

HM THANKED BY EMIR OF QATAR

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, in reply to His Majesty the Sultan's condolences cables on the death of Shaikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Abdullah bin Jassim al Thani. In his cable, Shaikh Tamim expressed his appreciation for His Majesty the Sultan's heartfelt sentiments. — ONA



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FIFA WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2023

SPAIN DEFEAT ENGLAND IN FINAL OF WOMEN'S WORLD CUP



P11

SAYING GOODBYE TO THE AL WALED OF DMEITHA



P13

FRESH BID TO TAP WADI DAYQAH'S RESOURCES FOR POTABLE WATER USE



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO KING OF MOROCCO

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Mohammed VI of the Kingdom of Morocco on his birthday anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to King Mohammed VI. His Majesty also prayed to Almighty Allah for the return of this and similar occasions on King Mohammed VI at a time the people of Morocco have achieved aspirations of further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO HUNGARY PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Katalin Novák of the Republic of Hungary on her country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Katalin Novák and the people of Hungary. — ONA

QUITO

ECUADOR VOTES IN TENSE ELECTION



Ecuadorans headed to the polls on Sunday in a presidential election tarnished by the murder of a top candidate, which cast a spotlight on the violence ravaging a once-peaceful nation caught up in the illicit global drug trade. Polls opened at 7:00 am local and voting was to go on until 5:00 pm as Ecuadorans picked a successor to Guillermo Lasso, who called a snap election to avoid an impeachment trial just two years after his election. Soldiers have been deployed across the country to secure the vote. **SEE P6**

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Sohar International completes merger with HSBC Oman

**MUSCAT:** In a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), Sohar International Bank SAOG and HSBC Bank Oman SAOG announced on Sunday the successful completion of their merger, effective August 17, 2023. The merger was first announced

on June 20, 2023, and has been completed following the approval of shareholders of both banks, as well as the relevant regulatory authorities. As part of the merger, all rights, obligations, assets (including contracts and employees), and

liabilities of HSBC Oman have been legally transferred to Sohar International as a going concern. HSBC Oman has been delisted from the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) and its commercial registration has been revoked. All shares of HSBC Oman have

been cancelled. The merger creates a stronger and more diversified banking group in the Sultanate of Oman, with Sohar International now able to offer a wider range of products and services to its customers, and be better positioned to support the

economic development of Oman. At a bell-ringing ceremony hosted by MSX to mark the start of trading in shares of the merged entity, top officials came together at the stock market to celebrate the milestone. **DETAILS ON P13**



STUNNING NATURE!

An aerial shot of Al Ein village in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar showing beautiful nature and stunning scenes. PHOTO BY YAHYA AL QASMI

Ukraine to get F-16 fighter jets

**AMSTERDAM:** Both Denmark and the Netherlands have decided to supply Ukraine with F-16 fighter jets, the Danish Defence Ministry said on Sunday. Zelensky said he had come to an agreement with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte for Ukraine to receive 42 state-of-the-art US-made F-16s to help fend off Russia's war. "42 jets. And this is just the beginning," wrote the



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

Ukrainian leader on the platform X, formerly Twitter, during his visit to the Netherlands. **SEE ALSO P6**

OMAN LAUNCHES ADVANCED FISHING VESSEL 'ACILA'

State-of-the-art vessel to boost quality fishing

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

Marking a major milestone in the sustainable fishing practices in the Sultanate of Oman, Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), launched its latest fishing vessel, the 'Acila' under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, at the Sultan Qaboos Port, on Sunday. The state-of-the-art fishing vessel, built to international standards and sailing under the flag of Oman, will be a remarkable chapter in the economic growth of Oman's fisheries sector, according to the FDO representatives. FDO is strategically partnered in these developments by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, in promoting sustainable exploitation of Oman's precious fisheries resources for the benefit of future generations in the country, extending the maritime heritage of Oman's fishermen and fisherfolk. "The 'Acila' embodies our commitment to sustainable fishing practices, and showcases our dedication to maintaining the highest quality standards in the industry," stated the FDO representative. "With this investment, we reinforce Oman's position as an



**'Acila' embodies our commitment to sustainable fishing practices, and showcases our dedication to maintaining high standards**

FDO OFFICIAL

attractive destination for local and international investors seeking growth opportunities in the aquaculture sector." The 'Acila' is a cutting-edge fishing vessel constructed in 2023

and is the 792nd creation of the renowned Zamakona Shipyard in Pasaia, Spain, commissioned by Omani state-owned company, Al Wusta Fisheries Industries. Measuring an impressive 85 metres in length, the 'Acila' capacity is 1,800 cubic meters, making it ideal for operations in the Indian Ocean, where it will target various tuna species. The vessel's propulsion system is powered by 2x Guascor Energy SF480TA-SG engines, each providing 1250 kVA, and a Guascor Energy SF360-SP engine with a 360 6:1 reduction gearbox, delivering 1120 HP for auxiliary purposes. These engines, known for their efficiency and reliability, minimise fuel consumption even in the harshest conditions. **TURN TO P2**

One giant step in lunar mission as moon race heats up

**PARIS:** The crash landing on the Moon of Russia's Luna-25 probe is the latest twist in an international push to return to the Earth's natural satellite that has drawn in the world's top powers and new players. Technology, science and politics are all essential factors in the Moon race. The launch of Luna-25 on

August 11 was the first such Russian mission in almost 50 years and marked the beginning of Moscow's new lunar project. On August 16 the lander was successfully placed in the Moon's orbit but on Sunday, space agency Roscosmos announced it had "ceased to exist following a collision with the Moon's surface". Russian President Vladimir



Putin has been working to strengthen space cooperation with China after ties with the West broke down following the start of Moscow's war in Ukraine in 2022. China is pursuing plans to send a crewed mission to the Moon by 2030 and build a base there. The world's second-largest economy has invested billions of dollars in its military-run space

programme in a push to catch up with the United States and Russia. China was the third country to place humans in orbit in 2003 and its Tiangong rocket is the crown jewel of its space programme. India's latest, Chandrayaan-3, entered the Moon's orbit earlier in August. It will carry out India's second attempted lunar landing later this month. — AFP



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# Royal Office Minister receives Ambassadors

**MUSCAT:** Gen. Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received Qais Saad Al Amri, Ambassador of Iraq to Oman, in his office on Sunday.

Al Numani underscored the bilateral relations between Oman and Iraq. During the meeting, the sides reviewed areas of mutual cooperation and means of enhancing them. They also exchanged views on various matters of common concern. Al Numani also received Ildris Maya, Ambassador of Syria to Oman. Al Numani highlighted the march of relations between Oman and Syria.

During the meeting, the two officials discussed several matters of mutual interest and means of promoting them.

— ONA

## RAO’s musical band wins big in World Music Contest

**GLASGOW:** The Royal Army of Oman’s music band achieved first place in the infantry and discipline competition and came second in the music playing competition in the finals of the World Music Contest being held in Glasgow, Scotland.

More than 180 musical bands from all around the world are taking part in the competition.

Throughout the competition, RAO’s musical band won several advanced places.

In the other contest which was held in the town of Bridge of Allan, the RAO’s musical band won the first place in the infantry and discipline competition that saw the participation of 32 musical bands from all over the world.

In the third contest which was held in the town of North Berwick, the RAO’s musical band achieved the second place in the music playing contest from among 37 musical bands.

In the fourth competition which was held in Perth, the RAO’s musical band achieved second place in the music playing competition among 50 musical groups from all around the world. Sergeant Major Mohammed bin Khamis al Amri achieved first place in the stick holders category.

In the fifth and final competition held in Glasgow, the RAO’s musical band was able to win first place in the infantry and discipline competition and second place in music playing. — ONA



## New vessel set to boost quality fishing

**FROM PAGE 1**

With a gross tonnage of 2,480t and a DWT of 1,900t, the vessel is designed to operate efficiently, maximising catch potential while minimising environmental impact. This aligns perfectly with FDO’s core values, focusing on responsible use of renewable resources such as biomass and small pelagic fish, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the fishing industry in Oman.

The Sultanate of Oman has a long maritime history as a trading nation between Eastern Africa, the Indian sub-continent and the Arabian Gulf states. Oman’s 3,165 km coastline gives Omani fishermen access to both the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea and a wide range of both demersal and pelagic fish species.

In 2017 the fishermen of Oman landed 347,000 tonnes of fish which included sardines, tuna species, grouper, kingfish, abalone, and shrimps. Oman is the only net exporter of fish products in the GCC and has ready access to the growing GCC markets, notably the UAE and Saudi Arabia, as well as worldwide markets for quality seafood products.

# Wadi Al Hoqain gets a face lift with gazebos, walkways

**YAHYA AL SALMANI**  
MUSCAT, AUG 20

Wadi Al Hoqain in the Wilayat of Rustaq, which is home to gentle, bubbling streams and gushing torrents, is ready to welcome visitors with a new look. The area overlooking the waterfall now got a face lift featuring gazebos with seats, artificial grass and interlock walkways to make it an ideal picnic spot for families. Toilets and changing rooms have also been constructed.

New sign boards in Arabic and English have also been installed at the entrances, warning against swimming in deep waters to avoid drowning accidents. Another sign board advises visitors not to enter residential areas to avoid disturbing the privacy of the residents.

The waterflow is thin in summer but children and youths splash in the water to beat the heat. If you are driving from the capital, then you need to take a left



turn at Al Suwaiq roundabout to Al Rustaq City, passing by Rustaq Fort, Wadi Bani Awf, and Qasra Museum before reaching this best kept secret of Al Batinah South Governorate. The place draws more tourists during the rains when the waterfalls are in full glory.

The people of this village depend on rains to irrigate their crops. The water levels in artesian wells and the aflaj rise during rains.

The wadi is an ideal location for hiking, swimming, and tasting various types of local fruits. Tourists can also see some archaeological sites such as cemeteries and graves dating back thousands of years.

The fertile soil of this village produces dates, lemons, garlic, onions, maize and wheat. Farmers sell them in central and local markets “This is one of the best tourist sites that we go to during holidays. We have visited this site



## Muscat Airport runway to open in October

**SUHAIL AL NAHDI**  
MUSCAT, AUG 20

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has said that the rehabilitation works of the southern runway and taxiways at Muscat International Airport are nearing completion. The runway is scheduled to open in October this year.

The authority said in an exclusive statement that the asphalt works of the runway had been completed, and runway lighting is being installed before the final checks.

CAA said that the southern runway, which is one of the two runways at Muscat International Airport, was inaugurated in 1973 to coincide with the inauguration of the Seeb International Airport. This primary runway was used to transport domestic and international flights until the opening of the northern runway in mid-December 2014, as part of the construction package of the new passenger building, which was completed in March 2018.

CAA said that the southern runway was stopped for operations for rehabilitation works that included renovation and lengthening of the runway by 500 metres, and nine exit and entry lanes were added for aircraft, including four fast lanes, to enhance the capabilities of Muscat International Airport, which will allow receiving larger aircraft, including the A380.

There will also be faster take-off and entry of aircraft due to the increase in exit and entry corridors. It is hoped that the opening of the southern runway at Muscat International Airport will contribute to reducing the noise caused by aircraft arriving and departing to and from the airport, especially for the residents of the southern Mawaleh area, CAA said.

many times. With new facilities including toilets, we feel satisfied and comfortable. There are places to sit and relax. We thank authorities for developing this place,” some Omani visitors said.



# Muttrah, Nizwa forts most popular among tourists

VINOD NAIR  
@vinot\_nair

Muttrah and Nizwa forts are the most popular attractions among tourists in the country.

In 2022, Muttrah Fort received 37,700 visitors compared to 8,112 in 2021 and 14,781 in 2020, while Nizwa Fort is the most popular attraction in the country, with 193,194 visitors in 2022, compared to 55,636 in 2021 and 44,047 in 2020.

Among other statistics, the best time to visit Oman is between November and April when the temperatures are warm, while December and January are among the coolest months. Accordingly, museums, forts, and castles in the Sultanate of Oman attract visitors generally between August and March when temperatures are relatively moderate. According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the months of August (31,585), October (17,658), November (26,225), and December (26,588) saw

the most government museum visitors, while castles and forts received 381,233 visitors in 2022, compared to 111,211 in 2021 and 133,922 in 2020.

The month of December received the most visitors to the castle and forts (80,647) compared to 61,331 in November, 44,098 in March, 37,366 in February, and 26,632 in Nizwa Fort is an example of Omani architectural mastery, with its construction dating back to the middle of the 17th century, the unique cylindrical construction of this fort distinguishes the stronghold from others.

Nizwa is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in Oman, intermittently serving as its capital from the middle of the eighth to the middle of the 12th century. This city links the Sultanate of Oman with Muscat and the Dhofar Governorate. Managed by Omran, the daily operations of Nizwa Fort are handled by Bawader International, an Omani company.



Muttrah Fort is a historic fort in Wilayat of Muttrah in the Governorate of Muscat, overlooking the Port Sultan Qaboos, which would have made

it quite an impregnable position to defend Muttrah from attacks while also allowing observation of the surrounding areas.

The fort is thought to have

been built originally in 1507AD, only to be modified and upgraded with towers and stronger walls by the Portuguese during their occupation of Oman in the 1560s.

Currently, a private enterprise manages the Muttrah Fort following an agreement signed with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

## ■ ENDURANCE HORSE RACE HELD IN SALALAH



The 100-kilometre endurance race, Hahot Dhofar, was held at Khor Al Dahariz in the Wilayat of Salalah on Saturday. 27 riders from across Oman participated in the race. The winners will be honoured during a ceremony that will be held on Monday at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah on Monday.

## Tender floated for Samayil-Izki road

SUHAIL AL NAHDI  
MUSCAT, AUG 20

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology floated a tender for the implementation of Afri mountain road which links the wilayats of Samayil and Izki and the design and construction of a road in Al Saqari village in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The tender involves the design and construction of a supplement to an existing road from the village of Al Buri to the village of Al Uyaynah in the Wilayat of Samayil with a length of about 3.6 km in addition to the design and construction of a road in the village of Al Saqari in Wadi Saqat in the Wilayat of Samayil with a length of 3 km.

The floating of a tender

for the construction of the mountain road follows a work hiatus after the completion of the road on both sides down the mountain with the mountain pass remaining.

The Afri mountain road services dozens of villages on Wadi Mahram in the Wilayat of Samayil and will make it easy for traffic between the villages and the centre of the wilayat.

## UNESCO heritage sites in Dhofar register strong rise in tourist traffic

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
SALALAH, AUG 20

Three UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Dhofar Governorate have received over 53,000 visitors so far this year, with arrivals seeing a steady uptick during the current khareef season.

The most popular of these is Al Baleed Archaeological Park, which pulled in a total of 30,181 visitors. The site is an ancient city that was once a major centre for the frankincense trade.

The second big attraction is Khor Rori, also known as the Samharam Archaeological Park, with 15,820 visitors. The park is home to a number of ancient tombs and shrines.

In third place is the desert site of Ubar, located at the entrance to the Empty Quarter. The location, which has attracted 7,326 visitors so far, is of interest to archaeologists due to its potential to shed light on the early history of the region.

In comparison, the three sites in questions drew around 38,000 visitors over the corresponding period of 2022, underscoring the growing popularity of Oman as a



tourist destination.

All three attractions are important cultural and historical assets for Dhofar Governorate. They provide insights into the region's rich history and heritage, and they help to promote tourism in the region.

The increase in tourism to the Frankincense Land World Heritage sites is a positive development for the local economy. The sites provide jobs

for local people and help to promote the local culture and heritage.

In particular, the Frankincense Land World Heritage site at Al Baleed is a must-see for any visitor to Oman. The sites offer a glimpse into the region's rich history and culture, and they provide a unique opportunity to learn about the ancient civilisations that once thrived in this part of the world.

# Muscat International Film Festival from March 3

KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate of Oman will host international film festivals in the coming months. Many renowned stars are expected to grace the occasion.

Besides Muscat International Film Festival (MIFF), which is scheduled to begin on March 3, 2024, two local and one regional film festival called Cinemana Arab Film Fest (CAFF) will light up the theatres in Oman.

“We are hosting local film festivals -- Al Dakhiliyah Film Fest and Al Batinah Film Fest -- in the coming months, followed by the most sought-after MIFF and CAFF,” said Humaid al Amri, President of the Oman Film Society. Al Dakhiliyah Film Fest



Mohammed al Kindi, Qasim al Sulaimi, Humaid al Amri, and Dr Monia Heijaiej

is scheduled from September 12 to 15, where short films, documentaries and graphic films will be screened.

“What makes the Al Dakhiliyah Film Fest different is that it is a highly environment-friendly event where we will have a green

carpet welcome instead of the traditional red carpet greeting, and all the films are shown in daylight in open theatres, thus making it an eco-friendly film fest,” said Mohammed al Kindi, Chief Coordinator of the event.

He said there would be

seminars and workshops attended by Arab film personalities and moderated by Dr Monia Heijaiej, Professor of Literature and Film Studies at SQU.

Al Batinah Intl Film Fest, part of Omani regional film festivals, will be held from November 12 to 15 in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Al Batinah South.

The second edition of the annual film fest, organised under the slogan ‘Human Relationship with Earth’, aims to highlight the strong ties between Omani citizens and the environment.

“We are focusing on the youth creativity in the field of the film industry and to provide an opportunity to benefit from international cinematic experiences and to learn the

cinematic culture and the advancement of Omani cinematic works,” said Mohammed al Ajmi, Chief Coordinator of the fest.

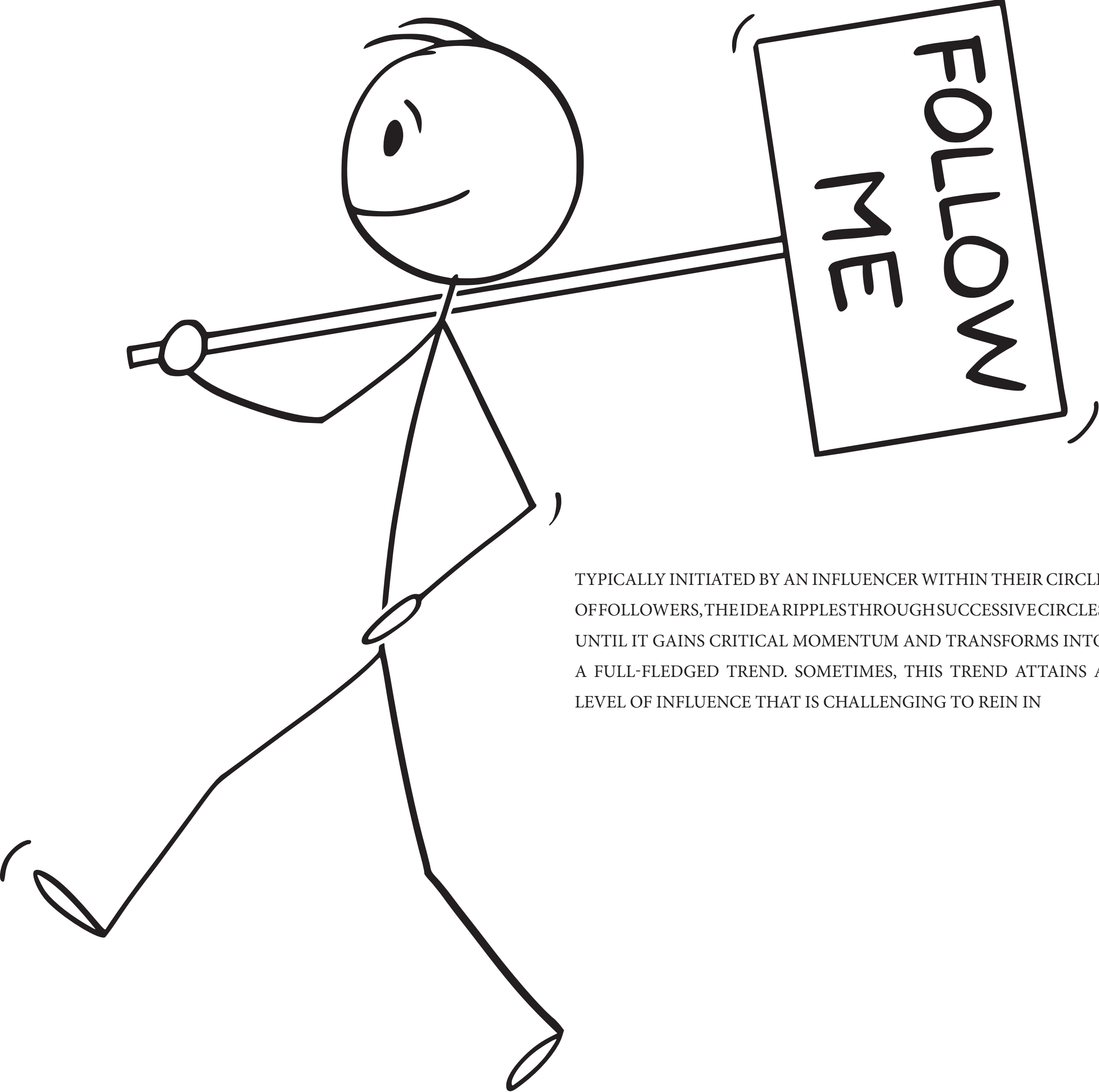
The fourth edition of CAFF will be held sometime next February. Film enthusiasts across the Sultanate of Oman are looking forward to attending the fest, watching global films and attending film-making workshops.

“Over 100’s of films will be shown, which will go through the selection process once the jury committee resumes work in September,” said Khalid al Zadjali, Director and President of CAFF.

As to the most sought-after MIFF, the previous edition was held in March 2020 under the theme ‘Make your film in Oman’ and introduced international

film-makers to the most important tourist destinations in the Sultanate of Oman, besides having seminars and workshops on the formalities and procedures involved in obtaining the necessary licence to film in the Sultanate of Oman.

“This year, the festival includes several competitions in a number of genres, including the Omani and international short narrative film competition, the Omani and international short documentary film competition, and the festival competition under the title ‘The Relationship of the Omani Man with the Land.’ What makes the festivals different is that both citizens and expatriates can participate in the festival, and we have created separate sections for the same,” said Mohammed.



TYPICALLY INITIATED BY AN INFLUENCER WITHIN THEIR CIRCLE OF FOLLOWERS, THE IDEA RIPPLES THROUGH SUCCESSIVE CIRCLES UNTIL IT GAINS CRITICAL MOMENTUM AND TRANSFORMS INTO A FULL-FLEDGED TREND. SOMETIMES, THIS TREND ATTAINS A LEVEL OF INFLUENCE THAT IS CHALLENGING TO REIN IN

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, AUG 20

Trends emerge and recede in modern society. They shape our preferences and influence people’s behaviour. However, the concept of ‘trends’, once a staple of the online realm and social networking platforms, has transformed into a multifaceted tool employed across society to gauge and steer public sentiment toward specific ideas or commodities.

According to Nasser al Harrasi, the phenomenon of riding the trend wave has transcended its initial confines and permeated the entire spectrum of society. No longer relegated to a particular faction, it has evolved into a ubiquitous

and preferred method for individuals from all walks of life. This trend-driven phenomenon now exerts its influence over our life, morphing into an insatiable obsession that captivates minds, rendering resistance futile.

Al Harrasi emphasises how trends have become interwoven into our daily choices, encompassing attire, cuisine, affiliations, leisure pursuits, luminaries, and even our core beliefs. Fuelled by the propulsion of social media networks, platforms, and emerging media. Trends steer us towards notions and products that might not inherently resonate with our needs or preferences. This intricate process of trend adoption and its concomitant effects can potentially divert the contemplation and awareness of those ensnared within its

beguiling allure.

Reflecting on contemporary developments, Al Harrasi cites an illustrative instance involving a prominent coffee brand’s latest offering for its new drink. Despite widespread criticism for its lacklustre taste and steep pricing, the product swiftly sold out across numerous branches during its initial fortnight. This curious phenomenon underscores that people, regardless of financial implications or flavour profiles, are compelled to acquire the product solely to align with the trend and share the experience through imagery.

In a similar vein, Mazen al Abri sheds light on the trajectory of ideas as they mature into trends. Typically

initiated by an influencer within their circle of followers, the idea ripples through successive circles until it gains critical momentum and transforms into a full-fledged trend. Sometimes, this trend attains a level of influence that is challenging to rein in.

Al Abri observes that this trend-driven mindset has altered the motivations behind consumption, particularly in the younger generation. Consumables are no longer sought for their inherent utility; they are acquired to embody the trend and partake in its circulation. He notes that savvy digital marketers capitalise on this trend-driven ethos due to its cost-effective nature in promoting concepts or products. As a result, corporations and content creators

alike strive to craft trends around their offerings.

Al Abri underscores the peril of trends being manipulated to commodify our existence, eroding its intrinsic values. When individuals prioritise numerical metrics, indicators, and the prevailing trends themselves, regardless of socioeconomic status, they inadvertently forsake authenticity in their pursuit of trendiness.

“All current generations are actively using social media platforms. Therefore, parents must concentrate and be vigilant about reducing their children’s participation in these trends. Engaging in these trends makes it challenging to alter their perspectives later on,” Al Abri Added.



## In brief

■ BANGKOK



### THAIS OPPOSE PLAN FOR COALITION GOVERNMENT

Most Thais disagree with the leading plan for a coalition government including military-backed groups, an opinion poll showed on Sunday, two days ahead of a parliamentary vote.

About 64% of 1,310 respondents disagreed or totally disagreed with the idea of the Pheu Thai party forming a “special government” with military-backed rivals, according to the survey by the National Institute of Development Administration.

Thailand has been under a caretaker government for five months. The second-place Pheu Thai took over efforts to form a government. — Reuters

■ JAKARTA



### PRESIDENT TO ATTEND BRICS SUMMIT IN S AFRICA

Indonesian President Joko Widodo departed for South Africa on Sunday to attend the BRICS summit in Johannesburg.

The meeting, which brings together major emerging economies countries, will be held for three days starting on Tuesday.

“Indonesia has been invited to the BRICS summit and of course in between the BRICS summit there will be meetings with other world leaders,” Widodo told reporters ahead of his departure.

The trip is Widodo’s first to Africa as leader of South East Asia’s biggest economy.

— AFP

■ SINGAPORE



### PM SAYS SUCCESSION PLAN ‘BACK ON TRACK’

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said on Sunday that plans to hand over power to a younger generation of leaders are “back on track” after being disrupted by the Covid pandemic.

Lee, 71, had planned to step down by 2022, before his 70th birthday, and hand the reins to his deputy, Lawrence Wong.

But that was postponed as Lee said he had to lead Singapore through the coronavirus crisis.

“Now Covid is behind us, and my succession plans are back on track,” Lee said in his annual National Day Rally speech.

Rare political scandals “will not delay my timetable for renewal”, he added. — AFP

# Troops hunt for West Bank shooting suspect



Israeli security forces block a road following a reported attack in the town of Huwara in the occupied West Bank. — AFP

**HUWARA:** Schools were shut on Sunday in the occupied West Bank town of Huwara as troops searched for the suspected killer of an Israeli father and his son who were shot dead over the weekend.

The two Israeli men were gunned down on Saturday in Huwara, in the latest attack to rock the territory where violence has surged this year.

Israeli media identified the two as Shay Silas Nigrekar, 60, and Aviad Nir, 28.

Nablus’s acting governor Ghassan Daghlis ordered the closure of Huwara’s schools “after requests from parents who are afraid of reactions from settlers”, he said.

Huwara, a Palestinian town near the city of Nablus, has seen a number of attacks on Jewish settlers or the Israeli military since early last year.

Settlers have also responded with revenge attacks on the town and surrounding villages.

“Whenever an attack occurs that negatively affects the residents of Huwara... settlers break in, hurl rocks and smash cars,” local resident Ashraf Odeh said.

“The army can do nothing for you because its priority is to protect the settlers before it protects us.”

On Sunday, Israeli forces also

blocked access to the nearby villages of Beita and Aqraba as their manhunt continued.

“Our security forces are currently looking for the murderer... this terrorist’s day will also come and sooner than he thinks,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said at a cabinet meeting on Sunday.

In a separate incident on Sunday, an Israeli civilian was

injured in the West Bank when troops fired at a group of “masked suspects” who turned out to be Israeli citizens.

The incident happened near the Israeli settlement of Maale Levona, not far from Nablus.

The army did not provide further details and said the incident was under investigation.

The West Bank has seen a surge in violence since early last

year, with a string of attacks by Palestinians on Israeli targets, repeated Israeli army raids and violence by Jewish settlers against Palestinian communities.

At least 218 Palestinians have been killed in violence linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict this year.

Some 30 Israelis, one Ukrainian and one Italian have also been killed, according to an AFP tally

compiled from official sources on both sides.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967.

Excluding annexed east Jerusalem, the territory is home to nearly three million Palestinians and around 490,000 Israelis who live in settlements considered illegal under international law.

— AFP



Thousands of anti-sanctions protesters gather in support of the putschist soldiers in the capital Niamey, Niger. — Reuters

## Pro-coup rally in Niger after military leader warns against foreign intervention

**NIAMEY:** Several thousand people demonstrated in the capital of Niger on Sunday in support of last month’s military coup, whose leader has warned against outside intervention and proposed a three-year transition of power.

The demonstrators chanted slogans hostile to former colonial power France and West African regional bloc ECOWAS, which is considering a potential military operation to reinstate elected president Mohamed Bazoum if ongoing negotiations with coup leaders fail.

The Sahel state’s new military leaders have officially banned demonstrations but in practice, those in support of the coup are allowed to go ahead.

The demonstrators waved placards saying “Stop the military intervention” and “No to sanctions”, in reference to the

financial and trade restrictions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) four days after the coup on July 26.

Sunday’s pro-coup rally was accompanied by musicians praising the new military regime.

The latest in a string of pro-coup rallies came a day after the new military ruler in Niamey warned that an attack on Niger would not be a “walk in the park”.

General Abdourahmane Tiani also said in a televised address on Saturday that he did not wish to “confiscate” power and a transition of power back to civilian rule would not go beyond three years.

Niger television showed delegation members shaking hands with Bazoum, who remains in detention.

It also broadcast footage of Abubakar speaking to Tiani but

the content of the exchange has not been made public.

In his televised address on Saturday, Tiani alleged that ECOWAS was “getting ready to attack Niger by setting up an occupying army in collaboration with a foreign army”, without saying which country he meant.

But he added: “If an attack were to be undertaken against us, it will not be the walk in the park some people seem to think.”

Tiani also announced a 30-day period of “national dialogue” to draw up “concrete proposals” to lay the foundations of “a new constitutional life”.

ECOWAS leaders say they have to act now that Niger has become the fourth West African nation since 2020 to suffer a coup.

The bloc has agreed to activate a “standby force” as a last resort to restore democracy in Niger.

— AFP

# Fukushima says no decision on water release date

**TOMIOKA:** Japanese premier Fumio Kishida said on Sunday his government has not yet decided when to begin releasing treated water from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean.

Media reports suggest that the discharge of some of the 1.34 million tonnes of water, which Japan insists is safe, could begin as soon as this month.

Speaking at the Fukushima site, wrecked by a tsunami in 2011 in one of the world’s worst atomic accidents, Kishida said he would first meet fishing industry officials to discuss their concerns.

“I must refrain from commenting on a concrete timing of the release into the ocean at this point, as the decision has to be made after the government as a whole looks at measures to do with safety and reputational damage for the fishing industry,” Kishida told reporters.

“I hope to meet with

fishermen, led by chairman Masanobu Sakamoto of Japan’s fisheries cooperative federation, as early as tomorrow,” the prime minister said.

The water, equivalent to more than 500 Olympic swimming pools, has accumulated in the past 12 years from water used to cool three melted-down reactors combined with groundwater and rain.

Plant operator TEPCO says that dangerous radioactive elements have been filtered out and that the water it plans to release is safe, a view backed by the UN atomic agency.

The release of the treated water -- a maximum of 500,000 litres per day, TEPCO says -- is just one stage of the clean-up.

The far more dangerous task remains of removing radioactive debris and highly dangerous nuclear fuel from the three reactors that went into meltdown.

— AFP



Japan’s PM Fumio Kishida (C) listens to a briefing at the Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings (TEPCO) Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Fukushima Prefecture. — AFP



# Zelensky hails ‘historic’ decision to hand F-16 jets to Ukraine

**KYIV:** President Volodymyr Zelensky on Sunday hailed on a visit to the Netherlands a “historic” decision to supply F-16 fighter jets to strengthen Ukraine’s Soviet-era air force.

It came two days after the United States approved the transfer to Ukraine of Dutch as well as Danish US-made warplanes, a key demand by Kyiv as it seeks greater firepower from allies during a grinding counteroffensive against Russia.

Zelensky landed at a Dutch Air force base in Eindhoven at around midday, a Dutch government spokesperson said, and inspected the aircraft shortly after.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte rubber-stamped the deliveries, saying: “The Netherlands and Denmark commit to transfer F-16s to Ukraine once the conditions for such a transfer have been met.”

The decision is “absolutely historic, powerful and inspiring for us,” Zelensky said at a press conference with Rutte.

“This is another step towards strengthening Ukraine’s air shield.”

Details of the aircraft delivery to Ukraine have not been unveiled.

The Dutch and the Danes are leading a plan to train Ukrainian pilots to fly the US-made aircraft as part of an 11-nation coalition, with training potentially complete by early 2024.

Washington has strict rules on



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte walk near an F-16, in Eindhoven, Netherlands. – Reuters

the sale or transfer of US military equipment by its allies.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said Moscow will regard Western F-16 fighter jets sent to Ukraine as a “nuclear” threat because of their capacity to carry atomic weapons.

Zelensky was in Sweden on Saturday, finalising with Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson the production of CV90 armoured vehicles in Ukraine.

Russia said it thwarted Ukrainian drone attacks on Moscow and its region on Sunday,

the second such incident in two days.

Both sides have reported regular drone incursions during the conflict, with strikes on Russian territory becoming increasingly regular.

“At around 4:00 am, an attempt by the Kyiv regime to carry out a terrorist attack by drone on infrastructure in Moscow and the Moscow region was thwarted,” the Russian defence ministry said in a statement.

Zelensky has vowed “a tangible answer” to Saturday’s attack on

the northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv, which came during the Orthodox holiday of the Transfiguration of the Lord as some attended morning church services.

The Russian army marched through the city when it attacked Ukraine through Belarus in February 2022, before being repelled by Kyiv’s forces.

Ukraine launched its widely expected counteroffensive in June but has come up against fierce resistance from entrenched Russian forces. — AFP



Ecuador’s presidential candidate for the Construye party, journalist Christian Zurita (2-R), arrives under heavy security to vote at a polling station in Quito. – AFP

## Voting begins in tense Ecuador election

**QUITO:** Ecuadorans head to the polls on Sunday in a presidential election tarnished by the murder of a top candidate, which cast a spotlight on the violence ravaging a once-peaceful nation.

The eight presidential candidates have prioritised promises to crack down on organised crime, all while campaigning in bulletproof vests.

Several political assassinations marked the run-up to the vote, with the murder of serious presidential contender Fernando Villavicencio just 11 days from the election underscoring the challenges facing the country.

“These are completely atypical elections, in a situation basically of horror that Ecuador is going through... due to the existing violence, but which manifested itself in a more acute and atrocious way” with

Villavicencio’s murder, political scientist Anamaria Correa Crespo said.

President Guillermo Lasso called the snap election after he dissolved the opposition-dominated Congress in May to avoid an impeachment trial just two years after his election.

Leading the polls before the murder was Luisa Gonzalez, 45, a lawyer from the leftist party of former president Rafael Correa.

Villavicencio, who was polling second before his murder, was replaced last-minute by another journalist, Christian Zurita.

Voters will also elect members of the 137-seat parliament.

Soldiers have been deployed across the country to secure the vote. Initial results are expected to trickle in the same night, with a final tally expected in 10 days.

— AFP

# Deadly hurricane Hilary barrels towards Baja, southwest US

**MEXICO CITY:** Hurricane Hilary hurtled towards Mexico’s Baja California peninsula on Sunday, blanketing the region with heavy rain amid warnings of catastrophic and life-threatening flooding on the peninsula and in the US Southwest.

One man died in the Baja California Sur state when a family of five was swept away into the sea while crossing a stream, according to a Mexican official, who also shared images of flooding and roads that were swept away in the area.

In the United States, the hurricane disrupted flights and sports games before it arrived.

Early on Sunday, the hurricane was carrying top sustained winds of 140 kph, the US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said. Its centre

was forecast to move close to the west-central coast of the Baja California peninsula in the next few hours and then across southern California on Sunday afternoon.

Hilary was expected to weaken but would likely remain a hurricane as it passed near Baja California, becoming a tropical storm before reaching southern California, the NHC said.

Storm surges — when the ocean is pushed inland — could produce coastal flooding in parts of Baja California and the hurricane was carrying heavy rain that could cause catastrophic flooding in some areas, the NHC said.

Rainfall of 7.6 to 15 cm was expected across the northern Baja California peninsula as well as portions of southern California and southern



Hurricane Hilary hits Mexico’s Baja California peninsula, in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. – Reuters

Nevada, the Miami-based agency said in its latest advisory. Hilary was about 625 km

south-southeast of San Diego, the NHC said. It was moving north-northwest at 33 kph.

US President Joe Biden received a briefing on Saturday from senior staff on

preparations for the hurricane, the White House said.

In the Baja California peninsula, some school and other non-essential activities were cancelled through Monday, and authorities in Mexico’s second-largest city, Tijuana, urged people in high-risk zones to move to temporary shelters.

Images showed flash floods in the coastal town of Santa Rosalia, on the eastern side of the Baja California peninsula, with water gushing down what used to be a road, sweeping away a tree.

US authorities in affected areas warned residents and businesses to take precautions.

Nearly 200 flights scheduled for Sunday at the San Diego International Airport have been cancelled and another 184 on Monday, according to the FlightAware website. — Reuters

### LIMA

#### At least 13 killed in Peruvian bus crash

At least 13 people died and another five were seriously injured when a bus travelling through Peru’s mountainous Andes plunged off the road, authorities said.

The crash occurred in the morning after the bus, which was carrying around 50 people, departed from the Andean town of Vilcashuaman en route to capital Lima.

Near the town of Huancavelica, in the southeast, the vehicle overturned and fell 200 meters.



“We are reporting thirteen dead and five seriously injured after a bus crashed and fell into a precipice on the Los Libertadores highway,” an officer from the Huaytara district — AFP

### BUKAVU

#### Seven children dead in fire at camp

A fire that broke out at a camp in the Democratic Republic of Congo for hundreds of families that fled fatal flash floods and mudslides in May has killed seven children, local authorities said on Sunday.

The camp in Mushonezo is home to around 420 families from Bushushu, a village on Lake Kivu near the eastern border with Rwanda.

The blaze erupted on Saturday afternoon and killed seven children two small boys and four



small girls, aged one to five years old.

The fire started in a hut in the middle of the site, where a child was cooking while the parents weren’t there. — AFP

### LA OROTAVA

#### Firefighters make gains against wildfire

Firefighters made gains in their battle against a vast wildfire on Tenerife on Sunday after better-than-expected overnight weather helped them keep the blaze from destroying homes on the Spanish holiday island, regional officials said.

So far the blaze, which has a perimeter of 70 kilometres, has burned through 8,400 hectares, or just over four per cent of Tenerife’s overall surface area, forcing more than 12,000 people to flee their homes.



The blaze has generated a vast pillar of smoke that now stretches some eight kilometres into the air, rising far above the summit of Mount Teide, the volcano that towers over the island. — AFP



Pump up your adrenalin...

Every day of life brings new challenges; this is an undeniable fact! However, in a way or other we obviously face some of those challenges. It's not always such challenges tend to be serious ones, but they are matters that require part of our attention, time and effort. This is life; every dawn comes with a different surprise that might be pleasing or frustrating. What matters is the way we handle every challenge we experience every single day.

Perhaps we come across more than just a challenge on a day! Sometimes it's our job, attitudes, people or minds being the reasons behind us getting challenged.

Our work environment, day-to-day attitudes, feelings and personalities as well as those with whom we work or live with are creating obstacles in our way. Likewise, all those factors might be provoking us to get challenges or displeasing experiences possibly.

It happens like anything else in life as days are not always the same. Yet, it's us who control how we run the show on every single day of our life regardless of what happens around us.

Being positive and looking at the brighter side of each experience we come through is the best way of overcoming the disappointing or unpleasant moments.

Although it's not easy to manage our reactions, attitudes and feelings, but we always try our best to enjoy every moment of life.

All what we need is just to have a dose of patience which could cure our tensions, frustrations and irrelevant disappointments. Unfortunately, whenever we get a sort of a shock or an unexpected displeasure or incident, we get frustrated and our mind gets focused on the negative side of that certain experience.

I just wonder why it happens even though we have not given ourselves the chance or sufficient time to investigate or even think of what happened or what was the motive behind it.



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami  
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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

AS LIFE IS VERY SHORT, IT SHOULDN'T BE WASTED IN MOMENTS OF SADNESS, MISERY AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

This is not a general assumption of our reaction to every incident, but it's a common observation. Perhaps some are in agreement that this is what first happens with some of us is similar circumstances.

Nevertheless, everyone has his/her own way of perceiving things and experiences around them, but we all get affected either emotionally or behaviourally by what happens, though it's normal as human.

However, our responses differ depending on the experience we face, time, condition and environment we are in when receiving the challenge if it could be called so.

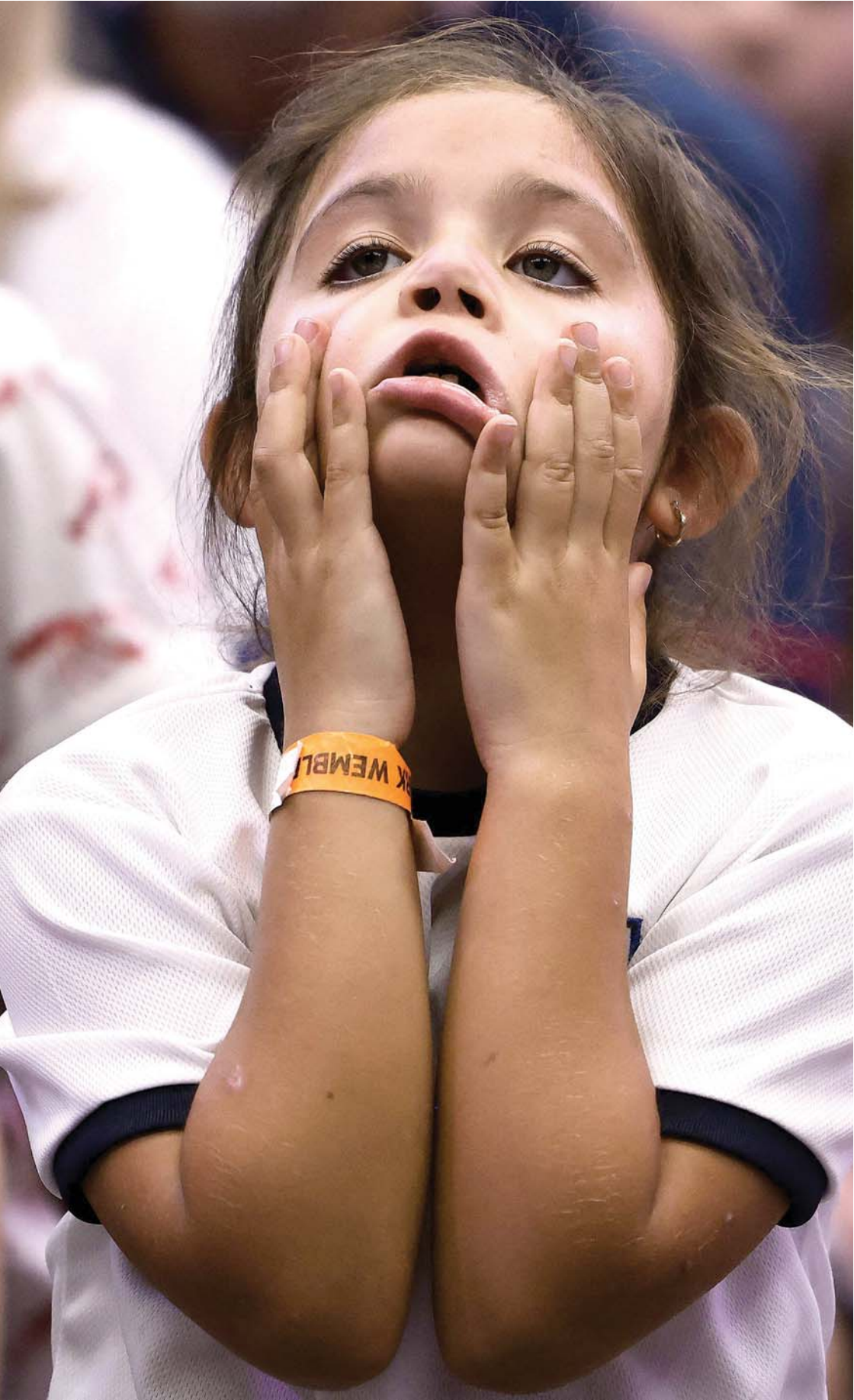
Feasibly, we all should have the needed dose of patience whenever we get any sort of challenge in our life. As well, we should be fair with ourselves by having enough time to fully understand what happens and what are the possible reasons behind it? Then things will undoubtedly get clear for us, so we can think of potential solutions. Seeking support from others could be another way of getting things out of our chest. Thus, we might need to get a proper consultation and advice from trusted ones.

More important is that whenever we come across a challenge or a dilemma perhaps, we shall have some hope and faith as always problems start big and then vanish. Believing in hope is another relief that makes us calm and relaxed. As Helen Keller, an American lecturer and creative author, said: "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence."

As life is very short, it shouldn't be wasted in moments of sadness, misery and disappointments. We should live the moment and try to enjoy life as much as possible!

Challenges should be turned into learning lessons and disabilities should be turned into abilities that bring new opportunities. Just focus on the positive side and believe that there is something inside you that is greater than any obstacle.

A YOUNG FAN



A young England fan reacts while watching a live broadcast of the Women's World Cup final football match between Spain and England, at Boxpark Wembley in London on Sunday. Spain won the cup for the first time in their history. – AFP

Illegal logging turns Syria's forests into 'barren land'

On a riverbank in war-ravaged Syria's north, felling has reduced what was once a lush forest to dispersed trees and decimated trunks poking out from dry, crumbly soil.

Twelve years of conflict that led to a spike in illegal logging, along with the effects of climate change and other factors, have eroded Syria's greenery.

The dwindling forest on the shores of the Euphrates river "is shrinking every year", said Ahmed al Sheikh, 40, a supermarket owner in the village of Jaabar, in the Kurdish-held part of Syria's Raqa province.

Before, "the forest would attract tourists, birds, purify the air and protect the area from dust storms", he said. But fuel shortages and rampant poverty during the war have pushed many Syrians to chop the trees to sell or use for heating, dealing a blow to the nature surrounding Jaabar.

Its ancient citadel had made the village a popular pre-war tourist attraction, with a reforestation project launched in the mid-1990s offering rare respite from the searing heat.

"Some people cut down the trees to sell them and earn money, others to keep warm during the winter," Sheikh said. "If this goes on, desertification will follow."

Residents said they hear loggers riding motorbikes into the forest at night to cut down trees. Even in broad



Delil Souleiman

The writer is a photojournalist and reporter working for AFP

THE COUNTRY HAS WITNESSED A 26-PER CENT DECREASE IN TREE COVER SINCE 2000, ACCORDING TO DATA FROM GLOBAL FOREST WATCH

daylight, young men sneak into the woods to chop trees, evading the handful of forest guards patrolling the vast, green spaces.

Syria's war has killed more than 500,000 people and displaced millions.

It has also devastated the environment, triggering an "alarming" loss of forest cover across the country, Dutch peacebuilding group PAX warned in a report earlier this year.

The country has witnessed a "26-per cent decrease in tree cover since 2000", according to data from Global Forest Watch. Ten kilometres from Jaabar, the same fate has befallen the trees of Tuwayhina.

"In my childhood, we used to come here with friends to sit under the shade of eucalyptus and pine trees," said Mohammed Ali, surrounded by tree trunks scattered across the sun-scorched earth.

"But now it is a barren land," said the 30-year-old nurse.

"Now, there is no shade left, only the heat of the sun everywhere."

"The dust storms never stop, the lake is drying up and there are no trees left," Ali said, referring to Lake Assad, Syria's largest freshwater dam reservoir.

Water levels have dropped and



A woman leads a donkey carrying wood from trees cut at the Mount Abdulaziz nature reserve near the town of Hasakeh. – AFP

pollution has worsened in the Euphrates and the reservoir it feeds, with the river's flow further impacted by upstream dams in Turkiye.

Deforestation in Syria is largely attributed to logging and thinning for firewood, according to the PAX report.

"Soaring fuel prices combined with massive displacement form the main driver for large-scale

deforestation throughout Syria," it said. "Civilians are cutting down trees for cooking and heating, while there are clear indications that armed groups also use illegal logging and wood sales as a source of income."

The once-dense forests of Syria's west "have suffered the most degradation caused by the war", mostly from tree felling and wildfires, PAX said.

Latakia, Hama, Homs and Idlib provinces lost at least 36 per cent of their trees in the decade following 2011, when the conflict erupted, according to PAX.

In the northeast, authorities have "no precise data" about the damage but its impact is "obvious", Ibrahim Asaad, who co-chairs the Kurdish semi-autonomous administration's environment body, said. **BREADBASKET**

The area was the country's breadbasket in pre-war times, but has witnessed severe droughts and reduced rainfall in recent years. On the outskirts of Hasakeh, a city further east, the Mount Abdulaziz reserve has been plagued by dry spells and some illegal logging.

The trees had provided a "blanket of greenery", said Hussein Saleh al-Helou, a 65-year-old resident of the village of Al Naseri. But now "there is no water, the trees near the village have withered... and people have started cutting them", he said, surrounded by vast barren lands and hills.

"Logging has had a huge impact on the village," Helou said.

"The temperature has risen, and the weather is not the same any more."

# Sport

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## Messi leads Miami to first trophy with Leagues Cup win

**NASHVILLE:** Lionel Messi scored a screamer and won his first trophy in North American soccer as Inter Miami beat Nashville on penalties (10-9) after their final ended 1-1 in 90 minutes.

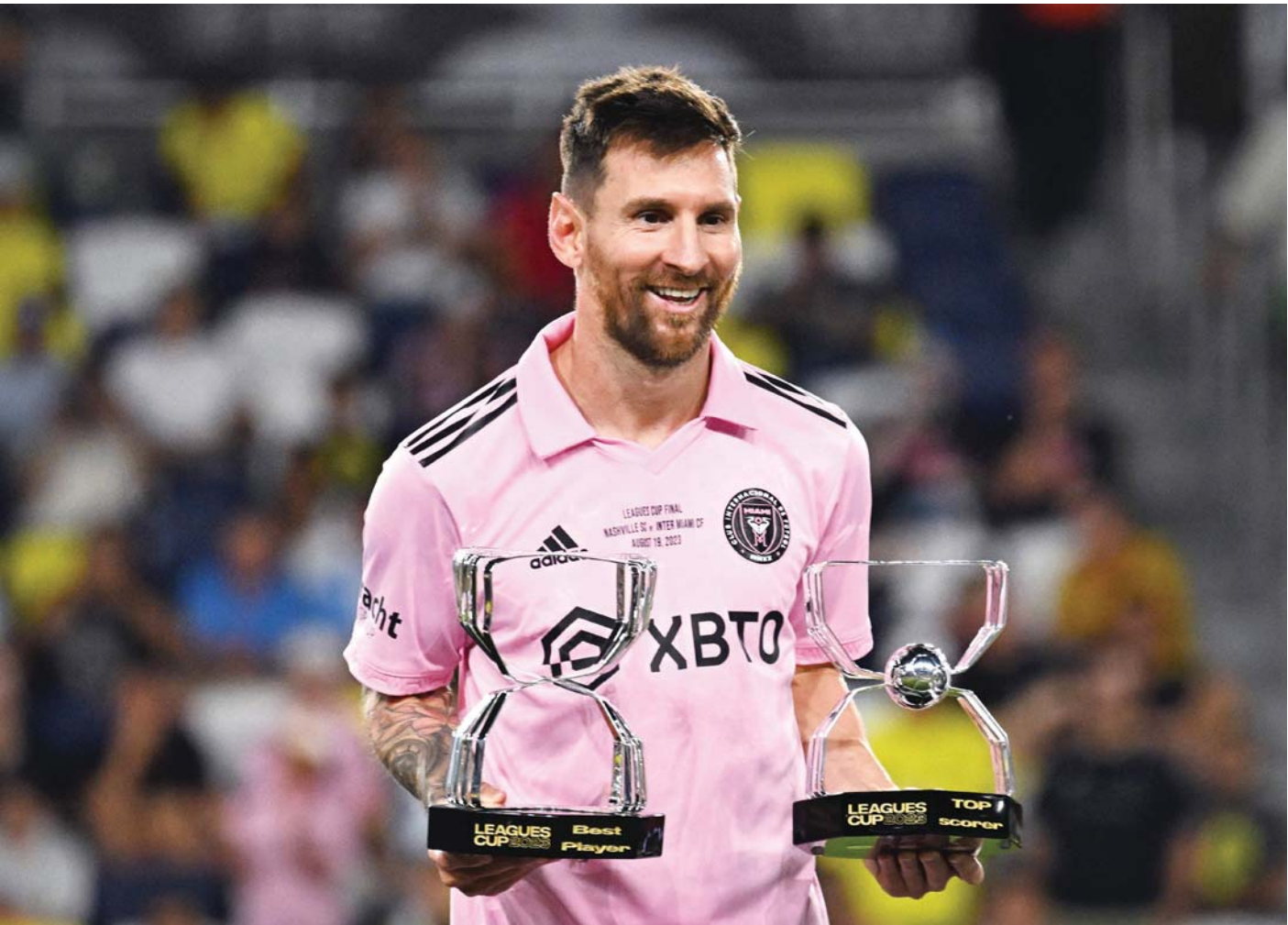
The Argentine World Cup winner had put Miami ahead in the 24th minute with a wonder strike into the top corner but Fafa Picault levelled for Nashville in the second half.

After Messi hit the post and Leonardo Campana missed a last second chance to win the game in regulation for Miami, the game went to a shoot-out which ended in a duel between the two keepers and Elliot Panico's shot being saved by Miami's Drake Callender.

Messi and his team-mates rushed to celebrate with the American goalkeeper, who had made some key saves late in the game to keep his team alive.

Miami, in their third season of existence, were rock bottom of Major League Soccer when Messi joined them a month ago but Messi, along with Spanish pair Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba, has utterly transformed the team leading them on a seven game unbeaten run to the League Cup title.

Co-owner David



Lionel Messi poses with the awards for Best Player and Top Scorer after Inter Milan won the Leagues Cup – AFP

Beckham, who created the club, said he was stunned by the way the former Barcelona trio had been able to bring about change so quickly.

"It is like a movie, you watch these players play and it is, emotionally, everything about their play is beautiful," he said.

Seven-times Ballon d'Or winner Messi has now scored

10 goals in seven games in the pink shirt of his new club and on Wednesday has the chance to reach another final when his team take on Cincinnati in the semi-final of the US Open Cup.

This was not the dominant, entertaining Miami that in the past month has lit up the tournament, featuring MLS and Mexican Liga MX

clubs, but the win was sweet nonetheless.

"I am very happy to win our first title in just one month, the club's first. The team is growing by leaps and bounds and we are very happy," said midfielder Busquets.

### LEAPS AND BOUNDS

"We have infected the team with our spirit, our work, our

character and experience. We are making a solid team ... And then we have Leo, who makes a difference because he's the best in the world."

Nashville set out with the clear intention to limit the impact of Busquets and by extension Messi and they were effective in forcing Miami to play a slower type of possession football, deeper

in their own half.

Gary Smith's side sent an early warning that they could trouble Miami at set-pieces with Walker Zimmerman's header from a Lukas MacNaughton corner forcing Callender into a low save.

Miami were probing, with Messi dropping deeper and looking for gaps in the home defence.

But with Walker Zimmerman marshalling the back line well chances were hard to come by until Robert Taylor spun and turned and fired a fierce drive which Nashville keeper Elliot Panico did well to keep out.

Three minutes later, Miami had the lead -- and the source of their breakthrough was no surprise.

Taylor's attempted pass inside was blocked and the ball fell to Messi who zipped past Zimmerman, opening enough space to his left to unleash an unstoppable drive from over 25 yards out which flew into the top corner past the helpless Panico.

Miami looked in total control, playing with confidence bordering on swagger, but it was a different story after the interval.

From a corner Picault won a header at the back

post which ricocheted in off the foot of Benjamin Cremaschi and Callender.

Suddenly Nashville had the belief and their German forward Hany Mukhtar came alive, testing Miami with his speedy runs and Callender with a blast from the right.

Messi went close to another Hollywood ending with a 71st minute shot from just outside the box which shaved the outside of the post.

But in the final seconds, his Ecuadorian team-mate Campana should have won the game for Miami, when he rounded Panico but from a tight angle could only hit the post with the goal at his mercy.

Then came penalties and with all 10 outfield players having shot, with one miss for each side, it came down to the keepers and Callender kept his cool with his shot before denying Panico and launching the celebrations.

While the players sprayed champagne in the locker-room, Argentine coach Gerardo 'Tata' Martino was in reflective mood.

"The most important thing we had to do is put together a team while we were playing a seven-game tournament, and that's very difficult to do," he said.— AFP



## Alcaraz, Djokovic to face off in final

**CINCINNATI:** Carlos Alcaraz saved a match point on the way to a three-set victory over Hubert Hurkacz on Saturday as he lined up title clash with Novak Djokovic at the ATP Cincinnati Masters.

World number one Alcaraz held on for a 2-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 victory over Hurkacz, rallying to beat the big-serving Pole for the second time in as many weeks.

Djokovic beat Germany's Alexander Zverev 7-6 (7/5), 7-5 to reach the final, which will be a repeat of last month's epic Wimbledon final won by Alcaraz. Alcaraz has won two of three career meetings with Djokovic, but the Serb was looking forward to their first hard court clash.

"Now it's going to be the first encounter on a hard court.

It's a very good test prior to the US Open," Djokovic said. "Obviously different conditions.

"It's still facing the top player of the world now who is in form. It's the biggest challenge I could get, so I'm looking forward to it."

Djokovic was trying for a second time to serve out the match against Zverev when he was distracted by a nearby amusement park's fireworks. — Reuters



## Al Nahda take on Al Khaldiya in AFC play-off

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, AUG 20

Oman's representative, Al Nahda club, are all set to play the AFC Cup 2023-24 Play-off against Bahrain's Al Khaldiya SC on Tuesday at the latter's home in Manama city, Bahrain. The match will begin at 8 pm (Oman time) at Khalifa Sports Stadium.

With just one triumph against the Bahraini club, the Al Buraimi-based club will aim to secure a slot in the group stage as the draw will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on Thursday.

Al Nahda's delegation arrived in Manama city on Saturday and began their warm-up sessions ahead of the thrilling encounter. The defending champions of HM Cup and Omantel League, coached by national head coach Hamed al Azani, will work hard on keeping the title



of 2023-24 AFC Cup under Omani club name after Seeb Club had won the title for the previous edition in 2022. The team made history for Omani clubs as they won the continental competition after defeating Kuala Lumpur City FC 3-0 in the final.

However, Seeb suffered a 1-0 loss against Uzbekistan's AGMK FC recently in the AFC Champions League

preliminary round.

Al Nahda began their matches in the 2023-24 top flight league with a 1-1 draw against Al Shabab at Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

After the match, the players reported back to their training and the coaching staff focused during the latest training sessions on addressing the weakness areas besides improving the technical and

tactical sides ahead of the Asian tie.

### IMPROVED RESULT

The Al Buraimi-based club will aim the fifth attendance to be different than the previous presences. Al Nahda reached the semifinals of the AFC Cup in the 2008 edition and they are looking for a better result this edition after ending the play-off on a winning note.

Al Nahda had an external camp ahead of the new season in the UAE and played several friendly games. They played out a 1-1 draw with Saudi's Al Riyadh club before going down to UAE's Al Wasal club 2-0. The abroad camp in UAE helped the team to shape their readiness for the new season and the crucial AFC Cup Play-off.

On the other hand, the Bahraini side will enter the match with their fans' support and they will eye a maiden attendance at the AFC Cup.



**Sultanate of Oman**  
**MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH**

**TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT**

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects :-

| Tender No.        | Project Category | Grade In Tender Board Registration | Location                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Re-tender 14/2023 | Supply           | Excellent & First                  | <b>SUPPLY AND INSTALLATION SPORT SCIENTIFIC EQUIPMENTS</b>                                                                                          |
| 16/2023           | Services         | Excellent & First                  | <b>REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS TENDER FOR THE SULTANATE OF OMAN'S PARTICIPATION IN EXPO 2025, OSAKA, KANSAI, JAPAN</b> |

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 26/08/2023.

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 09:00am 04/09/2023.

**INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH**

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email [etenderhd@ita.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@ita.gov.om)



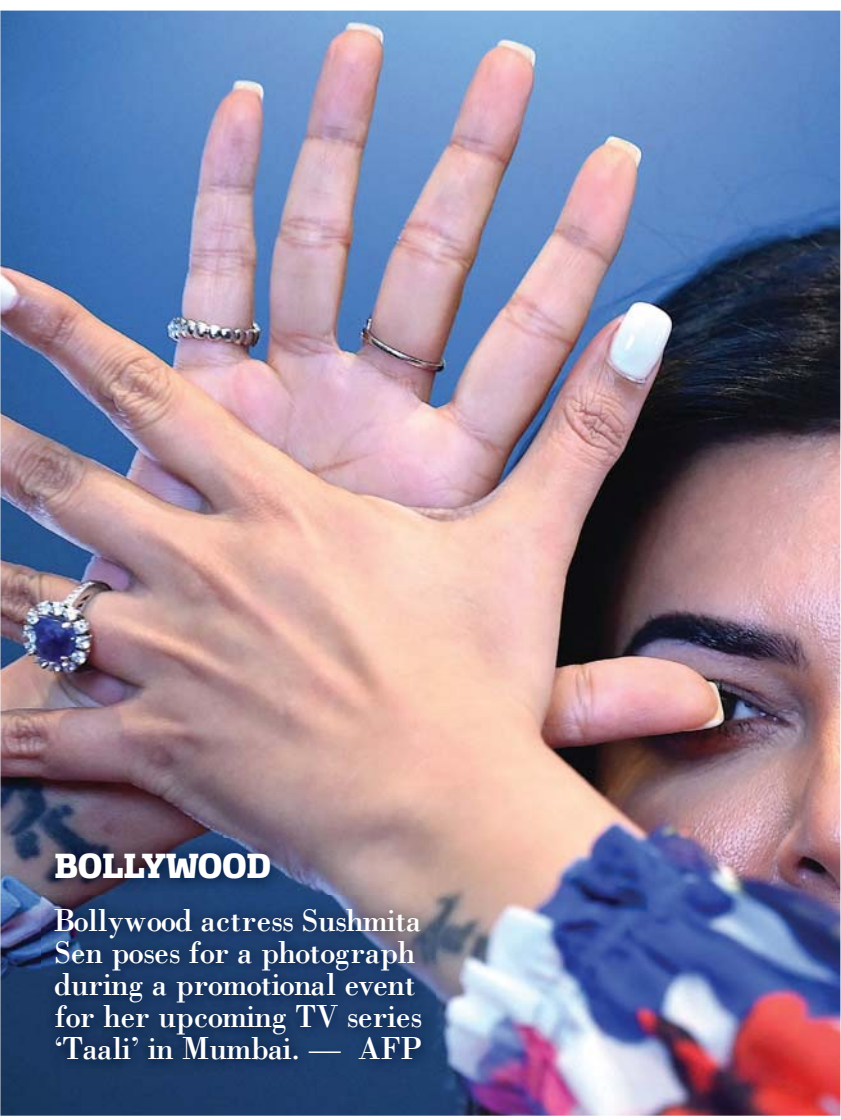
ENTERTAINMENT

Colombian singer Karol G performs during her “Manana Sera Bonito” tour at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California. — AFP



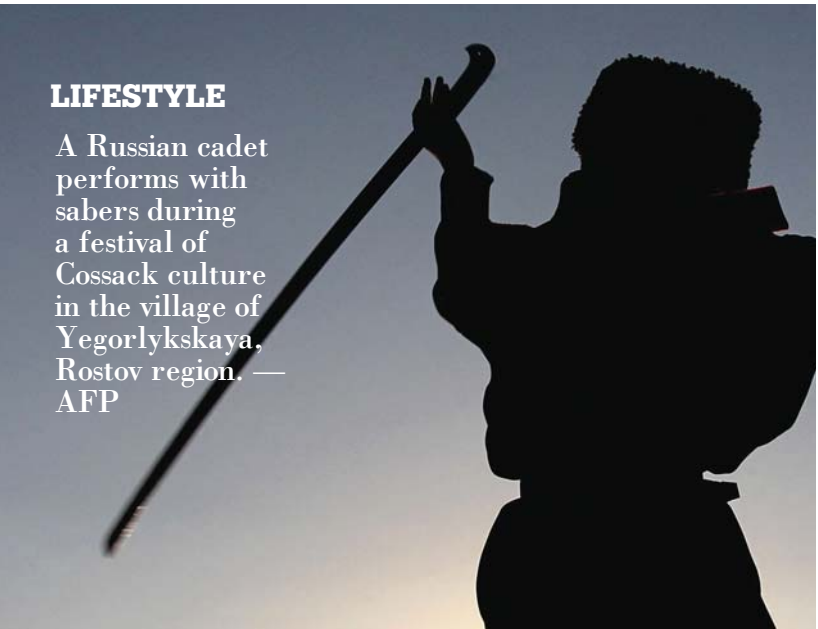
HERITAGE

A young Maasai man rubs his head on the head of a friend to paint his hair with the traditional red ochre pigment as they prepare to take part in the Eunoto ceremony in a remote area near Kilgoris, Kenya. — AFP



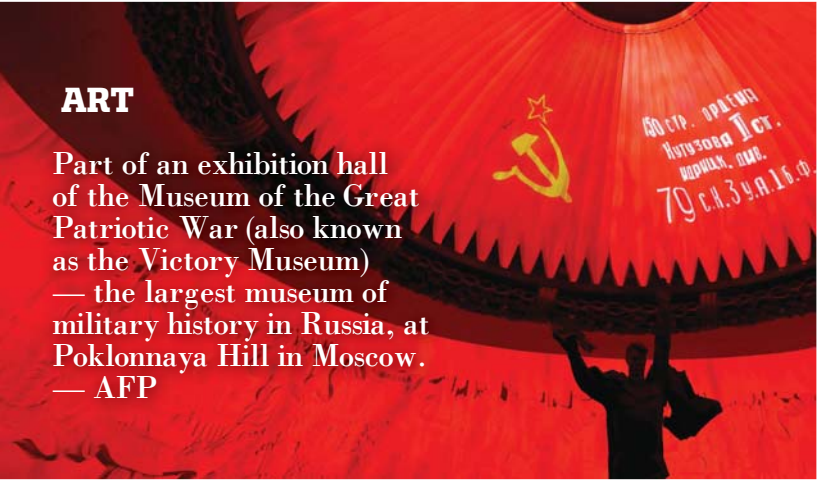
BOLLYWOOD

Bollywood actress Sushmita Sen poses for a photograph during a promotional event for her upcoming TV series ‘Taali’ in Mumbai. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A Russian cadet performs with sabers during a festival of Cossack culture in the village of Yegorlykskaya, Rostov region. — AFP



ART

Part of an exhibition hall of the Museum of the Great Patriotic War (also known as the Victory Museum) — the largest museum of military history in Russia, at Poklonnaya Hill in Moscow. — AFP

art & life

MONDAY | AUGUST 21, 2023 | SAFAR 4, 1445 AH

OMAN OBSERVER f t i y u www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om



By Khaled H Abdul Malak

On July 27, a dear friend, Khamis al Subhi, sent me a message with a sad voice. He said, “Good morning, Khaled. Sorry to disturb you early in the morning, but I wanted to tell you that our dear friend Musabbah passed away last night.”

I used to consider Musabbah somehow my Omani “Waled” (father in Arabic). I met him around 15 years ago while we were exploring, along with my wife, my son, and Deborah, a friend of ours, the lower part of Wadi Al Hijri, one of the main branches of Wadi Tanuf in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

While I was taking pictures in the wadi, I heard “Assalamu aaleykoum”. It took me a few seconds to localise the person greeting me. I took my camera and zoomed in to see an old person looking in my direction with his binoculars.

He was crossing a traverse at around 40m above the wadi bed. The old man told me to be careful and invited me to stop by his place for a coffee on my way back.

One hour later, when I joined Marta, Kevin, and Deborah, they told me that a lady came to ask them to come for coffee at her place.

After having a snack, we visited the couple in Dmeitha, their hamlet built in the caves on the right bank of the wadi.



Since that day, Musabbah and Nasra, his wife, have become very dear to my whole family, and we have visited them many times and had the chance to learn a lot from their unique experience.

They lived alone in Dmeitha; their hamlet was the last one in the canyon for around 30 years before they moved to Tanuf when “Al Waled” Musabbah had some medical issues.

A memorable trip that I did with my family, in the company of Musabbah, Nasra, Khamis, and his wife Moza, was when we followed “Al Waled” in the wadi to check on his bees after he had moved to the city.

The temperature that day was close to 40 degrees, but it did not

seem to disturb my nearly 90-year-old friend or his wife.

On their faces, I could read the happiness of being back in their natural environment. They were so proud to show us around and explain the use of several small shrubs, trees, and plants. Musabbah was practically running and jumping from stone to stone, and we could hardly follow him. He told me that he comes to the wadi for a walk at least 3 or 4 times a month. I am sure that this is what kept him healthy, physically and mentally.

Some 45 minutes after we started walking, Musabbah stopped and pointed at a tiny yellow dot on a boulder.



“This is qass,” he said, “it is a tiny droplet of wax that a bee dropped.”

He explained that it was an indicator of the presence of a beehive nearby. Only a few metres further, Musabbah went to the right bank of the wadi and started climbing towards a small cave in the cliff. He moved three flat rocks to show us the first beehive. With bare hands and nothing covering any other part of his body, Musabbah started gently moving the bees off the wax that was dangling from the ceiling of this cave-

ity in the rock with his experienced hands.

We were all terrified because the bees started to fly towards us. “Don’t worry! Just be calm; they won’t sting you!” shouted the old man.

We followed his instructions, and the bees started landing on us, waiting for Musabbah to finish his inspection of their house! It was just unreal!

The hive was still empty without any honey. As soon as our friend stood back, the bees went back to their house in the cave, and



Musabbah put back the three stones that he had moved earlier to protect the beehive from the burning sun.

Musabbah and Nasra are a unique couple whose attachment to the traditional Omani culture and ways of living, made them popular figures in their Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

“Of course, I know Musabbah and Nasra. Who doesn’t?” exclaimed a shopkeeper in Nizwa, with a big smile on his face. “They are the most unusual couple on Earth!” Rest in peace, “Al Waled Musabbah.” Oman will miss you dearly.

## INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

**ameliagerman\_**  
Wadi Ain Jarziz

**nethelly** with 2 others  
Urock Karaoke · Arabian Nights (From "Aladdin")

**thamooooor84**  
Al Mughsail Beach- شاطئ المغسيل

**SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE**

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.

# Kenya's young Maasai reconnect with their culture at Eunoto ceremony

**WITH BEAMING SMILES**, their hair dyed a red ochre and adorned with a ceremonial headdress of ostrich feathers, the young Maasai men are busy taking selfies. They have just completed the first day of Eunoto, a traditional ritual marking the transition from young warrior to adulthood. "Today we are becoming men," 22-year-old medical student

chants, single-file dances on one leg, and the adumu — the famous Maasai jump. Cows are sacrificed and their blood drunk by the young men, whose hair is shaved from their heads by their mothers. They then abandon the warrior's sword for the fimbo, the walking stick of the "elders".

called "emanyatta", but meet there during school holidays to learn Maasai history and traditions, as well as the rules of life in society. "Apart from having the Western education, traditional education also matters," says agriculture student Peter Ledama Nuntai, 24. "Our culture teaches us good behaviour." Olerina Karia is one of the

southwestern region of Kenya which is notably home to the emblematic Maasai Mara wildlife park. **'DYNAMICS OF SOCIETY HAVE CHANGED'** In theory, young Maasai men can only marry after Eunoto, and their bride must have been circumcised.



Hillary Odupoy says proudly, wearing sunglasses and a string of pearls across his bare chest. Aged between 18 and 26, the young men came in their hundreds to the village of Nailare in southwestern Kenya, all from the same generation of "morans" ("warriors" in the Maasai language), a status they have held for a decade. Many left their homes in the region to work or study in the cities of Kisii or Nairobi, or like Odupoy, further afield in the town of Machakos that lies more than seven hours away by road. "It is one of the biggest ceremonies we have in our life. We can never meet in such multitude. It unites the Maasai community," explains Odupoy. All wear red, the sacred colour of the Maasai — from their hair which is coated in a mixture of ochre and oil to their traditional plaid cloth shukas. This rite of passage brings together the families of the morans as well as local inhabitants and officials, in all several thousand people. For five days, the Eunoto ceremony features traditional guttural



**ABANDONED RITUALS** For centuries, Maasai men have gone through three rites of passage which have been inscribed since 2018 on the UNESCO list of intangible heritage in need of urgent safeguarding. Enkipaata is the transition from boyhood to moran status, Eunoto, the passage to "young elder", and finally Oling'esherr marks the start of eldership status. But such traditions of the Maasai, originally semi-nomadic herders living in southwestern Kenya and northern Tanzania, have had to adapt to the changes and demands of modern life. The morans no longer spend two years in an isolated village,

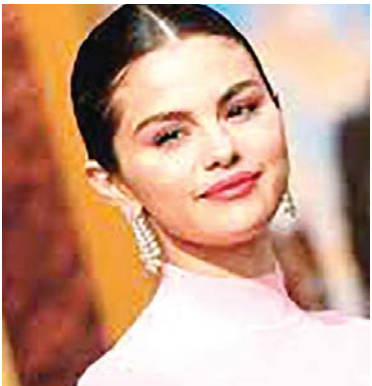
elders teaching these life lessons to the young Maasai. "We teach them to be responsible citizens and members of society," says 52-year-old Karia. "But all the traditions that were not the best for the survival of our community, such as killing a lion or the circumcision of girls, we teach them to get rid of them, especially if they collide with the law." The killing of lions was to prove the bravery of the Maasai men, but has been illegal in Kenya for decades to protect the threatened animal. The decline of the lion population was also threatening tourism, a precious source of income in the

But female circumcision, or female genital mutilation (FGM) has been banned in Kenya since 2011 and is officially no longer practised or recommended. "You can be a Maasai without killing a lion and without going through FGM," says Hillary Odupoy. Nowadays, some morans do not wait for Eunoto to marry. "The dynamics of society have changed. When they go to school, sometimes they meet their fiancées there, they marry," says Olerina Karia. "We adapt, we adjust." For many, it is a matter of survival to preserve the traditions and culture of the most famous of Kenya's 45 tribes. The Maasai are the 10th largest tribal grouping in Kenya with a population of less than 1.2 million, according to the last census in 2019. "It is our greatest fear that in the near future we may not be able to practise this culture," says Olerina Karia. "Other communities and other people are commercialising it, while the real owners who know how to practise it are not in the limelight." — **AFP**

## ENTERTAINMENT

### 'Best Of Both Worlds' as Miley Cyrus and Selena Gomez reveal music

**DISNEY CHANNEL STARS** Miley Cyrus and Selena Gomez are set to release new music on the same day. The childhood friends were supportive of one another on social media as they both revealed their plans to unveil a new single on August 25. Texas-born, child star Gomez, who is famed for her role on Disney's "Wizards Of Waverly Place," shared a video of her 2007 guest appearance on Disney series "Hannah Montana," in which Cyrus starred in the title role with the theme song, "The Best Of Both Worlds." In the episode, Gomez features as a rival of singer Hannah Montana, as the teenagers engage in a catty exchange



as they answer phones at a telethon. In the clip, Cyrus' character says: "Hey, what's up? It's Hannah Montana. What would you like to give," to which Gomez's character replied: "I'd like to give you singing lessons. Just heard your new single, ouch." Cyrus reposted the clip with the joke: "Selena and Miley announcing new singles within one hour of each other." Meanwhile, Gomez used the title of her new track, "Single Soon," and Cyrus' upcoming song, "Used To Be Young," in her supportive message, writing, "@miley Cyrus and I both have a SINGLE SOON and we are releasing on the same day. "We have been friends since we USED TO BE YOUNG. Excited for August



25th!" Their popular TV shows "Hannah Montana" and "Wizards Of Waverly Place" both aired on the Disney channel during their early teenage years. About her upcoming single, Cyrus said in a video posted on Instagram: "I decided to release 'Used To Be Young' on August 25 because this particular date historically has been important to me personally and in my career." Meanwhile, Gomez also posted on Instagram about her new music: "Y'all have been asking for new music for a while. "Since I'm not quite done with SG3, I wanted to put out a fun little song I wrote a while back that's perfect for the end of summer.SINGLE SOON. August 25th." — **PA Media/dpa**

## DISCOVERY

### New find throws light on life of slaves in Rome's Pompeii

**ARCHAEOLOGISTS HAVE** discovered a small bedroom in a Roman villa near Pompeii that was almost certainly used by slaves, throwing light on their lowly status in the ancient world, the culture ministry said on Sunday. The room was found at the Civita Giuliana villa, some 600 metres (2,000 ft) north of the walls of Pompeii, which was wiped out by a volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius nearly 2,000 years ago. It contained two beds, only one of which had a mattress, two small cabinets and a series of urns and ceramic containers, in which the remains of two mice and a rat were found. "These details once again underline the conditions of precarity and poor hygiene in which the lower ech-



elons of society lived during that time," the culture ministry said in its statement. There were no traces of grates, locks, or chains to restrain the room's inhabitants. "It seems that control was primarily exerted through the internal organisation of servitude, rather than physical barriers and restraints," said Gabriel Zuchtriegel, the director of the Archaeological Park of Pompeii. Excavations at the Civita Giuliana villa were carried out in 1907-1908, and then again from 2017, when police realised the site was being plundered by illegal diggers. Archaeologists said part of one of the beds had been destroyed by a tunnel used by robbers to access

another part of the villa. Pompeii and the surrounding countryside was submerged by volcanic ash when Mount Vesuvius exploded in AD 79, killing thousands of Romans who had no idea they were living beneath one of Europe's biggest volcanoes. The eruption buried the city in a thick layer of ash, preserving many of its residents and buildings. The site has seen a burst of recent archaeological activity aimed at halting years of decay and neglect, largely thanks to a recently concluded 105-million-euro (\$115.58 million) EU-funded project. Culture Minister Gennaro Sangiuliano said on Sunday that conservation and research efforts would continue. — **Reuters**



Oman embraces renewables, infrastructure development to address water stress

JOMAR MENDOZA  
MUSCAT, AUG 20

In a recent report released by the World Resources Institute (WRI), the Sultanate of Oman has been identified as one of the world's top five most water-stressed countries. However, amidst the challenges, Oman is taking significant steps to alleviate water stress and ensure a sustainable future with a positive outlook.

The report said that 25 countries are currently exposed to extremely high water stress annually, meaning they use over 80 per cent of their renewable water supply for irrigation, livestock, industry and domestic needs.

“The five most water-stressed countries are Bahrain, Cyprus, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman and Qatar. The water stress in these countries is mostly driven by low supply, paired with demand from domestic, agricultural and industrial use.

The most water-stressed regions are the Middle East and North Africa, where 83 per cent of the population is exposed to extremely high water stress, and South Asia, where 74 per cent is exposed,” the report added.

Completing the top 10 most water-stressed countries include Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Egypt.

Recognising the urgent need for water conservation and management, the Omani government has implemented various strategies to optimise water usage and reduce wastage. One notable initiative is the development of advanced desalination plants, which use state-of-the-art technology to convert seawater into fresh water.

These plants have significantly increased the country's water supply, helping to meet the growing demand.

One successful project is the Independent Water Project (IWP) in Sur, owned and operated by the Sharqiyah Desalination Company SAOG (SDC).

What sets this project apart is



its pioneering use of renewable electricity to power the facility, making it the first of its kind not only in Oman but also in the entire Middle East. By embracing renewable energy sources, Oman is reducing its carbon footprint while ensuring a reliable supply of fresh water.

Furthermore, Oman has made substantial investments in infrastructure projects such as dams, reservoirs, and wastewater treatment facilities. These projects aim to enhance water storage capacity, capture rainfall, and recycle treated wastewater for agricultural and industrial purposes.

By effectively managing water resources, Oman is not only ensuring a sustainable water supply but also minimising its impact on the environment.

A major flood protection scheme overlooking Salalah City in Dhofar Governorate is currently under construction.

This ambitious project aims to safeguard the city and its inhabitants from potential flooding, enhancing the overall resilience of the region. This proactive approach demonstrates Oman's commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of its citizens.

Furthermore, the Barka IV independent water project, has been operations since 2018, becoming the largest producer of fresh water in Oman. This project highlights the vital role of desalination in the country's water supply plans.

By leveraging advanced desalination technologies, Oman is ensuring a consistent and reliable source of freshwater to meet the growing demands of its population and industries.

Sohar International completes merger with HSBC Oman

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
MUSCAT, AUG 20

In a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), Sohar International Bank SAOG and HSBC Bank Oman SAOG announced yesterday, August 20, 2023, the successful completion of their merger, effective August 17, 2023.

The merger was first announced on June 20, 2023, and has been completed following the approval of shareholders of both banks, as well as the relevant regulatory authorities.

As part of the merger, all rights, obligations, assets (including contracts and employees), and liabilities of HSBC Oman have been legally transferred to Sohar International as a going concern.

HSBC Oman has been delisted from the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) and its commercial registration has been revoked. All shares of HSBC Oman have been cancelled.

The merger creates a stronger and more diversified banking group in Oman, with Sohar International now able to offer a wider range of products and services to its customers, and be better positioned to support the economic development of Oman.

At a bell-ringing ceremony hosted by (MSX) to mark the start of trading in shares of the merged



entity, top officials came together at the stock market to celebrate the milestone.

Present at the ceremony were Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Muscat Stock Exchange, and Abdullah bin Salem al Salmi, Executive President of the Capital Market Authority, among other senior executives of Sohar

International Bank.

Speaking at the event, Haitham al Salmi, CEO of (MSX), commented: “The merger of the public shareholding companies will provide strong impetus to the banking and financial sector in Oman, while serving as an attractive investment opportunity and supporting the further diversification of the market's investment offerings.”

Post-merger, Sohar International issued capital has

soared to RO 560 million, while the number of listed shares is set to reach about 5.5 billion shares owned by more than 6000 shareholders.

“We welcome Sohar International to the Muscat Stock Exchange as an economic entity in its new form that reflects the aspirations and goals of the bank's senior management to create a success story that represents a new journey to achieve greater achievements,” Al Salmi added.

Investments in Al Sharqiyah South reach RO 108m

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, AUG 20

The Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South is an attractive destination for the establishment of a number of investment and economic projects, whether local or foreign.

This is due to the development of its infrastructure, its unique nature, and its important historical and archaeological sites. It is a commercial and tourist destination in the Sultanate of

Oman.

Khalid bin Hamad al Saadi, Director of the Department of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South, explained that the number of foreign projects registered with the department in the governorate until the end of the first half of this year amounted to 124 investment projects, with a value of more than RO 108 million.

He added that the governorate is a stimulating

destination for the economy through many investment projects, including: the Blue Project, the Al Diyar project in the Ras Al Hadd district, food security projects, which are represented in several agricultural projects in the Wilayat of Al Kamil and Al Wafi, and the two shrimp farming projects in the wilayats of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, and a seaport project.

Al Saadi pointed out that the Department of Trade, Industry and Investment Promotion in

the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South — in cooperation with the Governor's Office and government and private agencies in the governorate — is working on a plan for the development of the governorate, by participating in facilitating procedures for holding annual events and activities that are held in the governorate, including the Maritime History Forum of, the Summer Forum and a number of economically stimulating exhibitions and activities in the governorate.

Fresh bid to tap Wadi Dayqah's resources for potable water use

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, AUG 20

Oman's water authorities have announced the revival of a long-stalled initiative to harness the water resources of Wadi Dayqah Dam in Muscat Governorate – a move designed to help augment potable water supplies, as well as meet the irrigation needs of local farmers.

Constructed in 2011, Wadi Dayqah Dam is presently the country's biggest man-made reservoir with a capacity to hold an estimated 100 million cubic metres of rainwater runoff at full capacity.

The dam site, located in the Wilayat of Qurayat, is a major

draw for tourists, boaters and other weekend visitors.

State-owned Nama Power and Water Procurement Co (PWP), the sole buyer of new power and potable water output, revealed recently that a proposal for the procurement of an Independent Water Project (IWP) that will tap Wadi Dayqah's resources, is now back on the front-burner.

It follows a request by Nama Water Services (formerly Oman Water & Wastewater Services Co) calling for a revival of the IWP initiative.

“Nama Water Services has requested PWP to resume the project development of Wadi Dhayqah IWP and requested to procure a capacity of 65,000



m3/d, provided that the project will supply 35,000 m3/d of desalinated water to Nama Water Services network, while the rest of the capacity will be supplied to the farmers for irrigation water

in the local vicinity,” PWP stated in its recently published 7-Year Statement covering the power and water outlook for the 2023 – 2029 timeframe.

“PWP initiated the

procurement in coordination with the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and relevant stakeholders,” PWP noted, adding that supplies to local farmers will be coordinated through the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

A previous effort to procure a privately funded and operated water project was launched in 2019, with the PWP inviting interested developers to submit Expressions of Interest (EoIs). It centred on a proposal for the development of a surface water treatment plant with a net production capacity of 125,000 m3 per day.

The IWP was proposed to

be set up at a distance of about 6.5km from the reservoir and connected to the reservoir and the transmission network via new pipelines.

Further details, alongside a procurement timeframe, about the scaled-down version of the IWP will be disclosed in the next edition of the 7-Year Statement, which is scheduled to be published next year, PWP said.

When eventually operational, the Wadi Dayqah IWP will be the first water project in the Sultanate of Oman that will use surface water as feedstock, as opposed to seawater, which is presently the principal resource for potable water production in desalination projects.

## Oman Air, Oman Airports dissolve boards of directors, elect new members



MUSCAT: The general assemblies of Oman Air and Oman Airports on Saturday held separate meetings during which they dissolved their respective boards of directors and elected new boards of directors for both general assemblies.

The new board of directors of Oman Air and Oman Airports later held separate meetings for both companies under the chairmanship of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Chairman of the Board.

The meetings approved Oman Air's new organisational structure and the new committees of the Board of Directors. It also appointed a Deputy Chairman of Board of Directors of the company.

The Oman Air board of directors also approved the implementation of executive action for its financial sustainability programme. It underscored the significance

of conducting the programme in accordance with a comprehensive reform vision comprising commercial regulations and corporate governance of human capital.

Meanwhile, Oman Airports Company's Board of Directors reviewed the firm's strategy for the next five years, discussed the company's financial accounts for the first half of the current year (2023) and approved the formation of new committees for the company's board of directors. It also appointed a Deputy Chairman of Board of Directors.

Al Maawali stressed the need to exert concerted efforts during the next stage to enhance the capabilities of civil aviation sector companies in line with the government's directives that focus on maximising investment returns, achieving in-country added value (ICV) and realising financial sustainability in the sector.

— ONA

## New joint venture to transform hydroponic farming in Oman

MUSCAT: Nailesh Kanaksi Khimji (NKK) Investments, a visionary company in the agritech, green hydrogen, and sustainability sectors, has announced a strategic partnership with UrbanKisaan, an acclaimed Agri-tech startup from United States, with its research centre in India. This alliance is set to transform hydroponic farming practices in Oman, UAE, and Saudi Arabia.

Under the umbrella of this joint venture, NKK Investments aims to introduce UrbanKisaan's advanced hydroponic and vertical farming technology to Oman. The focal point of this venture is to popularise UrbanKisaan's innovative farming techniques, rendering them more affordable and accessible to Omani farmers.

By harnessing the power of hydroponics and vertical farming, the joint-venture seeks to empower local agriculturalists to cultivate higher yields with significantly fewer resources, consequently enabling them to invest wisely in the future of farming.

A key facet of this collaboration lies in the intent to extend UrbanKisaan's revolutionary technology across Oman's borders, to benefit farmers in the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

This technology, proven to be environmentally conscious and resource-efficient, allows crops to flourish with minimal water and land utilisation in comparison to conventional methods. The result is not only a reduction in the carbon footprint but also the production of highly nutritious crops that contribute to a healthier populace.

Shedding light on the joint-venture, Chirayu Khimji, Director of NKK Investments and KR



Group stated, "We would like to thank the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and allied authorities, for providing a robust framework to support this Joint-Venture.

Our partnership with UrbanKisaan aligns perfectly with our commitment to fostering sustainable advancements in agriculture within the Sultanate of Oman. Most importantly, we will be able to serve our customers with technology to allow them to grow more with less."

"By combining NKK Investments' strategic insights with UrbanKisaan's pioneering technology, we are poised to reshape the future of farming in Oman and help our nation achieve food security targets in line with His Majesty Sultan Haitham's Oman Vision 2040. We are confident that the proliferation of our technology

within the Sultanate of Oman will allow the people of Oman to enjoy pesticide and GMO-free fruits and vegetables at the lowest pricing to date", he continued.

Sharing his perspective, Vihari Kanukollu, CEO and Co-founder of UrbanKisaan mentioned, "Our collaboration with NKK Investments marks a significant step forward in realising our mission to make advanced farming technology accessible to a global audience.

Together, we are creating a more sustainable and productive agricultural landscape."

**Empowering Omani farmers:** The core mission of this partnership is to equip Omani farmers with state-of-the-art hydroponic and vertical farming technology to allow them to grow more produce with far fewer costs. By offering access to cutting-edge solutions, the collaboration aims

to amplify agricultural output while keeping investments within reach.

**Sustainability leading the way:** By revolutionising traditional farming practices, NKK Investments and UrbanKisaan are steering Oman towards a greener and more self-sustaining agricultural future, fostering positive impacts on both the environment and the local community.

**Reducing carbon footprint:** The infusion of hyper-local urban farms into Oman's agricultural landscape is anticipated to create a substantial reduction in the carbon footprint associated with the traditional supply chain. UrbanKisaan's innovative farming methodologies not only conserve water but also promise higher yields, setting a benchmark for environmental stewardship in the region.

## Bank Nizwa's minor account sees overwhelming response

MUSCAT: The leading Islamic banking institution in Oman, Bank Nizwa, has been receiving an overwhelmingly positive response to its fully Sharia compliant Minor Account.

Thoughtfully created for parents to secure their children's future, the Minor Account, aligned with the principles of Islamic finance, is one of Bank Nizwa's key propositions in the Sultanate of Oman's competitive finance landscape.

Ever since its rollout, the bank has recorded registrations in substantial numbers — a key indicator of the growing need for Sharia compliant banking solutions in the Sultanate of Oman.

Bank Nizwa's Minor Account offering is a well-rounded solution to parents seeking to secure their children's financial futures in alignment with Islamic finance best practices.

The bank's move to facilitate a strong financial foundation for children is being received with much admiration and approval across communities.

It also serves the key pillar of Oman Vision 2040 that outlines the promotion of social protection and social responsibility, more so by supporting the needs of Oman's future generations.

To cater to the high demand for enrollment, The bank has extended its opening hours from 3pm to 5pm at selected branches across the Sultanate of Oman to make it more convenient for parents to open Minor Accounts.

Commenting on the immensely positive response the bank has received, Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa stated, "At Bank Nizwa, we have always strived to offer our customers with full-fledged Islamic banking solutions that cater to their every need.

We believe that instilling a savings mindset and essential money management skills in the younger generation is of utmost importance to their personal



growth as well as to the Sultanate of Oman's progress.

Our Minor Account promotes the concept of savings for parents, and fosters a sense of financial responsibility among children, a trait that will serve them well throughout their lifetime.

We are proud to see the turnout this product is garnering and look forward to serving more customers with our Minor Account."

Owing to its commitment to developing an array of Islamic banking products and services for its customers, Bank Nizwa's Minor Account gives parents the opportunity to not only ensure their children are set up for bright futures brimming with endless possibilities, but also helps them inculcate the core values and ethics of Islamic finance in their young ones. The Minor Account is a pivotal step in a child's financial journey. By adopting early savings and investment for their children, parents can pave the way for them to excel in education, pursue their dreams, and achieve their life goals.

## Enjoy exciting journeys in the Toyota Corolla

MUSCAT: Toyota's popular Corolla has for generations been a preferred travel partners for many across the world.

The Corolla's impressive fuel-efficiency, easy maintenance and overall ownership period experiences have contributed immensely to the Corolla's success.

Powering the Corolla is a 2.0-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine which produces 168 hp and 20.39 kg-m of torque. For more immersive driving experiences, the engine is paired to a Direct Shift CVT transmission.

Customers looking for a more fuel-efficient option can choose the 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine Corolla that produces 121 hp and 15.7 kg-m of torque.

This is paired with a CVT transmission.

The Corolla's interior adopts a simple yet appealing style, with impressive space and integrated functional parts that combine to create a refined elegance.

The ergonomically designed seats feature new cushion material, while the armrest and ample legroom offer superior comfort for the rear-seat passengers.

Making every drive a delightful



experience are a range of features, which vary based on the trim level.

Occupants also benefit from AC vents for the rear seat, a moonroof, 4.2-inch multi-information display (MID), 8-inch display audio, cruise control, six-speaker sound system, and 60:40 split-folding rear seats.

As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the Corolla, which includes a comprehensive array of features to protect its occupants, such as four SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Brake Assist, Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD), Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), among many others.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor

Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade.

Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions and fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories.

Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications.

For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit [www.toyotaoman.com](http://www.toyotaoman.com), [www.youtube.com/toyotaoman](http://www.youtube.com/toyotaoman), [www.facebook.com/toyotaoman](http://www.facebook.com/toyotaoman) and [instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/](http://instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/).

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**HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER**

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Said bin Khalifa al Busaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court Shakh Al Maktar bin Abdullah bin Issa al Harthy, took the oath of office at Al Basmala Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

**UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN**

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

**NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH**

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

**STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN**

**SAMUEL KUTTY**  
MUSCAT: The frequent orders and fervent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are failing on deaf ears. A drive around the downtown Muscat and its adjoining areas reveals how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder. While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not. "In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves. It is more than enough times that social distancing is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19," while expressing his awe, Hamad said. "The attitude of some people is not acceptance that they paved the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can ensure them away," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4

**SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS**

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



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# Navigating the challenges of product development



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The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant.

As-Salaam-Alaikum, Embarking on the journey of product development can be both exciting and daunting for startups. The path to transforming an innovative idea into a tangible, market-ready product is rife with challenges and intricacies.

In this article, we'll navigate through some of these challenges and shed light on strategies that can guide startups toward successful product development.

**1. Concept refinement:** Begin by crystallising your idea. What problem does your product solve? Who is your target audience? Define the core features and functionalities that will address your audience's needs effectively.

**2. Market research:** Thoroughly understand your target market.

Identify your competitors, study their products, and discern gaps that your product can fill. This information will help you position your product uniquely.

**3. Prototyping:** Develop a prototype or minimum viable product (MVP) that showcases the basic features and functionality. This allows you to gather user feedback early, enabling you to iterate and refine your product.

**4. Resource allocation:** Allocate resources wisely — time, finances, and personnel. Having a clear budget and timeline can prevent overruns and keep your development on track.

**5. Agile methodology:** Adopt an agile approach to development. Break the process into smaller phases, allowing you to adapt to changes and implement improvements as your progress.

**6. Cross-functional collaboration:** Product development involves various disciplines — design, engineering, marketing, etc. Foster collaboration among these teams to ensure a holistic approach and a seamless product outcome.

**7. User-centric design:** Design with the user in mind. Prioritise user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) design to create a product that is intuitive, easy to use, and visually appealing.

**8. Testing and quality assurance:** Rigorously test your product to identify and rectify any bugs or glitches. Quality assurance is vital to ensure a stable and reliable product.

**9. Iterative refinement:** Feedback from testing is invaluable. Continuously refine your product based on user

feedback and changing market dynamics.

**10. Launch strategy:** Plan a strategic product launch. Consider factors such as timing, marketing channels, and engagement tactics to generate initial traction and interest.

**11. Post-launch support:** Launch day is just the beginning. Provide ongoing support, updates, and improvements based on user feedback to keep your product relevant and competitive.

**12. Regulatory compliance:** Depending on your product's nature, ensure that it complies with any relevant regulations or standards.

**13. Scalability:** Design your product with scalability in mind. As your user base grows, your product should be able to handle increased demand without major disruptions.

Remember, the process of product development is dynamic and requires adaptability. As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) advised, "Take benefit of five before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty, your free-time before your preoccupation, and your life before your death."

Similarly, seize the opportunities and tackle the challenges of product development while they're within your grasp.

Stay tuned for our upcoming article, "Crafting an Effective Go-to-Market Strategy," where we'll delve into the crucial steps of introducing your product to the world and positioning it for success. Maas salama!

## Depreciation of Indian rupee sparks uptick in remittances



VIJAY VALECHA

The Indian rupee (INR) has depreciated over 1.2% from its late-July high to a five-month low against the dollar. In doing so, it declined past 83 per dollar for the first time in nearly ten months! A stronger greenback, rising US treasury yields, and a weaker Chinese yuan contributed to the rupee's descent.

Historically, a slump in the rupee relative to the USD and AED is inadvertently followed by a surge in remittances to India by the NRI community. This is because a weaker rupee allows NRIs to send more money to India while spending the same amount in their host nations.

The Indian rupee is likely to remain under pressure in the near-term due to several reasons.

For starters, even though market participants are broadly expecting interest rates to have nearly peaked in the US, the "sell-the-dollar" theme will not automatically lend support to the Indian rupee.

Since last autumn, the currency appears to have found equilibrium around 82 per dollar — a level that is consistent with real-effective exchange rate.

This was likely driven by the uptick in RBI reserves from approximately \$525 billion in October 2022 to \$601.5 billion as on August 4, 2023, surpassing the \$600 billion-mark for the first time in 16 months.

By bidding for the greenback, the RBI has somewhat offset the impact of increased foreign flows into India as well as the broader weakness in the US Dollar Index.

This has ensured the rupee remains in a tight trading range since its record low in October

2022. As a result, the rupee has underperformed any rally in Asian currency peers while still losing less ground during times of dollar outperformance.

Meanwhile, headline inflation in India surged to 7.44% in July to a 15-month peak, substantially higher than the RBI's upper tolerance limit of 6%. Nonetheless, Core CPI decelerated slightly to 4.9% in July from 5.1% in June — the lowest reading in nearly three years.

Nevertheless, despite the uptick in inflationary pressures, the RBI is not expected to tighten financial conditions with another rate hike after it took a pause on August 10, 2023. By virtue of these factors, the INR is likely to remain subdued.

This presents an opportune moment for the NRI community to remit money to India, especially with the imminent arrival of prominent festivals like Onam and Raksha Bandhan in August; Ganesh Chaturthi, Durga Puja, and Dussehra in October; and Dhanteras and Diwali in November.

Interestingly, remittances account for around 3% of Indian GDP and are the second largest source of external financing following service exports. They also serve as a financial cushion in the event India's trade deficit widens.

According to a World Bank report, India received a substantial \$89.4 billion in remittances in 2021, elevating its position as a top recipient globally.

This figure rose to \$100 billion in 2022, marking a YoY growth of 12%. Recently, the US overtook the UAE as the top destination for remittances.

(The author is Chief Investment Officer of Century Financial)

## Debt supercycle comes to China



KENNETH ROGOFF

The author, Professor of Economics and Public Policy at Harvard University and recipient of the 2011 Deutsche Bank Prize in Financial Economics, was the chief economist of the International Monetary Fund from 2001 to 2003.

The 2008 financial crisis in the United States kicked off a debt supercycle, which spread to Europe in 2010 and has recently engulfed many of the world's low-income and lower-middle-income countries. Could the debt woes of Country Garden, the behemoth Chinese real-estate developer now facing billions of dollars in losses, augur the cycle's next turn?

The answer remains unclear. While the Chinese authorities have a remarkable track record when it comes to containing economic crises, the challenges posed by a significant growth slowdown, combined with high debt levels — especially for local governments and the property sector — are unprecedented.

China's current problems can be traced back to its massive post-2008 investment stimulus, a significant portion of which fuelled the real-estate construction boom.

After years of building housing and offices at breakneck speed, the bloated property sector — which accounts for 23% of the country's GDP (26% counting imports) — is now yielding diminishing returns.

This comes as little surprise, as China's housing stock and infrastructure rival that of many advanced economies while its per capita income remains comparatively low.

At the same time, in what had once seemed like a race between a tortoise and a hare, the US is speeding toward artificial-intelligence-powered technological innovation and higher long-term economic growth.



A man cycles outside the construction sites in Beijing's central business area. — Reuters

WHILE SOME ECONOMISTS MAY ARGUE THAT SECULAR STAGNATION IS TO BLAME FOR CHINA'S ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN, CONCERNS ABOUT SUSTAINED SLOWER GROWTH ARE OVERBLOWN. IF THE COUNTRY FALLS INTO A RECESSION, IT WOULD CONSTITUTE THE NEXT TURN OF THE DEBT SUPERCYCLE THAT BEGAN IN THE US IN 2008 AND MOVED TO EUROPE IN 2010.

As highly respected *Wall Street Journal* economics commentator Greg Ip recently put it, "No one talks about secular stagnation now," referring to a theory that a chronic deficiency in global demand and economically important innovation will hold down growth and real interest rates long into the future.

Funnily enough, I said much the same at a conference seven years ago. In my presentation, which was based on my 2015 paper "Debt Supercycle, Not Secular Stagnation," I explained that post-crisis malaise was typical and would at least partly fade.

I then conjectured that "in nine years, nobody will be talking about secular stagnation" — a perhaps hyperbolic remark to underscore the point.

Over the past decade, the overwhelming consensus in academic and policy circles has been that the world is deeply mired in an era of ultra-low interest rates driven by weak growth fundamentals. And in fact, it remains so today.

For example, Northwestern University economist Robert J. Gordon's magisterial history *The Rise and Fall of American Growth* offers persuasive arguments for the death of innovation and the

end of growth. Gordon posits that post-1970s inventions — even the computer revolution — are not nearly as economically important as, say, the steam engine or electricity generation.

Billionaire investor Peter Thiel and former world chess champion Garry Kasparov made similar arguments in a 2012 debate on the topic of "Innovation or Stagnation" at the University of Oxford.

Arguing on the "innovation" side of that debate, I pointed to advances in chess that heralded the coming of an AI age, while also noting that commercial innovation invariably stalls at times, for example during the Great Depression.

In fact, my greatest concern has never been an end to innovation, but rather that the rise of AI will outpace our ability to control it.

There are strong arguments for secular stagnation on the demand side, owing to demographic decline.

In a brilliant 2013 speech, Harvard economist Lawrence H. Summers argued that only a continuing shortfall in global demand could explain the era's ultra-low interest rates, triggering an avalanche of research on fundamentals that could explain the demand deficiency. Progressive politicians have used this work to make the case that bigger government is needed to fill the void.

Summers, however, was more circumspect, advocating increased investment in infrastructure and education, and outright transfers from rich to poor — ideas with which I strongly agree.

But despite some good arguments for secular stagnation, concerns about sustained slower growth are overblown. Charles Goodhart and Manoj Pradhan have challenged the view that demographic decline inevitably lowers demand by pointing to the rapidly growing elderly population.

Moreover, long-term trends are not wholly responsible for the spectacular collapse in real interest rates after the 2008 crisis; the collapse was at least partly because of the crisis itself.

After all, interest rates also fell to zero during the Great Depression and stayed there — until they didn't. Notably, the rate on ten-year inflation-indexed Treasury bonds is currently well above its average level of about zero from 2012 to 2021.

The debt supercycle may have lasted longer than initially expected, perhaps because of the pandemic. But it was a critical piece of the story, and now, as China's economy falters, it is the best explanation for what might come next.

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