s rich history through her jewellery.

Safa’s passion for jewellery was cultivated through her interactions with Omani women,



Laila al Harthy

who significantly influenced her artistic flair. Her mother, in particular, encouraged her to experiment with jewellery, allowing Safa to develop her unique style.

Despite her enduring love for jewellery, Safa had never



Safa al Buraiki

envisioned herself in the industry until a one-week gemstone workshop shortly before the pandemic changed her trajectory. This transformative experience spurred her to establish her jewellery business in 2021.

“Being a woman is never a

limit; it is a power,” she proudly asserts.

In a unique approach, Laila al Harthy, CEO, and co-founder of the startup “Waqt Dawam,” identified a common struggle in Oman’s job market, where candidates and recruiters often struggled to connect. In 2019, she launched Dawam, which offers technological solutions for the labour market, bridging the gap for both employment and freelance opportunities. Dawam has become a valuable resource for various segments of Omani society, assisting individuals, businesses, and government ministries.



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BIDEN HEADING TO ISRAEL AND JORDAN, FOCUSED ON GROUND OFFENSIVE AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

2



ISRAELI AIR STRIKE KILLS SENIOR HAMAS COMMANDER AYMAN NOFAL IN GAZA

3



SPAIN TO RAMP UP AID TO GAZA BY 1 MILLION EUROS, READY TO SEND MORE

GENEVA: The United Nations human rights office said on Tuesday that Israel’s siege of Gaza and its evacuation order for the north of the enclave could amount to a forcible transfer of civilians and be in breach of international law.

Speaking to reporters in Geneva, Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the UN human rights office, said Israel seemed to have made no effort to ensure the civilians temporarily evacuated in Gaza were provided with proper accommodation, as well as satisfactory conditions of hygiene, health, safety and nutrition.

“We are concerned that this order, combined with the imposition of a complete siege of Gaza, may not be considered as lawful temporary evacuation and would therefore amount to a forcible transfer of civilians in breach of international law,” she said.

“Those who managed to comply with the Israeli authorities’ order to evacuate are now trapped in the south of the Gaza Strip, with scant shelter, fast-depleting food supplies, little or no access to clean water, sanitation, medicine and other basic needs.”

The term “forcible transfer” describes the forced relocation of civilian populations and it is a crime against humanity punishable by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

In separate comments, the World Food Programme said its food supplies in Gaza were running low but that it was stockpiling supplies in the Egyptian city of Al Arish nearby.

Abeer Etefa, WFP Regional Communications Lead for the Middle East and North Africa, said they hoped “to cross as soon as the border access is granted.”

“We call for unimpeded access, safe passage to desperately needed humanitarian supplies to Gaza,” she said.

Trucks carrying supplies headed towards the Rafah crossing in Egypt, the only access point to the enclave outside of Israel’s control, though it was not certain whether they would be able to cross.

In addition to dwindling food and water supplies, Gaza’s health sector finds itself at a “breaking point,” said UN Special Rapporteur Tlaleng Mofokeng.

“The shutdown of backup generators would place the lives of thousands of patients at serious risk,” it said. — **Reuters**



ISRAEL’S GAZA EVACUATION ORDER BREACHES INTERNATIONAL LAW: UN

Israeli artillery unit appears near border with the Gaza Strip. – Reuters



A Palestinian boy reacts at the site of Israeli strikes on houses, in Rafah. – Reuters



A Palestinian woman covered in dust, reacts following an Israeli air strike on buildings in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP



Palestinians carry a wounded man following southern Gaza. – Reuters



A Palestinian waits outside the Rafah border crossing in the hope of getting permission to leave Gaza. – Reuters

Gaza aid arrives at border crossing

CAIRO: Egyptian aid trucks moved closer on Tuesday to the only crossing to Gaza, but with no agreement in place to deliver relief and the Palestinian side still closed due to Israeli strikes it was unclear when they might pass through.

At least 49 people were killed in overnight Israeli bombardment of Rafah, where the crossing is located, and the nearby town of Khan Younis, interior ministry said.

Some people with dual citizenship who have gathered in

recent days awaiting the opening of the Rafah crossing began approaching the border on Tuesday, but many said they were staying away due to the air strikes.

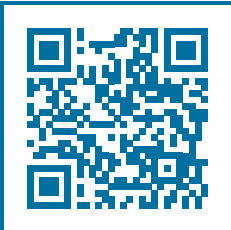
Egypt says the Rafah crossing, a vital artery before the fighting and now a key route for desperately needed supplies into the Israeli-besieged Palestinian enclave, has not been officially closed but has become inoperable due to the Israeli air strikes on the Gaza side.

Early on Tuesday some 160

trucks left al-Arish in Egypt’s Sinai peninsula, where hundreds of tonnes of aid have been awaiting an agreement on aid delivery, an eyewitness said.

Ahmed Salem of the Sinai Foundation said that the trucks heading for the border contained Egyptian aid, and that the international aid remained in warehouses in al-Arish.

Salem and another security source said Egypt had repaired the roads within the crossing that had



4



WHO SAYS IT NEEDS
URGENT ACCESS TO
GAZA TO DELIVER
AID, MEDICAL
SUPPLIES

5



GAZA FAMILIES
ORDERED SOUTH
RETURN HOME, SAY
NOWHERE IS SAFE
FROM ISRAELI BOMBS

6



AROUND 3,000 KILLED,
12,500 WOUNDED IN
GAZA SINCE OCT 7 -
PALESTINIAN HEALTH
MINISTRY



Mourners bury the bodies of Palestinians from Zraiee family, who were killed in Israeli strikes, at a cemetery in the central Gaza. — Reuters



g Israeli strikes on houses in Rafah in the



Palestinians gather at the site of Israeli strikes on houses in Rafah in the southern Gaza. — Reuters

EU tries for united message on Middle East situation

BRUSSELS: Following days of confusing and sometimes contradictory messaging about the EU's stance on the developing conflict, leaders of the bloc's countries on Tuesday are to try to rally around a clear statement.

"We felt the need to bring some order," one EU official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the issue more freely.

A video-conference of the leaders, chaired by European Council President Charles Michel, will seek to supersede initial steps taken by the European Commission and its chief, Ursula von der Leyen.

Several EU governments bristled at von der Leyen taking it on herself to wade into foreign policy matters, which are decided by member countries, without prior consultation and straying from their national positions. "Foreign affairs is



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen

a matter for member states, it is a matter for the (European) Council," an EU official said. The resulting impression left by these individual forays and U-turns is that the EU's stance on the conflict is chaotic and not

worthy of a bloc that wants to project an image of geopolitical heft, EU lawmakers and Brussels observers say.

The diplomat added that a meeting of EU foreign ministers last week should have set the tone for Brussels' public stance, especially the emphasis on referencing international humanitarian law, which also reflected the UN's position.

Both the statement and the meeting are an attempt "to bring things back on track so that the EU is speaking about the situation, and not speaking about the EU speaking about the situation," a diplomat said.

The video-conference -- coming a week before leaders are to meet in person at a regular Brussels summit -- was to discuss various aspects and implications of the conflict, not least on diplomatic efforts to prevent it escalating into a regional conflagration. — AFP

JORDAN HOPES BIDEN SUMMIT REVIVES MIDEAST PEACE PROCESS

AMMAN: Jordan voiced hope that a summit this week involving US President Joe Biden would breathe new life into the Middle East peace process following major fighting between Israel and Hamas.

On Wednesday, Biden will visit Israel and then head to Jordan, a key US partner, for a four-way summit.

In Amman, Biden will meet King Abdullah II of Jordan and President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of Egypt as well as Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas.

Jordan's royal court said the summit will "discuss the dangerous developments in Gaza and their repercussions on the region".

The talks will also "work towards finding a political horizon that will revive the peace process," it said.

Efforts to create a Palestinian state have been at a standstill for years with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-right government firmly opposed.

The Biden administration has backed calls for a two-state solution but has done little diplomatically to advance the goal, seeing little prospect of success.

King Abdullah will also meet separately with the three leaders on "how to ensure the entry of humanitarian and relief aid into the (Gaza) Strip".

Israel has been pounding Gaza Strip and preparing a ground invasion after suffering the deadliest attack in its 75-year history. Israel's air strikes have killed at least 2,750 Palestinians, also mostly civilians, although Israel claims it is targeting Hamas. — AFP

ing but no plan for delivery yet

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been damaged by Israeli strikes. Israel began its intense bombardment and siege of Gaza following a devastating assault by Hamas on October 7. The territory's 2.3 million residents have been left without power, pushing health and water services to the brink of collapse, with fuel for hospital generators running low. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced. A UN spokesperson said on

Monday that no progress had been made on the Rafah opening, and that fighting on roads key to the aid delivery made it difficult to operate. An understanding was reached that the aid would be delivered to specific secure locations in Gaza under monitoring, the security sources said, in exchange for limited evacuations of foreign passport holders, though there were Palestinian fears that that could result in de facto forced displacement. — Reuters



Smoke billows after an Israeli air strike at the Rafah refugee camp, in the southern Gaza. — AFP

Global effects of war on Palestinians



Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi
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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

In 2007, the globally renowned author Nassim Nicholas Taleb coined “The Black Swan Theory” and changed the world of risk analysis forever. Taleb argued that any system that is not prepared for a surprise, difficult-to-predict or Black Swan events is a fragile system and there he called for building anti-fragility, resilience systems.

Examples of such Black Swan events that changed our world include how the world wide web changed how we communicate, and how the fall of Soviet Union (the USSR) changed the world’s geopolitics.

On October 7, 2023, we witnessed our lifetime Black Swan event, when a few hundred Palestinians broke through the Occupied Palestinian Territory of Gaza, which has been blockaded for the past 17 years, and carried out military operations targeting the Israeli army inside what is one of the most funded, superpower-backed military-industrial-technology complex regimes in our world — Israel.

While I strongly condemn the ongoing tragic cycle of violence and loss of life and destruction it will fall on all of us that this war is different. Generations will feel the global effects of this work

on three levels, economy, social progress, and geopolitics.

This surprise war is a setback for the economic recovery we have been making around the world after Covid-19. The billions of dollars paid to finance the continuous Israeli occupation and attacks against Palestinians means that taxpayers around the world will witness increasing fees and taxes.

Moreover, that global powers financing the said violence will increase pressure on the resource rich Global South nations to extract more natural resources and trade costs, to compensate for billions to finance the cost of munitions sent to Israel to forcibly subjugate Palestinians. This previously difficult-to-predict situation will deepen economic inequality in such a way it’ll be harder for present and future generation to live in decent socio-economic conditions all over the world.

Racial supremacy ideology has been defeated since WWII. Today, we face the risk of Israeli religious and racial supremacy-based violence to a globally accepted ideology due to its embrace by the current US administration and European Union

THIS SURPRISE WAR IS A SETBACK FOR THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY WE HAVE BEEN MAKING AROUND THE WORLD AFTER COVID-19

leadership. Racial supremacy is an uncontrollable beast that leads to genocide and ethnic cleansing, the most recent example being the despicable WWII Holocaust. We have learned the hard way that when bigotry and prejudice thrive in Western world the whole world suffers, as in the death of almost 100 million people in WWI and WWII.

The success of superpower leaders is measured by the extent of peace and prosperity they can bring and maintain around the world. The UN criminalised white phosphorous bombs supplied by the American defence industry to the Israeli army lead to the opposite - a never ending cycle of extreme instability and poverty.

Israel is known globally for its technological advancement, mainly in the surveillance industry. Now, because new generations are more knowledgeable of current events, unlike generations that lived during the two world wars and 1948 ethnic cleansing generations there can be no sustainability for a nation that takes bride in building the most technologically advance economy on top of the white phosphorous ridden bodies of Palestinian men, women and children.

How a Bronze Age rock became a ‘treasure map’

ANTOINE AGASSE

A piece of rock with mysterious markings that lay largely unstudied for 4,000 years is now being hailed as a “treasure map” for archaeologists, who are using it to hunt for ancient sites around north-western France.

The so-called Saint-Belec slab was claimed as Europe’s oldest map by researchers in 2021 and they have been working ever since to understand its etchings — both to help them date the slab, and to rediscover lost monuments.

“Using the map to try to find archaeological sites is a great approach. We never work like that,” said Yvan Pailler, a professor at the University of Western Brittany (UBO).

Ancient sites are more commonly uncovered by sophisticated radar equipment, aerial photography or by accident in cities when the foundations for new buildings are being dug. “It’s a treasure map,” said Pailler.

But the team are only just beginning their treasure hunt.

The ancient map marks an area roughly 30 by 21 km and Pailler’s colleague, Clement Nicolas from the CNRS research institute, said they would need to survey the entire territory and cross reference the markings on the slab.

That job could take 15 years, he said.

Nicolas and Pailler were part of the team that rediscovered the slab in 2014 — it was initially uncovered in 1900 by a local historian who did not understand its significance. The French experts were joined by colleagues from other institutions in France and overseas as they began to decode its mysteries.

“There were a few engraved symbols that made sense right away,” said Pailler.

In the coarse bumps and lines of the slab, they could see the rivers and mountains of Roudouallec, part of the Brittany region about 500 km west of Paris. The researchers scanned the slab and compared it with current maps, finding a roughly 80 per cent match.

“We still have to identify all the geometric symbols, the legend that goes with them,” said Nicolas.

The slab is pocked with tiny hollows, which researchers believe could point to burial mounds, dwellings or geological deposits. Discovering their meaning could lead to a whole flood of new finds.

But first, the archaeologists have spent the past few weeks digging at the site where the slab was initially uncovered, which Pailler said was one of the biggest Bronze Age burial sites in Brittany.

— AFP

Xi, Putin to freshen decade-long friendship at Beijing summit

PETER CATTERALL AND MATTHEW WALSH

Ten years after toasting a budding friendship, Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin will met again in Beijing seeking to further deepen the “no-limits” partnership between their two countries.

The two presidents share a strong personal bond, with Xi calling his Russian counterpart his “best friend” and Putin cherishing his “reliable partner”.

Their relationship has been a constant despite a decade of increasingly difficult relations with Western countries -- exemplified by Russia’s ongoing war on Ukraine, which China has refused to condemn.

Putin’s attendance at a leaders forum in the Chinese capital this week is not only a rare foreign trip for the Russian leader, but also an opportunity to pay homage to Xi’s signature Belt and Road infrastructure initiative.

“(The) Russian delegation’s presence in Beijing is important for Moscow,” said Alicja Bachulska, an expert on Chinese foreign policy at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

Xi and Putin forged their friendship when the pair shared cake to mark the Russian leader’s birthday at a summit in Indonesia in 2013.

They have since drawn closer, with Xi whisking Putin away on a high-speed train ride across China to make traditional steamed buns in 2018.

Putin later returned the favour with caviar-topped pancakes and a river cruise on Xi’s subsequent visits to Russia.

In 2019, the Russian leader even threw Xi a birthday bash of his own, surprising him with ice cream at a conference in Tajikistan. The two men’s lives share several similarities -- they were born just a few months apart in the early 1950s.

They are products of two socialist giants, with Xi the scion of a family of Communist revolutionaries and Putin a former Soviet intelligence officer.

Both are haunted by the collapse



Russian President Vladimir Putin is welcomed by Chinese President Xi Jinping during a ceremony at the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, China, on Tuesday. – Reuters

of the USSR — for Putin, a “major geopolitical disaster” and for Xi, a cautionary tale for China’s own Communist Party.

And both have invoked themes of national revitalisation while suppressing dissent during their long and increasingly unchallenged years in power.

XI AND PUTIN FORGED THEIR FRIENDSHIP WHEN THE PAIR SHARED CAKE TO MARK THE RUSSIAN LEADER’S BIRTHDAY AT A SUMMIT IN INDONESIA IN 2013

Mirroring their leaders’ ties, Beijing and Moscow have also huddled closer in recent years, viewing each other as a counterbalance against the US-led West.

The two countries describe their relationship as a “comprehensive strategic partnership” that has “no limits” on potential cooperation. Their amity has endured despite Russia’s frontal assault on Ukraine since last year.

Beijing has resisted calls to condemn the war and depicted itself as a neutral party, stopping short of providing weapons for Moscow.

But it has echoed Russia in blaming Western countries -- especially the Nato defence alliance -- for creating the conditions for the war’s outbreak.

Joe Webster, an expert on China-Russia relations at the Atlantic Council, described Beijing’s stance on the war as “pro-Russia neutrality”.

That has involved crucial diplomatic, economic and non-lethal military assistance for Moscow against a background of booming bilateral trade, he said.

But he added that the aborted mutiny by Russian mercenary Yevgeny Prigozhin this summer “shocked Beijing and led it to recalibrate relations with Moscow”. The threat of Putin’s ouster means “Beijing (now) seeks to depersonalise the relationship and institutionalise ties between the two political systems... to ensure close ties with Russia regardless of who occupies the power vertical”, Webster said.

The subtle shift in rhetoric illuminates the lopsided nature of the China-Russia relationship -- one that sees Moscow increasingly relying on its neighbour to prop up its economy and help sustain its war machine.

— AFP

A fresh threat to global peace

Even as human beings around the world have worked hard to maintain peace for generations, it still remains elusive. There is war, conflict, and violence in many parts of the world!

Although we all long to live in peace and never see the death and devastation that war can bring, some are engineering situations of conflict that cause hardship.

Wars and conflicts over the last few years have caused immense human suffering and had an enormous global impact. We're shocked and anguished by the loss of life and the pain and suffering of so many people around us. All of us fear for the future, as the destruction directly or indirectly affects us.

History shows that the present is only the product of the past, and no one can cut themselves off from history. Time and again, the past seems to have reached out to wreck the hope for peace.

Sadly, 2022 and 2023 will be added to the war years, as these two years will go down in history as very deadly and destructive, possibly spilling over into future years.

Reports indicate that battle deaths spiked by 45 per cent between 2020 and 2021, predominantly in the Asia-Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa regions.

The 2023 Global Peace Index report reveals a concerning surge in global conflicts, with pre-existing tensions predating even the significant Russian war on Ukraine, touted as the most significant conflict since World War II.

This year's results found that the average level of global peacefulness deteriorated by 0.42 per cent. This is the thirteenth deterioration in peacefulness in the last fifteen years, with 84 countries improving and 79 deteriorating in peacefulness in 2022.

"As we look to the horizon, potential challenges such as climate change, economic disparities, and political instability could arise in the future, potentially affecting regions



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

ALTHOUGH WE ALL LONG TO LIVE IN PEACE AND NEVER SEE THE DEATH AND DEVASTATION THAT WAR CAN

globally," says the Global Peace Index report.

IMF and World Bank officials pointed out during their meeting in Morocco last week that a wider conflict in the Middle East poses a fresh threat to the global economy just as the world emerges from shocks triggered by Covid-19 and the Ukraine war.

Like the wars of the past, the conflict between Israel and Hamas has the potential to even tip into recession if more countries are drawn in.

The cost of wars and conflicts is almost immeasurable. In addition to human suffering, social unrest, and damage to infrastructure, they impact the affected countries' economies. They disrupt access to basic services like food and water and force people into extreme poverty, with the poorest and most vulnerable paying the highest price.

Though the United Nations member states came together to prevent human suffering and promote peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, violent conflicts are increasingly becoming one of the big obstacles to reaching those goals.

It is projected that more than half of the people living in poverty will be found in countries affected by high levels of violence by 2030. This is utterly contrary to the promise contained in the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind.

The fact is that while talks about peace continue on one side, groundings for war progress on the other. If you talk to parties on either side of a conflict, each side can convince you why they need war for their survival and self-defence. We found a trust deficit!

There appears to be an abyss between moral ideas and actual work! And what we find today is that might is right, and the more powerful a country is, the more secure it is! Hence, as the Global Peace Index report points out, "the need for a systemic response to building peace is urgent".

RONALDINHO IN INDIA!



Former Brazilian football player Ronaldinho gestures during a visit to St Xavier's College in Kolkata, India, on Tuesday. – AFP

EUphoria! Poland election surprise spurs investor hope

Investors were quick to give a confident thumbs-up to Poland's Europhile opposition bloc's surprise election triumph as it fuelled hopes of better ties with Brussels and those that hold its purse strings.

Official results confirmed that Poland's ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party won most votes in Sunday's ballot but fell short of a majority, confirming that the liberal, pro-EU opposition is on track to form the next government.

The result would pivotally change Warsaw, which has fought with the European Union over the rule of law, media freedom and migration since the current conservative nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) government came to power in 2015.

The zloty and Warsaw's stock market - which has underperformed the rest of Europe by some 30 per cent during PiS rule - both extended gains for a second straight session on Tuesday as former European Council president Donald Tusk looked to be in pole position to be Poland's next leader.

As Europe's sixth-largest economy, a revitalised pro-EU attitude in Poland would be particularly welcome.

"It will be a positive development for sure because it will unlock the (EU) money that has been withheld and reduce a lot of the tension that has



MARC JONES
The writer is global markets correspondent at Reuters

OFFICIAL RESULTS CONFIRMED THAT POLAND'S RULING LAW AND JUSTICE (PIS) PARTY WON MOST VOTES IN SUNDAY'S BALLOT BUT FELL SHORT OF A MAJORITY

been created with Brussels," said Daniel Moreno, head of emerging markets debt at investment firm Mirabaud.

Some 110 billion euros (\$116 billion) earmarked for Poland from the EU's long-term budget and the post-pandemic Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) remain frozen due to PiS' record of undercutting liberal democratic rules.

"It would be one less headache for Brussels as well," Moreno added, referring to the criticism the EU receives from the likes of Hungary's Viktor Orban and last month's election win in Slovakia for the nationalist Robert Fico.

The 66-year old Tusk and his pro-EU coalition allies may still have to wait weeks or even months though before getting a turn at forming a government. Polish President Andrzej Duda, a PiS ally, has said he would give the first shot at forming a government to the party with the most votes, which as it stands is PiS.

However, with PiS' only obvious coalition partner the far-right Confederation unlikely to secure enough votes for an overall majority, Tusk should get his chance.

Veteran analysts were keen to stress, though, that even then it will not necessarily be plain sailing. Tusk will not instantly unlock the 35 billion euros in post-pandemic grants and loans that Brussels froze in May 2021 due to concerns about political influence over top judges.

Duda has referred the issue at the heart of that row to Poland's Constitutional Tribunal in Poland. But like all the country's institutions with a PiS leaning, it could be "quite obstructive", portfolio manager Viktor Szabo

said. The other big question he and others have is what now happens to the big spending promises that both Tusk's coalition and the PiS had campaigned on.

Ahead of Sunday's election, rating agency Fitch was forecasting a whopping 5.3 per cent budget deficit this year.

Poland still has a sub 60 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio but already had to triple what it had previously paid investors when it sold a 10-year bond in its local zloty markets at 6 per cent at the end of last year.

Daniel Wood, an emerging markets debt portfolio manager at William Blair Investment Management, said he expected Poland would focus potential additional bond sales on domestic markets in the next couple of years.

"Poland's debt stock is quite low, compared to some other countries in the region. There is some space," Wood said.

The central bank, though, has slashed interest rates at its last two meetings as the election campaign burst into life.

Szabo questioned whether that would continue under a new government, especially with the bank's governor, Adam Glapinski, originally installed by PiS. Short-term Polish money rates rose on Monday, suggesting the bank may turn more hawkish again.

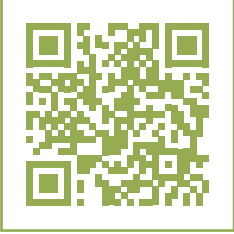
Simon Quijano-Evans, chief economist with Gemcorp Capital, said probably the biggest issue was whether a pro-EU coalition with Tusk at the helm could hold, although it should at least quell talk of Poland following Britain out the EU or cutting its support for Ukraine. "Stabilisation in Poland will definitely help in all of Europe," he said.



Donald Tusk, leader of the largest opposition grouping Civic Coalition (KO), gestures after the exit poll results are announced in Warsaw, Poland. – Reuters file photo

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AL NAHDA CLOSE IN ON SEEB IN OL



Oman Club and Al Rustaq players fight for the ball.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 17

Defending champions Al Nahda reduced the gap with league leaders Seeb to two points after their crucial win in the eighth week of Omantel League 2023-24. The Al Buraimi-based team registered a 3-1 win over Bahla at Nizwa Sports Complex on Sunday. Al Nahda raised their credit to 18 points and benefited from Seeb's goalless draw against Sohar at the latter's home in Sohar Sports Complex.

The eighth round of the top tier league recorded four victories, one goalless draw and another 2-2 draw. The round featured scoring of 15 goals. Seeb remained on top with 20 points while the draw dropped the Southern Batinah team from second place to the fourth position with 15 points.

Oman Club jumped to second position after they showed top game and earned three points against Al Rustaq at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. The match ended with the lone goal scored by Oman Club's Omar Shawqi in the 79th minute. The triumph took the Muscat-based team to second with 18 points while Al Rustaq stayed in their previous credit at seven points in



Al Nasr and Dhofar players in action.

ninth place.

The derby in Salalah ended in favour of Al Nasr as they defeated Salalah giants Dhofar 3-1 in a tough clash at Al Saada Stadium. Dhofar took lead with a header goal from Thani al Rushedi in the 30th minute. Al Nasr registered strong comeback in the match within five minutes as they equalised through Waleed al Musallami.

In the second half, Al Nasr began with more focus and they regained lead through the second goal netted by Abdullah Zahir in the 50th minute.

AbdulMajeed Shamas confirmed the win for Al Nasr as he struck the third goal in the

64th minute. Al Nasr earned three points to reach nine points in the sixth place while Dhofar are struggling in 10th spot with seven points.

Ibri continued their top performance as they tasted third victory in the league after beating Al Wahda 2-0 at the Sur Sports Complex. The win took Ibri to nine points in eighth place while Al Wahda are placed in the danger zone at 11th place with four points only.

In another match, Sur and Al Shabab ended their match in a 2-2 draw in Sur Sports Complex. The forthcoming round will take place on October 27 and 28.

Fresh Fritz starts Japan Open defence with a win

TOKYO: Defending champion Taylor Fritz won his Japan Open first-round match on Tuesday and said he felt “motivated and ready to play” after lightening his load ahead of the tournament.

The American has been one of the busiest players on the ATP Tour this season but he has taken his foot off the gas since the US Open, appearing in only the Laver Cup and Shanghai Masters.

He beat Britain's Cameron Norrie 6-4, 6-3 to kick off the defence of his Tokyo title and said it was “probably an advantage that I might be less burnt-out”.

“After the US Open, I think I had played the most matches of anyone on tour,” said Fritz, the number one seed in Tokyo.

“I thought it made sense to start the Asia swing in Shanghai. I feel motivated and ready to play.”

World number 10 Fritz beat fellow American Frances Tiafoe in last year's Japan Open final and has won six career titles.

He is the highest-ranked American in the world and overcame an early setback to dispatch Norrie in his Tokyo opener.

“I was holding easily and then out of nowhere he broke me, so it was a tough spot to be in,” said Fritz.

“I feel like I played a couple of really good points to break and I played the bigger, more important points better in the return games.”

“I definitely upped my level.”

Fritz was joined in the next round by countryman Ben Shelton, who beat Japan's Taro Daniel 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/2).

US Open semifinalist Shelton struggled with his serve in the first set and had to dig deep to recover in the second.

ATP JAPAN OPEN RESULTS

FIRST ROUND

Taylor Fritz (USA x1) bt Cameron Norrie (GBR) 6-4, 6-3; Shintaro Mochizuki (JPN) bt Tomas Etcheverry (ARG) 6-4, 7-6 (7/5); Christian Garin (CHI) bt Sho Shimabukuro (JPN) 6-4, 3-6, 6-3; Alexei Popyrin (AUS) bt Karen Khachanov (RUS x7) 6-4, 6-2; Alex de Minaur (AUS x4) bt Jack Draper (GBR) 4-6, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/1); Diego Schwartzman (ARG) bt Francisco Cerundolo (ARG) 6-4, 6-1; Aslan Karatsev (RUS) bt Frances Tiafoe (USA x6) 6-3, 7-6 (7/4); Ben Shelton (USA) bt Taro Daniel (JPN) 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/2); Casper Ruud (NOR x2) bt Yosuke Watanuki (JPN) 7-6 (8/6), 6-3

He said the experience of going to a third-set tiebreaker in his previous two matches helped him get over the line against home favourite Daniel.

“Being able to be in that situation time, and time again has definitely prepared me for that moment,” said Shelton, who has risen to number 19 in the world.

“When it came up today, I wasn't too nervous because I knew I'd been there before and that gave me the confidence to play the style that I wanted to play in the tiebreaker.”

Tiafoe, seeded number six, crashed out after a 6-3, 7-6 (7/4) loss to Russia's Aslan Karatsev.

Number two seed Casper Ruud of Norway beat Japan's Yosuke Watanuki 7-6 (8/6), 6-3 to reach the second round. Australia's number four seed Alex de Minaur also progressed with a 4-6, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/1) win over Britain's Jack Draper. — AFP



Taylor Fritz of the US pumps his fist after winning the first set against Cameron Norrie of Britain during the ATP Japan Open tournament in Tokyo. – AFP

Al Zubair gears up for third race of GT Open series

BARCELONA, Spain: Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and German team-mate Fabian Schiller take part in their third event of the 2023 International GT Open series at the 4.657km Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya in Spain from October 21 to 22.

The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes AMG GT3 pairing has only competed in two rounds and four races in the series so far this year and will be hoping to snatch outright victories on races 12 and 13 of the series.

Whilst Al Zubair and Schiller competed in Portugal in May and Hungary the following month, other competitors have taken part in additional rounds in Belgium, France, Austria and Italy and four teams still have a mathematical chance of taking the International GT Open title.

For Al Zubair and Schiller, following a first and second place in Portimão and a win and a third at the Hungaroring, it will be a case of trying to claim back-to-back wins in the Pro class in the races on Saturday and Sunday.

Al Zubair said: "I am looking forward to racing in Barcelona for the finale of the International GT Open. Together with Getspeed and Fabi (Fabian), we have a great package that we proved this season. Out of the two race weekends we have done so far, we have two wins, one second place and a third. This is a 100% podium-finishing record.

"That went really well and we are both excited to getting back to the championship and ending the European season soon before we announce our next races. Unfortunately, we will have a 20-second handicap because of our previous success but, nonetheless, I hope that we can still achieve great results this weekend."

Meanwhile, Al Zubair has also confirmed that he, Fabian Schiller and Austrian racer Martin Konrad will take part in the forthcoming Asian Le Mans Series.

The three-event calendar includes two races at the Sepang International Circuit in Malaysia on December 2nd and 3rd, one race at the Dubai Autodrome on February 4th and a back-to-back finale at the Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi on February 10th-11th.

Speaking about the Asian Le Mans Series, Al Zubair said: "The team will be Fabian Schiller, me and Martin Konrad. Hopefully it will be a very strong championship for us. We have a strong line-up and will be aiming for the win. It will be an extremely tough championship but we will be very well prepared by then. It will be great to be back in that series again for the second time after finishing second last year."

Thirty-four cars have been entered across the various classes for the final races in



Al Faisal Al Zubair and Fabian Schiller in action

the International GT Open in Barcelona and potentially four teams and four different brands of race car will be challenging for the title.

Sam de Haan and Charlie Fagg head into the weekend in the Optimum Motorsport McLaren with 103 points and a cushion of four over Diego Menchaca in the Motopark Mercedes. In Barcelona, the Mexican teams up with the 2019 GT Open champion Albert Costa. Christopher

Haase and Simon Reicher are a further four points adrift in the Eastalenet Racing Audi.

With dropped scores coming into force at year-end and 30 points still at stake, the British duo has a four-point advantage over Menchaca and eight over the Austrian and the German in third.

The Oregon Team Lamborghini of Pierre-Louis Chovet and Maximilian Paul is also still in contention, albeit 19

points behind after four race wins so far this season.

International GT Open drivers are sharing the race weekend with entrants in the Euro 4 Championship, GT Cup Europe and Euroformula Open. They will take to the Catalan circuit for a pair of one-hour free practice sessions on Friday from 11.17hrs and 16.33hrs, respectively.

The first 30-minute qualifying session takes centre stage at 10.20hrs on Saturday morning

and precedes the opening 70-minute race that gets underway with a rolling start from 15.05hrs.

Q2 takes place for the second driver from 09.30hrs on Sunday and is followed by a second one-hour race, starting at 13.30hrs.

2023-24 ASIAN LE MANS SERIES
R1 Sepang, Malaysia December 2
R2 Sepang, Malaysia December 3
R3 Dubai Autodrome, Dubai Feb 4
R4 Yas Marina, Abu Dhabi Feb 10
R5 Yas Marina, Abu Dhabi Feb 11

Afghanistan A blank Oman 2-0 in ODI series

MUSCAT: The visiting AfghanAbdalyan (Afghanistan A) cricketers made a 2-0 clean sweep against hosts Oman, winning both the unofficial ODI matches, which were played at the Oman Cricket Academy grounds last week.

The AfghanAbdalyan players are currently on their maiden tour to Oman and will also feature in five T20 games, which begins on Tuesday night.

The series comprising unofficial ODI and T20 matches is also providing the hosts a much-needed match practice ahead of the 2023 ICC Men's T20 World Cup Asia Regional Final in Nepal later this month.

Duleep Mendis' men will be among the eight nations vying for the sole spot for the 2024 ICC Men's T20 World Cup, co-hosted by the USA and West Indies.

In the first unofficial ODI match, AfghanAbdalyan won by 28 runs. Batting first, the visitors were restricted to 223 in 46.4 overs with Oman skipper Zeeshan Maqsood, Samay Shrivastav, Mohammed Nadeem and Ayaan Khan picking up two wickets apiece.

For Afghanistan A, Zubaid Akbari (76) and Mohammed Ishaq (57) slammed half-centuries in their total of 223 and the bowled then defended the modest target as they bowled Oman out for 195 in 47.5 overs.

Akbari and Abdul Malik (40) provided a strong opening wicket stand of 89 but after the partnership was broken by Maqsood in the 19th over, the visitors struggled against a tidy Oman attack. Akbari was looking good to reach the triple digits but was run out in the 31st over for 76 off 90 balls. A late onslaught



Oman's Shoaib Khan celebrates his half-century.

from Ishaq, who scored 57 off 46, which included three boundaries and four maximums took the team past the 200-mark.

Oman's chase was off to a flyer with Kashyap Prajapati and Pratik Athavale as they build a 116-run opening wicket partnership in 27 overs. Athavale's run out for 51 changed the game as AfghanAbdalyan came back strongly to rip apart the top and middle order batting line-up of the hosts. Prajapati's dismissal, yet another run out, for 80 in the 36th over saw a major collapse as Oman were bowled out for 195. Ayaan Khan was the only other batter to score in double digits with 17. There were four run out dismissals in Oman's innings while Naveed Zadran picked up three for 47.

In the second match, the hosts fared much better and though there was still one run out in the innings during their chase of 273, a sparkling innings of 88 off 97 balls from Shoaib Khan stood out. In fact, Shoaib missed out on a deserving century when he was run out in the 41st over with the hosts total at 221. His exit proved to be the turning point as along with Ayaan Khan (42), the

pair had put on a 108-run fifth wicket stand. Ayaan followed to the pavilion an over later with the total at 223 and despite a late charge from Siddharth Bukkapatnam with 22 off 19, Oman fell short by 15 runs as they were bowled out for 257 in 48.5 overs. Wafadar Momand was the pick of the bowlers with 3/66 while Naveed Zadran and Shahidullah took two wickets each. Skipper Zeeshan Maqsood (38) and Kahsyap Prajapati (24) were the other notable run-getters.

Earlier, AfghanAbdalyan put up a challenging total of 272-8 in 50 overs, with Abdul Malik hammering a strokeful century (117 off 128 balls). Nasir Jamal's 57 and Mohammed Ishaq's 11-ball 21 powered the tourists to a winning total. For Oman, Siddharth and Shrivastav claimed two wickets each.
BRIEF SCORES: Match 1: Afghanistan A 223 in 46.4 overs (Zubaid Akbari 76, Mohammed Ishaq 57; Zeeshan Maqsood 2/18, Samay Shrivastav 2/27, Mohammed Nadeem 2/27, Ayaan Khan 2/44) beat Oman 195 in 47.5 overs (Kashyap Prajapati 80, Pratik Athavale 51, Naveed Zadran 3/47).
Match 2: Afghanistan A 272/8 (Abdul Malik 117, Nasir Jamal 57; Siddharth Bukkapatnam 2/28, Samay Shrivastav 2/48) beat Oman 257 in 48.5 overs (Shoaib Khan 88, Ayaan Khan 42; Wafadar Momand 3/66, Naveed Zadran 2/47, Shahidullah 2/40).



ORSC marks World Squash Day with events for schoolchildren

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 17

The Oman Racket Sports Committee (ORSC) marked World Squash Day which falls on second on Saturday of October every year. The ORSC arranged series of activities at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat and at the Sohar Sports Complex in North Batinah governorate. The activities took place during October 14 to 17.

The main event took place on Saturday at the squash hall in Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in presence of Dr AbdulRahim Musallam al Droushi, Chairman of ORSC, and squash lovers.

The event featured a friendly match and later they honoured the winners of Muscat Squash League which was held during the couple months ago. The chief of ORSC delivered the prizes and trophies to the top winners of the league including Rashid Ali who won the premier league for June while Joseph Fighali for the first division league. Hussain Ahmed claimed the title of July in premier league while Tahir al Barwani for first division league. Salim al

Maqbali was crowned champion for August while Said al Hajri won the first division league title.

Earlier on Sunday, Muscat school students performed basic training sessions under supervision of Sultan Qaboos University students representing the Physical Education and Sport Sciences Department. The students were briefed about the rules of squash sports, showed some technical skills and how to play and earn points in this sport.

On Monday and Tuesday, the ORSC organised some activities for the students in Suhar under supervision of coach Hamed al Maqbali and in presence of coaches Ali al Rubaei and Abdullah al Maqbali who guided and instructed the players with the desired techniques and different technical training sessions besides holding a competitive tournament.

Dr AbdulRahim Musallam al Droushi, Chairman of ORSC, said the committee organised these activities on the World Squash Day to introduce and spread the sports to different age categories in the community. "School students were our main focus to develop their technical and tactical

areas. During the forthcoming period, ORSC will arrange some events to opt the most proper players and provide detailed and comprehensive plans for them to develop well," he concluded.

Tahir bin Taghlib al Barawani, Secretary-General of ORSC, affirmed that the participation of students for the World Squash Day showed a positive message to us. "We were surprised with their enthusiasm for the sport. This is a positive indicator to work hard in developing these junior stars for the future. Shortly, there will be a competition to select the players and form the junior national teams," he said.

Amal al Mahrouqi, member at OQSC, said the activities of World Squash Day focused on attracting school students. "The students are the future of the sports and will be the main nucleus to form the national junior teams. The committee will work to boost participants in squash by holding specialised different events for young players. Later, will work technically to select the talented players and refine them ahead of providing them with proper training programme," she said.

DHARAMSALA: Netherlands defeated mighty South Africa by 38 runs at the Cricket World Cup on Tuesday as the European outsiders humiliated the Proteas for the second time in a year.

Chasing 246 to win from a rain-reduced 43 overs after Dutch captain Scott Edwards made a crucial 78 not out, South Africa, one of the tournament favourites, were bowled out for 207 in the shadow of the Himalayas.

In November last year, the Dutch sent South Africa crashing of the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia.

The victory was the World Cup's second major shock in three days after Afghanistan defeated defending champions England on Sunday.

There was no hint of the drama to come as South Africa eased comfortably to 36-0 in their pursuit.

However, four wickets then fell for the addition of just eight runs.

Quinton de Kock had cracked back-to-back centuries in South Africa's impressive opening wins over Sri Lanka and Australia.

But on 20 he was caught behind off Colin Ackermann, one of three South African-born players in the Dutch starting line-up.

Ackermann had been man-of-the match when the Netherlands shocked South Africa in Adelaide last year.

Skipper Temba Bavuma (16) fell three runs later, clean bowled by Roelof van der Merwe who played 13 ODIs for South Africa before moving to the Netherlands.

Seamer Paul van Meekeren beat the defences of Aiden Markram for one before Van der Merwe's wily left-arm spin tempted Rassie van der Dussen into a rash reverse sweep with the catch taken by Aryan Dutt at backward point.

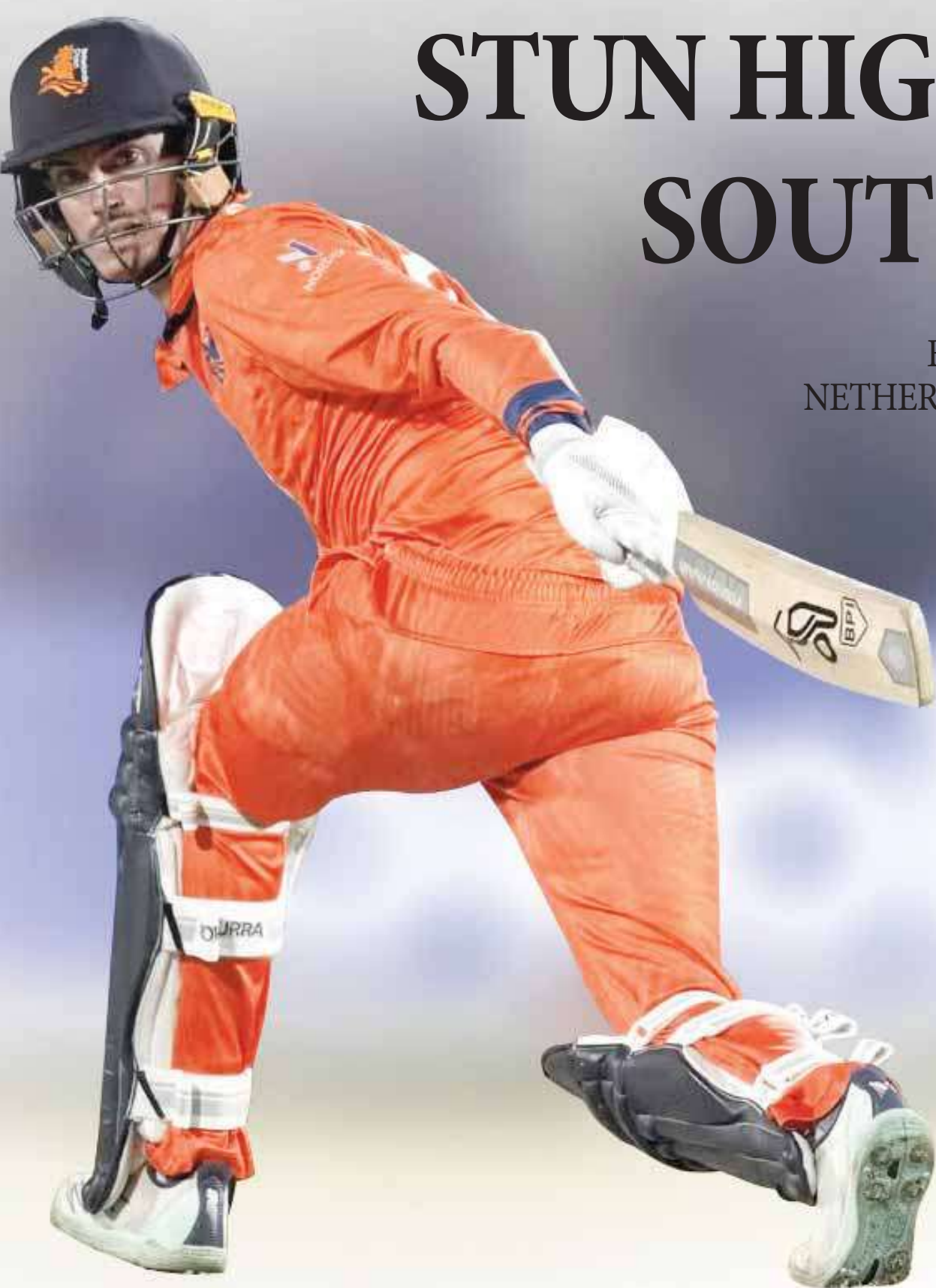
De Kock, Markram and Van der Dussen had all made centuries in South Africa's World Cup record total 428 in the win over Sri Lanka.

Heinrich Klaasen and David Miller steadily rebuilt the innings in a 45-run partnership for the fifth wicket before Logan van Beek broke through. Klaasen on 28 took on a long-hop and managed only to find Vikramjit Singh at fine leg, leaving South Africa teetering on 89-5.

EDWARDS HITS 78

Marco Jansen (9) saw his stumps scattered by Van Meekeren as South Africa slumped to 109-6 and it was virtually game over when David Miller swung and missed at Van Beek after making 43.

Bas de Leede mopped up Gerald Coetzee and Kagiso Rabada before Keshav Maharaj's late, defiant 40 was ended by Van Beek.



PLUCKY DUTCH
STUN HIGH-FLYING
SOUTH AFRICA

EDWARDS, VAN DER MERWE LIFT
NETHERLANDS TO COMPETITIVE TOTAL

RUNS (BALLS)
78*(69)

6s/4s
1/10

STRIKE RATE
113.04



It was the Netherlands' first win at this World Cup after losses to Pakistan and New Zealand.

Earlier, Edwards played a brilliant innings while Van der Merwe shone with a late cameo as the Netherlands made a fighting 245-8.

Edwards's runs came off 69 balls and featured 10 fours and a six.

Van der Merwe, 38, hit a quickfire 29 off 19 balls with three fours and a six before he was caught behind off Lungi Ngidi. Together, Edwards and Van der Merwe put on a crucial 64 for the eighth wicket after the Dutch were struggling at 112-6 following a delayed start due to rain.

Rabada claimed his 150th ODI

wicket as South Africa's feared pace attack ripped through the Netherlands top order in chilly, damp conditions.

Rabada reached his personal landmark when he struck with the first ball of his spell, cramping up opener Singh and forcing a top edge to Klaasen. Singh had laboured to just two runs from 16 balls after the Dutch were put in to bat.

Rabada, playing in his 95th ODI, also accounted for the dangerous De Leede, lbw for two.

Max O'Dowd, Ackermann, Sybrand Engelbrecht and Teja Nidamanuru all reached double figures. — AFP

WORLD CUP STANDINGS

CRICKET WORLD CUP STANDINGS AFTER FRIDAY'S MATCH

Team	Played	Won	Lost	Tied	No Result	Points	NRR
India	3	3	0	0	0	6	1.821
New Zealand	3	3	0	0	0	6	1.604
South Africa	3	2	1	0	0	4	1.385
Pakistan	3	2	1	0	0	4	-0.137
England	3	1	2	0	0	2	-0.084
Afghanistan	3	1	2	0	0	2	-0.652
Bangladesh	3	1	2	0	0	2	-0.699
Australia	3	1	2	0	0	2	-0.734
Netherlands	3	1	2	0	0	2	-0.993
Sri Lanka	3	0	3	0	0	0	-1.532

NOTE: Top four teams qualify for the semifinals

Kiwis to be wary of Afghan spinners in Chennai

Afghanistan created the biggest and the first upset of the tournament by beating England in Delhi and are high on confidence when they take on New Zealand in Chennai.

One of the reasons for them to be confident is because the match is going to be played in Chennai where spinners play a huge role. The Chennai pitch is known to assist spinners and that same pitch Indian spinners had got the better of the Australian batsman to bowl them out for just 199.



ANIS SAJAN



Afghanistan has three quality spinners in Rashid Khan, Mujeeb Ur Rehman and Mohammed Nabi who picked 8 wickets out of the 10 English batsman and had a complete control of the game. And if Rahmullah Gurbaz can once again set the platform for them along with Ibrahim Zadran, the rest of Afghanistan batsmen need to capitalise and not collapse like the way they did against England after being 114 for no loss to slump to 150-4, it was due to the late hitting by Rashid Khan and Mujeeb ur Rehman and smart batting by Ikram Alikhi they managed to post a decent score.

Mind you New Zealand too has good spinners in Mitchell Santner and Ish Sodhi and in Trent Boult they have the best left arm swing bowler and are the team to beat this World cup with three clinical wins against England, Netherlands and Bangladesh. It needs to be seen if Afghanistan can bat well to score a decent total to defend. The Kiwi batters are all in good form but as Rashid Khan mentioned, Afghanistan are here not to just create upset but win more matches against big teams and show the world they can play the 50 overs game and not just regarded as a T20 specialist format team.





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Fitch upgrades Nama Electricity Distribution Co to ‘BB+’

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, OCT 17

Fitch Ratings has upgraded Nama Electricity Distribution Company SAOC’s (NEDC) Long-Term Foreign- and Local-Currency Issuer Default Ratings (IDR) to ‘BB+’ from ‘BB’ with Stable Outlooks.

It was the first ratings action for NEDC, a subsidiary of Nama Group, following the completion of a landmark merger and restructuring of distribution and supply companies.

As a result of the merger and restructuring exercise, encompassing Muscat Electricity Distribution Company, Mazoon Electricity Company, Majan Electricity Company and Tanweer, two main companies were established: Nama Electricity Distribution and Nama Supply. They will oversee the provision of electricity services to all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman except for Dhofar Governorate, which is operated by Nama Dhofar Services that provides electricity, water and wastewater services in the southern parts of Oman.

Nama Electricity Distribution is responsible for providing services related to meter reading, and low voltage networks. The company’s mandates also include constructing lines and transformers to ensure reliable services to customers. Nama Supply will be responsible for billing and collection operations.

Fitch also revised its assessment of NEDC’s Standalone Credit Profile (SCP) to ‘bb+’ from ‘bb’ following the finalisation of the reorganisation of most distribution and supply companies in Oman. The higher SCP reflects a stronger business risk profile supported by larger scale, a near monopoly in electricity distribution across Oman, a supportive regulatory framework, and lower expected FFO net leverage in the next four years. We assume that the company will shortly refinance the bridge financing, now that the reorganisation is complete, the ratings agency said.

“Fitch rates NEDC using its government-related Entities (GRE) criteria. However, as the SCP of NEDC at present equals the sovereign rating of Oman (BB+/Stable), the GRE application does not affect the IDR,” it added.

Duqm to underpin Oman’s positioning as future renewable superpower

QASIM AL MAASHANI
DUQM, OCT 17

The two-day Duqm Investment Forum concluded at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm on Tuesday under the auspices of Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Vice-President of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) in Oman.

Speaking on the occasion, Al Dheeb highlighted the forum’s success in unlocking the “many possibilities and opportunities” of SEZAD that were laid bare over the two-day event.

“This Duqm Economic Forum has clearly demonstrated how Duqm is leading change in green industry,” said Al Dheeb. “It has provided a window on the rich possibilities of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, its exceptional appeal as an investment destination, and its outstanding competitive offer. A competitive offer defined by a steadfast commitment to sustainable growth, a keen pro-business outlook, and a bold innovative spirit.”

The first session, he said, shed light on how Duqm’s green hydrogen presents heavy industry with a viable solution to decarbonise and propel their manufacturing towards a more sustainable industrial future through discussions that covered renewables supply, sustainability goals, the demand for green materials, and more, the official said.

“The second panel explored exactly why Oman is considered a future renewable superpower and the role Duqm is already playing in positioning Oman as a world-scale producer and exporter of zero-carbon fuels to international markets, creating a green energy advantage for our nation.”

The value proposition offered by Duqm, Al Dheeb noted, is stronger than ever



Picture of the audience (Picture by Hussain al Maqbali)

before, as under the wise leadership and guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Oman is committed to bringing to life the goals and ambitions of Oman Vision 2040.

“The many opportunities of Oman’s vibrant economy are fully expressed here at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm — an investment destination of immense potential, an exciting hub for commerce, industry and innovation, and a gateway for global trade,” he stated.

Deliberations on the first day also focused on the immense renewable energy potential of Duqm, which will support the development of a large-scale green steel industrial cluster, creating a wealth of downstream opportunities in the automotive industry, the manufacturing of solar panels, wind turbines, and more.

Other sessions shone a spotlight on the vast potential of Duqm as a multi-purpose economic, commercial and industrial epicentre, as a major hub for global trade flows and the distribution of new energy. They also highlighted the new roles in the green energy transition for the petrochemicals

industry — just one being the manufacture of many of the parts required for today’s modern renewable energy system. The rich opportunities offered by Duqm are exemplified by the Duqm Refinery project and the Raz Markaz Crude Oil Storage Terminal — the largest oil storage in the Middle East. On the horizon is a new petrochemicals industry that will move forward with its new business models, he said.

HH Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said, Assistant Professor of Economics at the College of Economics and Political Science, Sultan Qaboos University, said the forum reflects the extent of economic development in Duqm, and is considered a gathering of experts, investors, CEOs, and companies investing in the Duqm region.

“We work to provide realistic solutions to existing challenges and enhance cooperation and investment in renewable energy projects, steel iron, green hydrogen, and associated projects, and the petrochemical industry. The Duqm region is



Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, OPАЗ Vice-President, addressing the conclusion of the Duqm Investment Forum. – ONA

considered a point of major focus, and it was noted that there is great economic potential that Duqm can offer to institutions and Oman in general,” he said.

HH Sayyid Adham praised the importance of expanding such forums held in the Duqm region, as they contribute to increasing tourism and commercial activity and enhance follow-up of economic developments in the region.

Eng Khamis al Shamakhi, Transport Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, underscored Duqm’s importance as a logistics hub.

“We are talking about having a strong supply chain and positioning Duqm to be a logistics hub. Therefore, the logistics sector will become the second biggest in terms of GDP contribution. To this end, we are working to make Duqm a gateway to all neighbouring countries, as we have worked to sign a number of agreements with companies to make Duqm a distributor for other countries.”

be’ah targets launch of bidding platform for recyclable wastes

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 17

State-owned Oman Environmental Services Holding Co (be’ah), the entity tasked with managing the solid waste sector in the Sultanate of Oman, says it plans to bring into operation early next year a new platform to regulate all trades involving recyclable commodities.

Upon the platform’s rollout in the first quarter of 2024, be’ah aims to make it mandatory for generators, collectors, transporters and recyclers of all types of recyclable wastes to transact their business via this portal.

According to a high-level official of be’ah, the new ‘bidding platform’ will cover all recyclable wastes, notably Used Cooking Oil (UCO), currently a significant bone of contention between, on the one hand, a pair of biodiesel producers that depend on the waste



oil as feedstock, and on the other, collectors who find ways to export their volumes to overseas markets for better earnings. In doing so, the latter operators circumvent existing curbs that prohibit the export of most types of recyclable wastes.

Speaking at a forum on Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), hosted by the

Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) last week, Kumayl al Lawati, Vice-President – Business Development at be’ah, said the platform will track the generation, collection, transportation and recycling aspects of every recyclable waste commodity in Oman. Consequently, all of the respective participants in the supply chain, starting from the generators all the way to the recyclers, will be required to register on the platform, he said.

“With this platform, we cover the full cycle by tracking the waste right from the generation point, check who is transporting it and where,” said Al Lawati. “So we will not allow a (waste) generator to give their Used Cooking Oil, for example, to a collector who is not registered on this platform.”

The ultimate goal is to “maximise value creation” by commercialising the waste sector — an initiative that also has the potential to ignite the growth of SMEs and

entrepreneurships in the resulting circular economy, he said.

One key segment that is expected to benefit from the bidding platform is the fledgling biodiesel sector. Based on figures shared by be’ah, roughly half of the estimated 94,000 tonnes of cooking oil currently imported into Oman should ideally be captured after use for processing into biodiesel or other sustainable products.

But the collection is barely around 4,000 tonnes per annum, mainly from industrial caterers, major hotels and food industry operators. In comparison, the collection potential of UCO can be as high as 11,000 tonnes per annum, said Al Lawati, citing a 2017 study.

But he acknowledged that the majority of the captured UCO is currently being exported out of the country “in different ways” — a move that be’ah plans to curb.

Vale showcases its vision to pioneer green steel

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 17

Under the auspices of HH. Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, Vale S.A., the world's largest producer of iron ore and nickel and one of the largest logistics operators in Brazil, participated in the Duqm Economic Forum showcasing its ambitious plans to pioneer Oman's green steel future. Rogeiro Nogueira, Vale's Business and Product Development Director highlighted the global player's vision to decarbonise the industry during a panel discussion titled, "Duqm Renewables Powering Industry." Operating a Pelletising Plant and a Distribution Centre in Suhar for over a decade, Vale is now looking to write a new success story in Duqm, setting plans to establish an Integrated Industrial Complex (Mega Hub) in the Special Economic Zone of Duqm. During the session, Vale, alongside its peers from leading global companies, highlighted how Duqm's strategic location, coupled with its world-class infrastructure



Dignitaries at the opening of the Duqm Economic Forum.

make it ideal to establish such major projects. In his speech, Nogueira shared insights on how Vale will be securing the supply of high-grade iron ore and agglomerates. By utilising groundbreaking technology and harnessing Duqm's renewable energy resources to power its

operations, Vale will enable the decarbonisation of manufacturing processes for a more sustainable industrial tomorrow. Rogerio Nogueira, Business and Product Development Director at Vale said: "Vale's partnership with Oman was forged over 15 years ago and

today we are proud to be charting a new course to greener frontiers in Duqm with our Mega Hub plans. We recognise the invaluable potential of Duqm's green hydrogen as a clean energy source that will bring us one step closer to our vision for sustainable mining,

and aid in the global progress towards carbon neutrality by 2050." Nasser al Azri, Chief Executive Officer of Vale in Oman, said: "Since the start of our operations, Vale in Oman has been committed to amplifying its economic, social and environmental impact,

working towards shared goals in line with Oman Vision 2024. Continuing our journey of growth and transformation, our Integrated Industrial Complex in the Special Economic Zone in Duqm will not only put Oman on world's green steel-making map but will further reaffirm the Port of Duqm's global positioning as a hub for green hydrogen and its derivative, all of which will significantly contribute to the development of a green economy for our nation." Vale's participation in the Duqm Economic Forum, highlights its strategic commitment to leading the charge towards a more sustainable and environmentally responsible future in the mining and manufacturing industries. With innovative projects like the Mega Hub on the horizon, the company is not only contributing to the global dialogue on sustainability but is taking steps to implement these practices. The insights shared by Vale's executives at the forum show a future where sustainability and industry work together to help grow Oman's economy, setting a benchmark for the world.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds unveils festive collection

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 17

The last few weeks have witnessed a significant rise in the number of people looking to buy jewellery. The approaching festive season and the fall in gold prices have contributed to the gold & diamond jewellery sector experiencing unparalleled customer influx. Adding to this phenomenon and in light of the upcoming celebration season, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 335 showrooms across 11 countries, has recently unveiled their festive jewellery collection.

Embracing the spirit of the season, the Festive jewellery collection puts forward an exquisite and mesmerising array of new designs in gold, diamond & precious gem jewellery. The special designs have been made available across a wide range of sub-brands such as Mine, Era, Precia, Viraaaz, Ethnix and Divine. Elegant designs crafted in contemporary fashion have also been introduced in the 18K gold category as well. Making this the best ever time to invest



in gold, the brand is also offering gold rate protection offer, wherein customers can block the gold rate by paying just 10 per cent of the amount as advance. "It is the festive season and every festival celebrated by our diverse customer base holds a distinctive cultural significance, which is what we've embraced through our Festive Jewellery collection. It has been carefully curated by considering the plethora of preferences that exist amongst customers looking for the perfect piece of jewellery to enhance their festive attire. The

exquisite designs in gold, diamond and precious gem jewellery ensure that jewellery lovers needn't look any further for their festive adornments", commented Shamlal Ahamed, MD-International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds. "The gold prices are fluctuating and is on a rising trend, considering which we encourage all our customers to enjoy a worry-free festive shopping experience by making a 10 per cent advance payment to block the gold rate, thereby ensuring the lowest gold rate during purchase. We will also be announcing a host of exciting

offers for our customers in the coming days", he continued. In addition to the special festive collection, new designs have also been incorporated into Malabar Gold & Diamonds' existing collections such as Legendz-Men's collection & Bella. Bella collection is one of the brand's most sought-after jewellery line, generating a lot of interest and enquiries from customers looking for 22K gold jewellery and considering the festive period, the collection has been enriched and launched with designs that are specifically crafted to cater to the spirit of the celebration season. By availing the gold rate protection offer from Malabar Gold & Diamonds, customers can block the current low gold rate by paying just a 10 per cent advance, valid till November 12th. If the gold price increases during the booked period, customers can purchase jewellery at the blocked rate and if the price falls further, they can take advantage of the lower rate. The advance option can be availed by visiting any of Malabar Gold & Diamonds outlets or online through their mobile app.

Oman Arab Bank confirms strong position after latest bonds redemption

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 17

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has announced the redemption of the Perpetual Subordinated Bonds (OAB PERPET. SUB OABB) on 14 September 2023 in Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX). The bonds for RO 42.553 million were issued by the Bank on 17 October 2018, at an interest rate of 7.50 per cent pa and listed on the MSX Bonds Market. Sulaiman bin Ali al Hinaï, General Manager — Head of Wholesale Banking Group at Oman Arab Bank, said: "Oman Arab Bank has been working domestically, regionally and internationally on bonds offerings for many years, such as our successful completed the first issuance of AT1 Perpetual bonds of RO 30 million on the 29th of December, 2016, listed in the MSX. Upon the completion of this issuance, the capital position of the bank



SULAIMAN
AL HINAI

strengthened significantly and our ongoing work on such initiatives is continuing to make OAB's position in the market ever stronger." He added: "We will continue to diversify funding sources and strive to attracting foreign direct investment in Oman, these successful redemptions underline our ability to service our obligations and enhance investor confidence." As per the terms and conditions of the OAB PERPET. SUB (OABB) bonds, the bank has issued an irrevocable notice to holders of these bonds on 14 September, 2023 that it will fully redeem all the bonds on the redemption date, 17 October, 2023, by paying the principal amount together with interest accrued for the period.

Kekst CNC successfully advises OQGN on IPO

BUSINESS REPORTER
DUBAI, OCT 17

Kekst CNC, a leading international strategic communications consultancy, is proud to have been able to work with OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) and the OQ Group on the landmark transaction. The firm was appointed to develop a global and regional communications strategy, support the equity story development in close collaboration with banks and legal advisors, media train the executive team, speech writing, analyst / investor meeting preparation, corporate narrative creation for website and IPO

page, and delivering strategic media relations with global media and financial newswires resulting in unprecedented international coverage for the IPO. The success of this project reflects Kekst CNC's core competency of delivering financial communications advisory on complex transactions requiring careful regulated disclosure. The global team, consisting of Kevin Soady, Katherine Fennell, Gregor Riemann, Victoria Douglas, Christopher Deifuss, and Stephan Göttel, worked closely with Kekst CNC partner agency OHI Leo Burnett in Muscat, which supported on

creative content, design, media buying and branding. The team provided a blend of close on-the-ground support in Muscat with remote advisory from London, Frankfurt, and Dubai, providing OQ and OQGN with regional best practice, combined with global know-how and expertise. The OQGN IPO was a complex endeavour, marked by bilingual requirements, and a significant number of stakeholder groups involved. These included leading banks, local / international law firms, and regulatory bodies. In addition, the focus on the retail investment tranche enhanced the requirements to deliver and



Kevin Soady, Partner at Kekst CNC.

roll out an integrated marketing campaign which engaged investors in Oman and across the Gulf. The overall success reflects the well managed

coordination between Kekst CNC and its partners to deliver and execute an integrated global communications strategy. Kevin Soady, Partner at Kekst CNC, said: "We are proud of what we have achieved together with OQGN and OHI Leo Burnett, truly working as one team and delivering success on such an important project. We expect to see increasing demand for this type of support as the Oman Investment Authority continues to bring companies to public markets. The Sultanate of Oman is on a significant transformative journey, with many companies on their route to privatisation – and it has been

a privilege to have been involved in the advisory of OQGN's IPO." Kekst CNC has had a presence in the region since 2005, with over 30 employees based in the Gulf working on mandates across the Sultanate of Oman, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, and Bahrain. Kekst CNC is a leading advisor for financial communications and transactions, it is a corporate member of the Middle East Investor Relations Association, and the firm was recently ranked as the #2 Global M&A advisor in MergerMarket's 2022 league table.



Goldman Sachs says profits down 36% in Q3

NEW YORK: Goldman Sachs' third-quarter profit dropped less than expected as a nascent recovery in dealmaking offset the \$864 million writedown related to its GreenSky fintech business and real estate investments.

The Wall Street giant's net profit slumped 33% to \$2.06 billion, or \$5.47 per share, it said on Tuesday. Analysts on average had expected a profit of \$5.31 per share, according to LSEG data.

Shares of the bank inched up 0.3% at \$315.30 in volatile premarket trading.

"The work we're doing now provides us a much stronger platform for 2024. I also expect a continued recovery in both capital markets and strategic activity if conditions remain conducive," CEO David Solomon said in a statement.

Goldman was an underwriter for high-profile initial public offerings (IPOs) in September,

including SoftBank Group's chip designer Arm Holdings and grocery delivery app Instacart.

The share sales sparked optimism about a recovery in the IPO market, but poor performance after debuts and the lukewarm reception to German sandal maker Birkenstock have raised doubts about how strong the market is.

Goldman's investment banking fees of \$1.55 billion were largely unchanged from last year as debt underwriting activity resumed and the market for initial public offerings picked up.

The US Federal Reserve may raise interest rates one more time this year, while several bank executives have said they expected borrowing costs to stay higher for longer.

CONSUMER BANKING WEAKNESS LINGERS

Goldman's ill-fated foray into



The Goldman Sachs company logo is on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange in New York City, US – Reuters

consumer banking, which has lost \$3 billion over three years, continued to weigh.

The bank took a \$506 million writedown on GreenSky, which facilitates home improvement

loans for consumers and was sold to a consortium of investment firms led by Sixth Street Partners.

It was bought for \$1.7 billion last year although it was valued

at \$2.2 billion when the deal was first announced in 2021. Goldman took a charge of \$504 million on GreenSky in the second quarter.

Real estate investments were another drag on earnings as the bank booked an impairment charge of \$358 million compared with \$485 million in the second quarter.

That weighed on revenue from its asset and wealth management unit, which slipped 20% to \$3.23 billion.

"Going forward, Goldman Sachs will likely face less headwinds from severance costs, CRE impairments and consumer loan exits," said David Fanger, a senior vice president at rating agency Moody's Investors Service.

"But it remains highly geared toward and more reliant on an improved investment banking environment than its peers."

Commercial real estate loans, which have emerged as a risk for banks as interest rates rise, accounted for 14% of the total loan portfolio of Goldman.

Solomon has shifted the firm's focus back to its traditional strengths - investment banking and trading - and aims to grow in asset and wealth management.

Investment banking results have been mixed for peers, with JPMorgan Chase reporting a 6% decline in revenue, while Citigroup said fees jumped 34%. Morgan Stanley is set to report its earnings on Wednesday.

Goldman had a headcount of 45,900 as of September end, up 3% from a quarter ago, but down nearly 7% from the year-ago period. The bank has laid off thousands of employees this year, including a round of cuts in January that was its largest since the 2008 financial crisis.

— Reuters

Sohar International set to commence operations in Riyadh

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, OCT 17

Sohar International, a leading Omani bank, has received a no objection letter from the Saudi Central Bank (SAMA) to commence operations in Riyadh, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This is a significant milestone for the bank, as it marks its expansion into the largest GCC economy. Sohar International's branch in Riyadh will offer a comprehensive range of banking and financial services to corporate and individual customers. The bank plans to leverage its expertise in trade finance, investment banking, and treasury services to support the growth of businesses in Saudi Arabia. Sohar International will also offer a wide range of retail banking products and services to meet the needs of Saudi residents.



The bank's expansion into Saudi Arabia is part of its broader strategy to grow its international business. Sohar International already has a presence in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, and it is planning to expand into other GCC countries in the near future.

The establishment of Sohar International's branch in Riyadh is expected to boost trade and investment between Oman and Saudi Arabia. The two countries have close economic ties, and the expansion of Sohar International's operations will further strengthen these ties.

German investor morale improves in October

FRANKFURT: German investor confidence improved more than expected in October, a key survey showed on Tuesday, thanks to slowing inflation and growing hopes that the European Central Bank is done hiking interest rates.

The ZEW institute's economic expectations index surged by 10.3 points month-on-month to reach minus 1.1 points, the third consecutive monthly rise.

Analysts surveyed by FactSet had expected a smaller increase, pencilling in a reading of minus seven points. A negative reading means most investors are pessimistic.

"It seems that we have passed the lowest point," ZEW president Achim Wambach said in a statement.

Although the assessment of Germany's current economic situation remained bleak, brighter expectations for the months ahead were driven "by the anticipation that inflation rates will decrease further and the fact that now more than three-quarters of respondents anticipate stable short-term interest rates in the eurozone," he said.



A man rows as a regional train crosses the Main river in front of banking district of Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. – AFP

"Negative factors such as the Israel conflict — cited by some respondents as a reason for revising their growth forecasts downward — had only limited impact on the overall more optimistic outlook," he added.

Germany's annual inflation rate fell to 4.5 per cent in September, the lowest level since

the start of the Ukraine war.

The European Central Bank has hiked rates at an unprecedented pace since last year in a bid to cool runaway prices. After 10 straight increases, analysts expect the ECB to hold rates steady at next week's monetary policy meeting.

The German economy,

Europe's largest, has been hit hard by high inflation, elevated energy prices and a manufacturing slowdown in recent months.

The government expects the economy to shrink by 0.4 per cent this year, before rebounding next year with growth of 1.3 per cent as demand picks up again.

— AFP

Chery announces major investment in ME, expands to Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
WUHU, CHINA, OCT 17

Chery, one of China's leading automotive manufacturers, has revealed its ambitious plans to invest heavily in the Middle East market. The company aims to strengthen its presence in the region by establishing a central warehouse and expanding its operations in Oman.

In an interview with Observer, Guibing Zhang, President of Chery International, said these plans reflect Chery's commitment to understanding customer needs and delivering high-quality vehicles that prioritise family, safety and sustainability. "By establishing a central warehouse in the Middle East, we can easily cater to the needs of our customers quickly and efficiently, especially in replacing car spare parts. The central warehouse may

be established in any of the countries in the region." Recognising the growing demand for intelligent vehicles, Chery also plans to make its cars more technologically advanced. By integrating cutting-edge technologies, "Chery aims to enhance the overall driving experience and provide Middle East customers with a seamless blend of convenience and safety features," Zhang added.

The expansion of Chery's operations in the Middle East, including the establishment of a central warehouse and its imminent entry into the Omani market, Xiantian Shen, Chery International General Manager for the Middle East, said these strategies echo the company's dedication to meeting the growing demand for high-quality vehicles in the region. "The cars we will produce for the Middle East are safer, smarter



and more reliable according to the demands and needs of the region. We will also push for the adoption of new energy vehicles

(NEV), promoting the use of clean and efficient transportation solutions." As for the launch in Oman, Shen said, "It can happen

anytime soon, within the next few months." The Sultanate of Oman is the 3rd largest market of Chery cars in the GCC region,

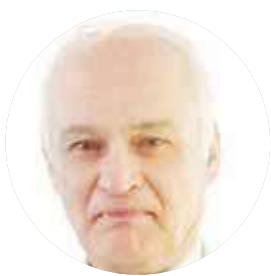
after Saudi Arabia and UAE. Last month, Chery signed a distribution agreement with Oman's renowned corporate Saud Bahwan Group. By establishing a partnership, Chery will not only expand its overseas sales network but also promote localised operations with the help of Saud Bahwan's experience. Chery is set to launch Tiggo series and Arrizo series in Oman.

In addition to its business objectives, Chery is also committed to environmental sustainability. The company acknowledges the importance of reducing pollution and plans to actively contribute to this cause. Chery is pushing for the adoption of new energy vehicles in the Middle East, including hybrid (HEV), plug-in hybrid (PHEV), battery electric vehicle (BEV) and range extender electric vehicle (REEV) setups and the OQ Ice EV cars.

Senators press for journalist’s release from jail

A bipartisan group of US senators has introduced a resolution pressing Russia to release *Wall Street Journal* journalist Evan Gershkovich, who has been in jail for six months after being arrested while on a reporting trip. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre also highlighted last month Gershkovich’s detention, calling the charges against him baseless.

The senate resolution calls on Moscow to “immediately release” Gershkovich and urges the Biden administration to continue to take up his case in all interactions with the Russian government. It is led by senator Jim Risch, the top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Democratic



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

senator Ben Cardin, who is stepping in as temporary chair of the panel. More than two dozen senators have signed on as co-sponsors as well.

The resolution, timed to mark Gershkovich’s six months in jail, also urges Russia to provide “full unfettered and consistent consular access” to Gershkovich while he remains in detention.

Russia’s Federal Security Service detained the 31-year-old US citizen on 29 March while he was on a reporting trip in the city of Yekaterinburg. He is being held on an allegation of espionage that the *Wall Street Journal*, the US government and he vehemently deny.

Russian courts have rejected appeals by Gershkovich’s lawyers and ordered him held in pretrial detention in a Moscow prison

until at least 30 November. Russia has said that it is acting in accordance with its own laws, though haven’t publicly provided evidence to support the allegation. The US government has designated Gershkovich as wrongfully detained.

Western governments, global news organisation, press-freedom advocates and human rights groups around the world have joined the WSJ and the Biden administration in demanding the journalist’s immediate release. The US has said Gershkovich isn’t a spy and has never worked for the government.

“As we mark six months since Evan’s arrest, we applaud another bipartisan effort from congress condemning Russia’s wrongful detention of him,” said Almar Latour, chief

executive of Dow Jones and publisher of the WSJ. He added: “This unified response from lawmakers makes clear that not only is this an egregious assault on press-freedom, it’s also an attack on all of free society.” Risch said: “Evan Gershkovich was jailed for simply doing his job – reporting on Russia’s war on Ukraine. The United States must do everything it can to bring Evan and every wrongfully detained American home. Cardin said: “Evan cannot be left behind, and I will continue to sound the alarm about this grave injustice.” The White House also spotlighted his continued captivity. Jean-Pierre said: “It is clear that Evan is being held for leverage because he is an American. That should bother every single one of us.” She called on Russia to release

Gershkovich, saying efforts to secure his release are ongoing, and “we will not stop until they are home.” The White House said recently that the US is in “very active” discussions aimed at securing Gershkovich’s release but warned that freeing him could be difficult.

Espionage trials are typically conducted in secret, and conviction can carry a prison sentence of 10 to 20 years. It is rare for a court to acquit a defendant.

Dozens of US senators wrote a letter to Gershkovich earlier this year, expressing their “profound anger and concern” over his detention. Congress has also passed resolutions calling for his release. These don’t have the binding force of US law, but underscore congressional support.

Key issues surrounding China’s Belt & Road project

JING XUAN TENG

Beijing’s belt and Road Initiative has been criticised for saddling poor countries with enormous debt and causing environmental harm, while proponents hail it for bringing resources and economic growth to the Global South. As representatives of 130 countries gather for a summit in Beijing to mark a decade of the project, AFP looks at some of the key issues surrounding the massive infrastructure project: The belt and Road is a landmark project in President Xi Jinping’s bid to expand China’s clout overseas, with Beijing saying it has now inked over two trillion dollars in contracts around the world.

Its most high-profile projects have laid down high-speed rail tracks crisscrossing South East Asia and massive transport, energy and infrastructure works through Central Asia.

But the flip side of the massive infrastructure spending is the huge debts incurred by participating countries.

China said this month that BRI participants owe more than \$300 billion to the Export-Import Bank of China.

And BRI nations were hit especially hard during the Covid-19 pandemic as soaring inflation and interest rates hurt their ability to repay debts.

Critics have also pointed to opaque pricing for the projects built by Chinese companies, with countries including Malaysia and Myanmar renegotiating BRI deals to bring down costs.

Residents of BRI nations have also complained that the majority of jobs at infrastructure projects are being done by Chinese workers who send their wages home rather than spend them in local businesses.

China has been forced to hand out billions of dollars in bailout loans to BRI countries in recent years to allow the countries to extend their loans and remain solvent, according to a joint report this year by the World Bank and other institutions.

CHINESE INFLUENCE

The BRI has functioned as a diplomatic vehicle burnishing China’s image as leader of the

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEGAPORTS, PIPELINES, RAILWAYS AND HIGHWAYS COULD RENDER THE PARIS CLIMATE GOALS UNREACHABLE, RESEARCHERS FROM CHINA, THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED KINGDOM WARNED IN 2019.



In this photograph taken on November 13, 2016, Pakistani Navy personnel stand guard near a ship carrying containers at the Gwadar port, some 700 km west of Karachi, during the opening ceremony of a pilot trade programme between Pakistan and China. China’s landmark Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has thousands of infrastructure projects in every corner of the globe, generating a staggering \$2 trillion in contracts while courting international controversy. – AFP

global South, while giving Chinese infrastructure firms a foothold in many emerging economies.

That has fueled concerns, especially among Western nations, that China is seeking to rebuild the global world order to its advantage, while opposition voices in BRI countries have also decried what they see as increasing Chinese influence in local politics.

Meanwhile, Washington has warned that China could use the initiative as a pretext to build up military bases around the world in the name of protecting BRI investments.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

The initiative has also drawn scrutiny for its massive carbon footprint and the environmental degradation caused by massive infrastructure projects.

The development of megaports, pipelines, railways and highways could render the Paris climate goals unreachable, researchers from China, the United States and the United Kingdom warned in 2019.



In this photograph taken on September 29, 2015, a loaded truck travels past signage on Pakistani-China relations by a newly-built tunnel in northern Pakistan’s Gojal Valley. China’s landmark Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has thousands of infrastructure projects in every corner of the globe, generating a staggering \$2 trillion in contracts while courting international controversy. – AFP

Meanwhile, a report by experts at Boston University’s Global Development Policy warned that Chinese-led hard infrastructure projects carry higher risks to indigenous lands and ecosystems due to the country’s “relative newcomer status in global development finance and its early stages of developing environmental and social risk management

due diligence policies and procedures”.

China has sought to allay environmental fears, promising in 2021 not to build new coal power plants abroad, though many previously agreed projects are still in progress.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

China argues that the BRI brings “high-quality development” to

partner countries — insisting that while Western projects offer only short-term aid to the Global South, Beijing provides for long-term opportunities with lasting impact.

The Boston University researchers noted the BRI’s role in providing “additional resources for the Global South” and fostering “significant economic growth”.

“Chinese overseas development finance has been much more focused on industrial and infrastructure lending,” they said.

“Chinese finance is thus more associated with economic growth, addressing infrastructure bottlenecks and increased energy access.” The World Bank has also said that BRI transport projects — including railway lines and highways — “substantially improve trade, foreign investment, and living conditions for citizens in participating countries”.

BRI transport projects, if fully implemented, could raise global income by 0.7 to 2.9 per cent, the World Bank estimates. — AFP

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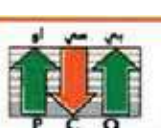
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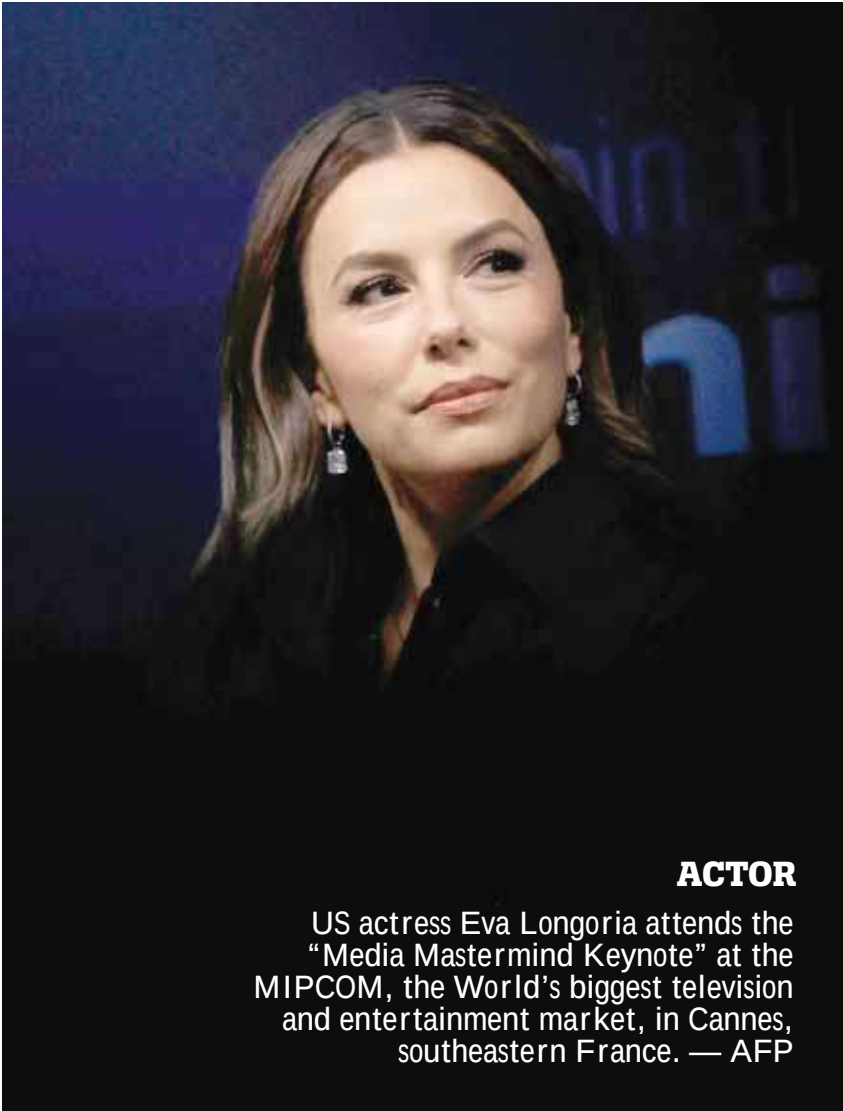
MUSIC

Cuban musician Chucho Valdes performs on stage during a concert at the Starlite Festival in Marbella, Spain. — AFP



CULTURE

A huge poster advertising a film called "Kurz - The Film" about the former Chancellor of Austria Sebastian Kurz covers a scaffolding next to the city highway in Vienna. — AFP



ACTOR

US actress Eva Longoria attends the "Media Mastermind Keynote" at the MIPCOM, the World's biggest television and entertainment market, in Cannes, southeastern France. — AFP



ART

Colombian artist Edgar Alvarez shows one of his plasticine figurines during an interview at his studio in Bogota. — AFP



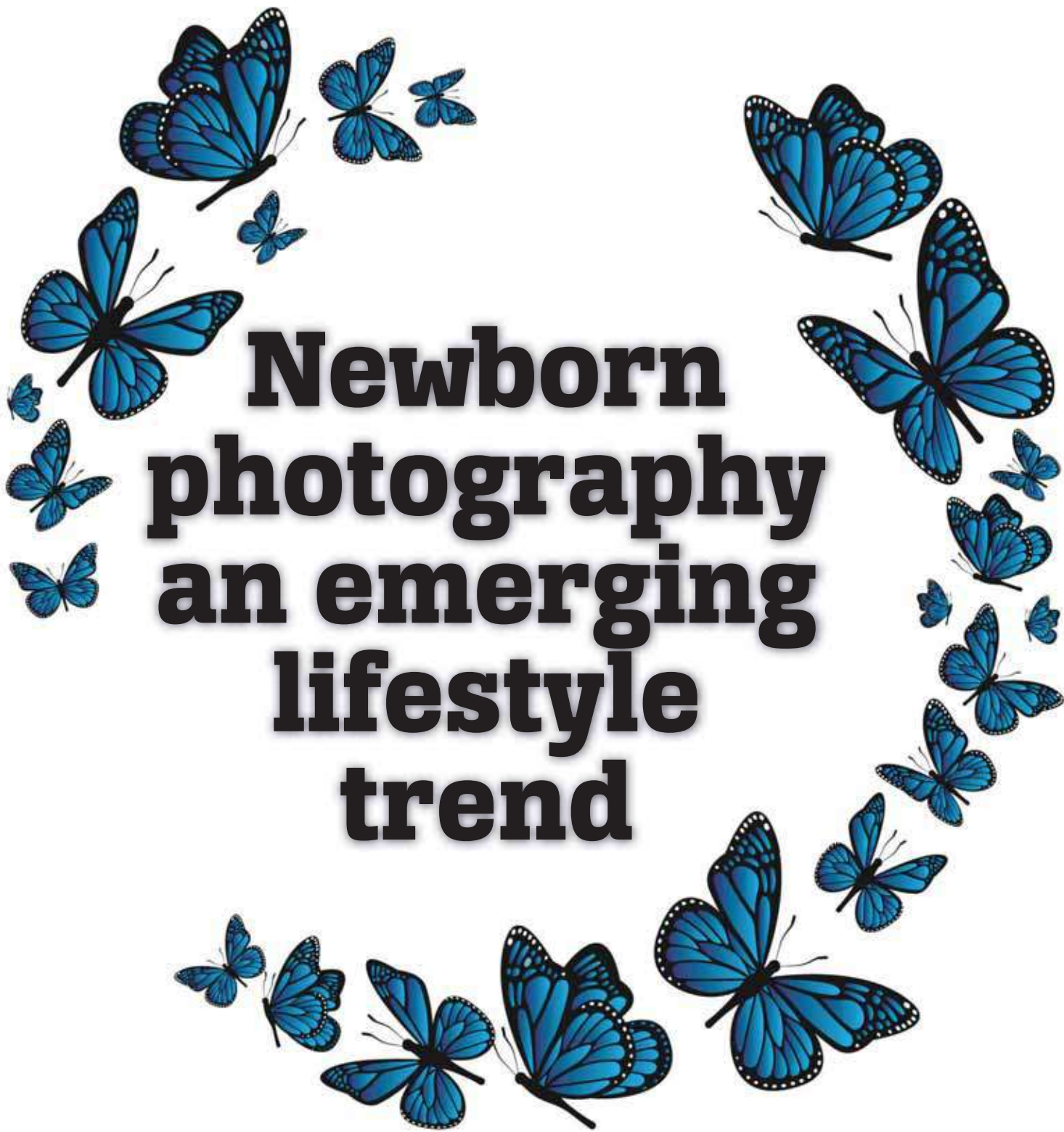
LIFESTYLE

A woman jogs at the Danube canal on the sunny autumn day in Vienna, Austria. — AFP

art & life

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Newborn photography an emerging lifestyle trend

Today i am

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Months Weeks

BY ASEELAH ALKUymi

Newborn photography is an emerging lifestyle trend in Oman, and it offers an enchanting way to commemorate the arrival of your little one. However, it is a unique art that presents interesting challenges and rewards, mainly because newborns have unpredictable moods, unlike adults. One of the essential skills for a newborn photographer is mastering the camera and its settings. This expertise is crucial to ensure that newborns feel secure and comfortable during their photoshoot sessions. It is all about creating an environment that allows them to be at ease. For those interested in diving into this world, there are various ways to acquire knowledge and skills. Self-learning through resources like YouTube is an accessible and cost-effective



option, while dedicated enthusiasts or aspiring professionals can opt for workshops and courses that provide hands-on training. According to seasoned experts, including mothers, doctors, nurses, and nannies who are well-versed in handling newborns, the ideal time for a photoshoot is around two weeks

of age. At this stage, babies are often more amenable to posing while in a sleepy, squishy state. The results are typically heartwarming and endearing. The duration of a newborn photoshoot session can vary, usually lasting around two hours. However, this timing depends on the baby's age, reactions, and mood at the time, as



well as the specific terms outlined in the photographer's contract. Sometimes, sessions might need to be postponed if the baby is unwell or uncooperative. Before each session, photographers typically provide a set of instructions and terms to ensure a smooth process and adherence to the agreed sched-

ule. The post-shoot phase involves meticulous editing and the printing of photographs, ultimately delivering the finished images to the parents. Parents hold these photographs close to their hearts as cherished memories of their little ones. It's a way to freeze those fleeting moments in time, ensuring they are never forgot-

ten. In 2021, after participating in multiple workshops and gaining practical experience through free photoshoot sessions, I established True Love Studio with the unwavering support of my family, friends, and husband. Our studio is equipped with a wide array of props, backdrops, wraps, and adorable accessories to create those charming and timeless newborn portraits. Welcoming a newborn is an experience beyond words. The joy, wonder, and pure emotion that comes with it is unforgettable. These newborn photographs are not just pictures but family heirlooms that capture the most cherished milestones of your growing family. They create a legacy, preserving memories that you will treasure for generations. When you think of newborn photography, think of posed newborn photoshoots that bring these precious moments to life.



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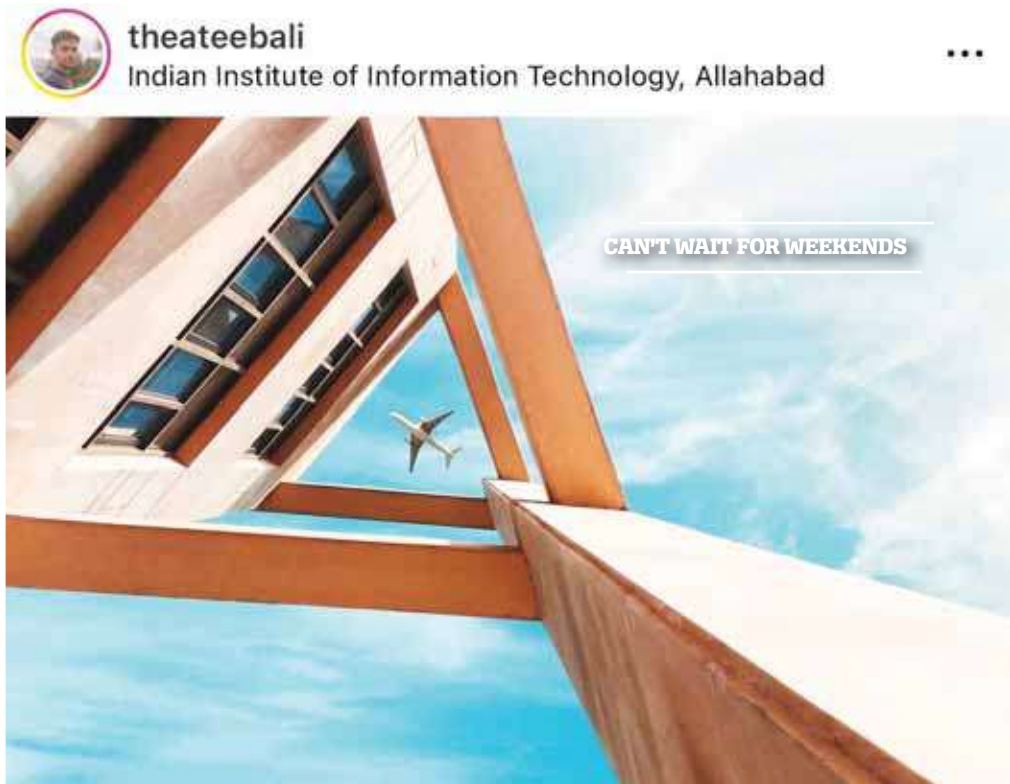
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Babylon Berlin: antiquities museum shuts for 14-year face-lift

ONE OF BERLIN'S TOP tourist attractions, the Pergamon Museum and its world-class collection of antiquities, will close this month for a top-to-bottom restoration not due to be completed before 2037.

The institution on the German capital's UNESCO-listed Museum Island houses treasures including the Great Altar of Pergamon, built in the second century BC, the 2,600-year-old Ishtar Gate of Babylon and a vast millennium-spanning collection of Islamic art.

The museum, which opened in 1930 and was named for the Ancient Greek masterpiece, attracts more than one million visitors a year when all its exhibits are accessible.

The impending 14-year closure beginning on October 23 has prompted a rush by Berliners and tourists alike to catch one last glimpse.

Gudrun von Wiese, who grew up on the western side of the Berlin Wall, said she began crossing into the Communist east when it became possible in the 1970s just to see the Pergamon Museum.

"I've always loved this place. Seeing it for the first time was an absolute epiphany," the 75-year-old retired teacher said, standing in the shadow of the ancient Roman Market Gate of Miletus.

"We were very lucky to get some of the last tickets this week. At my age, who knows if I'll be

alive for the reopening."

- 'IN BAD SHAPE' -

German archaeologists discovered the ruins of the Pergamon Altar between 1878 and 1886 and sent them back to Berlin based on an agreement between the German government and the Ottoman Empire.

Its reconstruction took until 1902.

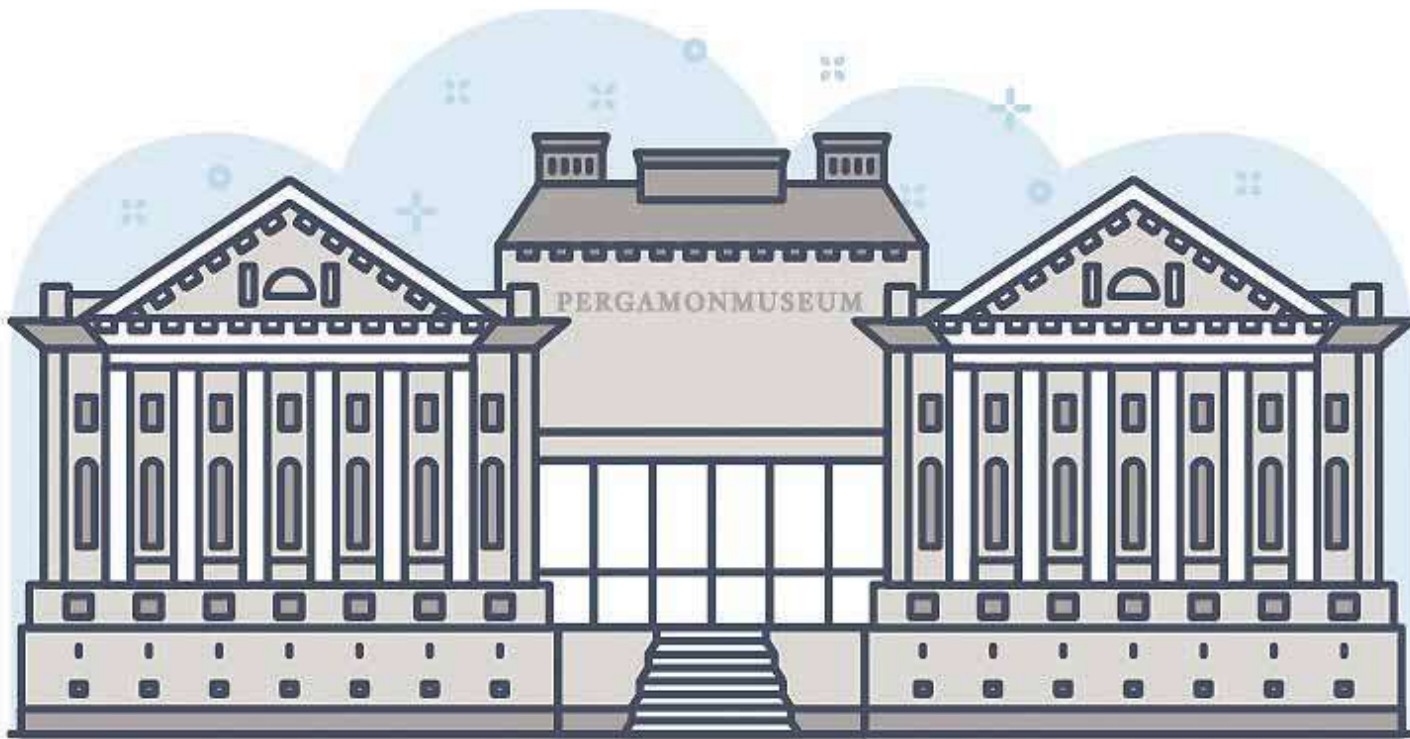
The temple-like museum building was erected to showcase the ornate altar and the Ishtar Gate, with the spectacular lion reliefs of its Processional Way, to the fullest dramatic effect.

However the strains of time and the sheer weight of the collections, resting on a porous Ice Age riverbed, have caused the museum to crumble.

Stabilising and reinforcing the more than century-old underground concrete foundations are a Herculean task, helping to explain the extraordinary duration and estimated 1.5-billion-euro (\$1.6-billion) cost of the renovation.

Wear and tear across the decades, combined with lasting World War II damage, have led to streaming leaks when it rains, said Barbara Helwing, director of the Ancient Near East Museum housed in the building.

She said the repairs were "urgently necessary" to protect the precious collections and



Pergamon Museum

ensure visitors' safety.

"The building is in really bad shape and it's sinking, which is why we're not only sad that it's closing for so long," she said.

Critics however have attacked the eye-watering cost of the makeover and the fact that, apart from a few solar panels, its plans do not include a "green" overhaul.

"The completely renovated Pergamon Museum, when it opens in 2037, will in climate technology and energy terms be a building from the fossil-fuelled past," architecture critic Nikolaus Bernau wrote in weekly Die Zeit.

RESTITUTION DEMANDS

Culture experts also say with advances in the restitution debate and more Western coun-

tries acknowledging the rightful owners abroad of their collections, claims for the Pergamon holdings could grow.

Zeynep Boz, an archaeologist at the Turkish culture ministry, told the daily Tagesspiegel last month that she questioned the legality of the German ownership claims and believed the altar itself should return to the "sunlight of Pergamon" in northwestern Turkey.

Helwing admitted the issue was "difficult" and said research on the provenance of the museum's collections would continue during the renovation.

The north wing was already closed for renovations in 2012 as part of a Museum Island "master plan" to make its five buildings fit

for the 21st century and interconnected with an underground "archaeological promenade".

The altar disappeared behind scaffolding in 2014. It will be the first to reopen — in 2027, if all goes according to plan.

Thousands of artefacts — sculptures, urns, carpets and tablets — must now be removed from their display cases, wrapped and taken to warehouses while a select few will be lent to other institutions, a process that alone will take a year, according to Helwing.

The biggest monuments, such as the Ishtar Gate, will stay put as the workers move in, protected by cladding until their grand reopening. — AFP

ANTIQUITIES

Auction features items from 'The Wizard of Oz,' Jackie Kennedy, British royals

A TROVE OF ARTEFACTS is hitting the auction block, including music scores from the beloved classic "The Wizard of Oz," a letter by former first lady Jackie Kennedy, and a 1980 holiday card issued by the British royal family and signed by the Queen Mother.

Two printed music scores from the film, "Over the Rainbow" and "If I Only Had a Brain," are being put up by the family of actor Ray Bolger, who portrayed the Scarecrow in the fictional land of Oz. They're expected to sell for \$12,000-\$15,000 and \$6,000-\$8,000 respectively.

"They're very rare," said David



Lowenherz, the owner of Lion Heart Autographs, the collectors running this auction. "They are virtually unheard of in any kind of private collection," he said of the printed scores that were used during the production of the 1939 classic.

The auction, the largest Lion Heart Autographs has held and due to run until Nov. 1, includes other memorabilia.

A holiday card issued by the royal family in 1980 and signed by the Queen Mother shows her standing beside her daughters, Queen Elizabeth II and Princess

Margaret.

Another item is a 1987 letter by Jackie Kennedy, wife of former President John F. Kennedy, on plans for Pennsylvania Avenue and signed, "affectionately, Jackie."

Other interesting items in their collection include an 1845 letter by Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi accusing English soprano Anna Bishop of bribing the Neapolitan Press, a letter by Impressionist painter Claude Monet to an art dealer, and a signed document ahead of Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Russia in 1812.

— REUTERS

FASHION

Moschino names Davide Renne new creative director

Italian luxury label Moschino on Monday named Davide Renne its new creative director, a Tuscan-born designer who has two decades of experience designing women's collections at Gucci.

The appointment comes seven months after the departure of American designer Jeremy Scott, the pop-art bad boy of fashion, famed for his bold, colourful and witty collections.

Renne, who rose to become head designer of womenswear during his

time at Gucci, will oversee women's and men's collections and accessories for Moschino, parent company Aeffe said.

The 46-year-old will take up the role from November 1 and his debut collection will be for Autumn/Winter 24-25, presented at Milan Fashion Week in February.

Renne said Franco Moschino, the Italian designer who founded the brand in 1983 in Milan, used to call his design studio "la sala giochi" ("the playroom").

"This resonates deeply



with me," Renne said in a statement.

"What fashion, Italian fashion especially, and the House of Moschino most of all, can achieve with its enormous power should be accomplished with a sense of play, of joy.

"A sense of discovery, and experimentation," he added. — AFP



SCIENCES

Scientists propose sweeping new law of nature, expanding on evolution

WHEN BRITISH naturalist Charles Darwin sketched out his theory of evolution in the 1859 book "On the Origin of Species" - proposing that biological species change over time through the acquisition of traits that favour survival and reproduction - it provoked a revolution in scientific thought.

Now 164 years later, nine scientists and philosophers on Monday proposed a new law of nature that includes the biological evolution described by Darwin as a vibrant example of a much broader phenomenon, one that appears at the level of atoms, minerals, planetary atmospheres, planets, stars and more.

It holds that complex natural systems evolve to states of greater patterning, diversity and complexity.

"We see evolution as a universal process that applies to numerous systems, both living and non-living, that increase in diversity and patterning through time," said Carnegie Institution for Science mineralogist and astrobiologist Robert Hazen, a co-author of the scientific paper describing the law in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Titled the "law of increasing functional information," it holds that evolving systems, biological and non-biological, always form from numerous interacting building blocks like atoms or cells, and that processes exist - such as cellular mutation - that generate many different configurations. Evolution occurs, it holds, when these various configurations are subject to selection for useful functions.

"We have well-documented laws that describe such everyday phenomena as forces, motions,



gravity, electricity and magnetism and energy," Hazen said. "But these laws do not, individually or collectively, describe or explain why the universe keeps getting more diverse and complex at scales of atoms, molecules, minerals and more."

In stars, for instance, just two elements - hydrogen and helium - were the main ingredients in the first stellar generation following the Big Bang about 13.8 billion years ago that initiated the universe.

That first generation of stars, in the thermonuclear fusion caldrons at their cores, forged about 20 heavier elements such as carbon, nitrogen and oxygen that were blasted into space when they exploded at the end of their life cycles. The subsequent generation of stars that formed from the remnants of the prior generation then similarly forged almost 100 more elements.

On Earth, living organisms acquired greater complexity including the pivotal moment when mul-

ticellular life originated.

"Imagine a system of atoms or molecules that can exist in countless trillions of different arrangements or configurations," Hazen said. "Only a small fraction of all possible configurations will 'work' - that is, they will have some useful degree of function. So, nature just prefers those functional configurations."

Hazen added that "function" might mean that a collection of atoms makes a stable mineral crystal that can persist, or that a star maintains its dynamic structure, or that "a life form learns a new 'trick' that allows it to compete better than its neighbours," Hazen added.

The authors proposed three universal concepts of selection: the basic ability to endure; the enduring nature of active processes that may enable evolution; and the emergence of novel characteristics as an adaptation to an environment.

Some biological examples of this "novelty generation" include organisms

developing the ability to swim, walk, fly and think. Our species emerged after the human evolutionary lineage diverged from the chimpanzee lineage and acquired an array of traits including upright walking and increased brain size.

"I think this paper is important because it describes a view of the cosmos rooted in function," said Carnegie Institution astrobiologist and planetary scientist Michael Wong, the paper's lead author.

"The significance of formulating such a law is that it provides a new perspective on why the diverse systems that make up the cosmos evolve the way they do, and may allow predictions about how unfamiliar systems - like the organic chemistry on Saturn's moon Titan - develop over time," added co-author Jonathan Lunine, chair of Cornell University's astronomy department, referencing a world being scrutinised for possible extraterrestrial life. — **REUTERS**

Dutch art sleuth recovers six historic paintings



A Dutch art detective dubbed the "Indiana Jones of the Art World" has recovered another six paintings, including a portrait of William of Orange and the first depiction of a seventh-century king.

Art sleuth Arthur Brand made headlines around the world last month when he recovered a stolen Van Gogh stuffed in an Ikea bag, and he believes that widely publicised success is leading to more discoveries.

Thieves made off with the latest six paintings from the town hall of Medemblik, in the north of the country, last month.

While the monetary value of the haul is not huge — around 100,000 euros (\$105,000) — the paintings are considered of great historical significance, including the earliest known portrait of Radbod, king of the Frisians from 680AD.

Brand was sitting at home on Friday night watching football when the doorbell rang and a man in a van asked him for help to unload some merchandise.

"I asked him, 'what are we going to unload?'. He said with a smile, 'well, the paintings of Medemblik,'" Brand recounted.

After the initial burglary in September, Brand had been widely quoted in the Dutch press as saying the thieves should have stolen six bikes, as these would be easier to resell.

Those comments, plus the publicity surrounding the Van Gogh recovery, probably led the thieves to simply hand the paintings back, explained Brand.

"In some cases, they burn them, just to get rid of the evidence because they find out they cannot sell them," he said.

"So I'm very thankful that they decided to do the right thing. Stealing is wrong, but if you return it, at least you do something right," he added.

Now Brand is hoping that the momentum from the Van Gogh will lead to another prize recovery — a masterpiece by Frans Hals called "Two Laughing Boys".

He also has his eye on recovering work from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, where paintings worth an estimated \$500 million from the likes of Vermeer, Manet, and Rembrandt were stolen in 1990.

The authorities in Medemblik had offered a reward of 10,000 euros for the safe return of the paintings but this has gone unclaimed.

Brand said he would not be collecting the cash himself.

"I told them to give me a good book voucher," he quipped. — **AFP**