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OMAN'S BANKING SECTOR SHOWS STEADY GROWTH IN ROE



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MAESTRO OF MAKEUP KEEPS AN INSPIRATIONAL AURA FOR WOMEN



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DJOKOVIC BACK ON TOP, SWIATEK ROLLS ON



MUSCAT

USED TYRE PROCESSING FACTORY OPENS

The Sultanate of Oman's first tyre recycling plant was opened in Saham on Monday. Initiated by Global Recycle LLC, a subsidiary of Tinna Rubber and Infrastructure Limited, India, a leading player in the recycling industry, in cooperation with a local partner, the facility is equipped with the latest technology and operated by a highly skilled team to process 6,000 metric tonnes of discarded tyres annually and will contribute in reducing the environmental impact of waste tyres, a challenge faced by many nations.

DETAILS ON P2

ISLAMABAD

COURT SUSPENDS IMRAN'S SENTENCE

Imran Khan's prison sentence for a graft conviction was suspended on Tuesday, his lawyer said, but it was unclear if the former Pakistan prime minister would be immediately released. A spokesman for Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said the Islamabad High Court had overturned a lower court's decision this month to imprison him for three years, a judgement which barred him from contesting upcoming elections. Khan's party and lawyers said he was granted bail.

DETAILS ON P6



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SECOND PHASE OF TURMERIC CULTIVATION IN DHOFAR

SALALAH: Funded by the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund (AFDF), the second phase of cultivation of turmeric is under way in Dhofar Governorate. Spanning over a period of three years, the project, worth RO 50,000, targets four wilayats, including Salalah, Taqah, Dhalkout and Rakhyouit.

This comes as the harvest of the first stage of cultivation of about 6 tonnes of fresh organic turmeric on an area estimated at 1.4 acres began.

In a statement, Radwan bin Abdullah al Ibrahim, Director of the Agricultural Development Department in Dhofar, said choosing Dhofar Governorate for such a project is driven by the fact that the seasonal agriculture represents a crucial part of the economic income.

Some of the prominent seasonal crops cultivated in the governorate include cowpea, locally called 'Dajar', white corn, and maize 'Mahindo'. Lemon trees, papaya, sugarcane, and some other vegetables are also grown for daily consumption.

Additionally, some citizens have recently rolled out some initiatives to



cultivate some distinctive crops, prompting necessary support for better productivity, and, consequently, maximising revenues. Among the most notable crops grown in these areas are green apples, berries, cherry and turmeric. Plans are on to develop crops such as cardamom, mushrooms, strawberries, saffron, ginger and grapes. Stretching over an area of 17,500 square metres, the second phase is projected to produce 25 tonnes, with sale volume to reach RO 37,000 for 55 beneficiaries. — ONA

‘Mandatory products list’ to promote local factories, suppliers

MUSCAT: The Secretariat-General of the Tender Board on Tuesday launched mandatory guidelines requiring contractors doing business with the government to purchase products and services from Omani factories and local suppliers.

The list, which will be

included in all tenders and government procurements, was compiled in coordination with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The mandatory list establishes competition between companies and prepares them to meet the requirements of local content,

so that their products could be considered for support through government purchases. The trial version of the mandatory list will be activated for a period of six months.

In its first phase, the list will include 9 categories of products from 57 commodities. These cover building materials,

electrical appliances, oil equipment, steel products, foodstuff, plastic products, paper tools, furniture, petroleum and chemical materials.

The list also includes 11 categories of services that cover 96 items, namely electrical works, civil and construction works, traffic safety and general

maintenance of buildings, primary equipment on the job site, engineering and professional designing, information technology, manpower services, supply of machinery and equipment, supply and transfer of cables and general supplies and services.

DETAILS ON P13

STARS, LEGENDS AND DREAMS...



The Royal Opera House Muscat on Tuesday unveiled the details of the programme for the Season 2023/2024. The season, entitled "Stars, Legends, Dreams", is built from an amazing variety of shows, including four popular operas, eight exhilarating Arab music concerts and shows, four classical concerts, two extraordinary ballets, one jazz evening, two world music stars, and six spectacular shows. The opera house said that there is so much magic to enjoy and so much inspiration to be gained during the new season. DETAILS ON P20

‘Qakbot’ hacking network taken down

WASHINGTON: US authorities on Tuesday said an international law enforcement operation had taken down the notorious "Qakbot" malware platform used extensively by cybercriminals in a variety of financial crimes.

First discovered more than a decade ago, Qakbot is commonly spread through malicious, boo-

bytrapped emails sent to unsuspecting victims. The US Department of Justice said the operation, nicknamed Duck Hunt, involved the Federal Bureau of Investigation as well as France, Germany, the Netherlands, Britain, Romania and Latvia. US attorney Martin Estrada said the move against Qakbot was the most significant

technological and financial operation ever led by the department against a botnet. The term botnet is used to refer to an interconnected network of infected computers that hackers use to spread viruses.

"Together we have taken down Qakbot and saved countless victims from future attacks," he told a news conference. — Reuters

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Around 782,818 students started the new academic year (2023/2024) on Tuesday.

The total number of students in grades (1-4) stood at 304,913, while the total number of students in grades (5-8) was 261,804, the total number of students in grades (9-12) reached 120,101, and the total number of new students in the first grade was 76,724, while the total number of special education students reached 1,769.

These students are attending 1,270 schools, including 356 schools for the first cycle, 68 for the second cycle, 121 in grades (9-12), and 25 in grades (11-12), and 700 operating in the morning and evening shifts, while the total number of schools operating in the evening shift stands at 133, while the total number of new schools stands at 29.

On the other hand, the total number of teachers in government schools for this academic year reached 60,840, and administrators and technicians constituted 11,509, the number of special education teachers reached 284, with 65 administrators in special education schools in various wilayats of the country.

Meanwhile, Dhofar Governorate saw a total of 63,739 students going back to 164 schools across the governorate after a long summer break.

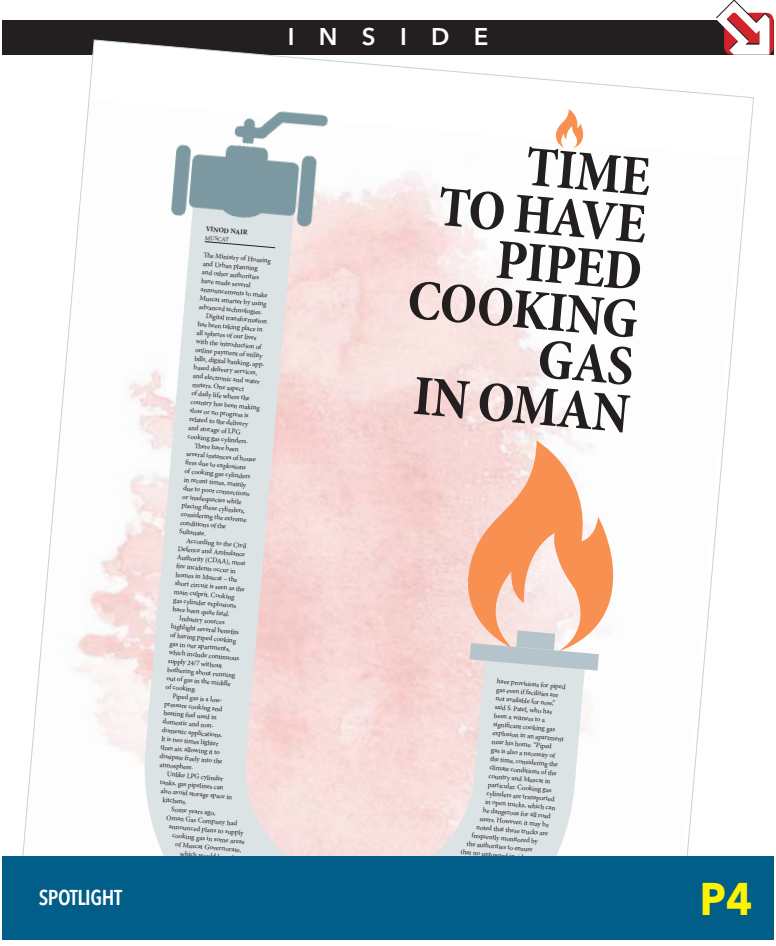
Amid welcoming activities, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate also welcomed around 111,198 students at 169 schools, including two new ones, while North Al Batinah received 157,703 students on the first day of the school year across its 235 teaching premises.

Ayman al Shaqsi, student, said, "At the outset of the new academic year, I feel jubilant to catch up with my classmates and teachers. We were handed over our new books and school timetable."

Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, said: "The ministry seeks to implement a number of educational goals, the most important of which is to continue to update and develop school curricula in line with the requirements of sustainable development and global trends."

"We look forward to achieving Oman Vision 2040, and empowering new teachers in the teaching and learning processes through the implementation of training programme, establishment of the third forum for school administrations, and setting up the second supervisory forum," he added.

INSIDE



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TO HAVE
PIPED
COOKING
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IN OMAN

SPOTLIGHT

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ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER, RAO COMMANDER RECEIVE UK MILITARY OFFICIAL



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received on Tuesday Gen Sir Patrick Sanders, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army and his accompanying delegation.

During the meeting, the two sides

reviewed the march of the historical relations binding the two countries and discussed a set of military topics of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by the Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) and the UK appointed-ambassador

to the Sultanate of Oman. Also, Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) received Gen Sir Patrick Sanders and his accompanying delegation.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed a set of military topics of mutual

interest. It was attended by senior RAO officers.

Meanwhile, Gen Sir Patrick Sanders and his accompanying delegation visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). The guest was accompanied The guest and his accompanying delegation were briefed on

the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre in the safety of the maritime environment.

They toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies used in carrying out its national duties. — ONA

BEWARE OF THE DOWNWARD WIND, MET OFFICE ALERTS

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

As the month of August draws to a conclusion, the summer influences carry on.

The Oman Met Office has urged the public to pay attention and take caution as downward winds are expected to reach higher than 30 knots in some parts of Oman. This could also cause the rising of dust.

As per the Omani numerical model, the mountainous areas of the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah South and Al Sharqiyah North are likely to be affected by downward winds.

Horizontal visibility might be reduced during thunder, rain, dust rising and fog formation, said the Oman Met Office in their weather forecast. The sea is expected to be rough along the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea.

Expansion of local formations on the Al Hajar Mountains continued with scattered thunderstorms accompanied by active winds on parts of the Al Hajar Mountains.



Speaking to Observer, the weather expert at Oman Met Office said the end of summer, astronomically, is on September 23. He said the summer temperatures waning begins with the Suhail star's appearance, which usually indicates cooler weather. The Suhail star is now visible.

According to the weather forecaster, Suhail coincides with the beginning of temperature moderation during the transition period. As of now, the weather is going through the transition phase.

Chances of local thunderstorms

continue over the Al Hajar Mountains and the adjacent areas, according to the weather experts, and on Tuesday, fast downward winds and hailstones were expected.

Partly cloudy to cloudy skies are expected along the coastal areas of Dhofar Governorate and adjoining mountains with intermittent drizzle and chances of isolated rain on Wednesday and mainly clear skies over the rest of the governorates with a chance of convective clouds development and isolated rain, occasionally

thundershower associated with downdraft over mountains and adjoining areas towards the afternoon.

Chances of low clouds and fog formation late night to early morning along parts of coastal areas of the Arabian Sea and Oman Sea. There is also the chance of blowing dust over desert and open areas.

Along the Oman Sea coasts, winds are expected to be easterly to northeasterly light to moderate during the day time, becoming variable light at night and along the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea, it will be southerly to southwesterly moderate to fresh, while over the rest of the governorates, it will be southerly to southeasterly light to moderate occasionally fresh over desert areas.

The humidity in Muscat ranges between 40 per cent and 90 per cent, whereas in Salalah, it is ranging between 80 per cent and 99 per cent.

The temperature has slightly eased back to the mid-forties except for Marmul and Fahud, topping at 46 degrees Celsius.

Hotel revenues in Oman grow 27.8pc to RO 122m in July 2023



MUSCAT: The revenues of 3-5-star hotels in Oman stood at RO 122,530,000 as at the end of July 2023, up by 27.8 per cent over the corresponding period in 2022.

Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) show that the total number of hotel guests grew by 25.8 per cent to 1,098,157 by the end of July 2023, compared to 872,796 during the corresponding period in 2022.

Hotel occupancy posted a growth of 10.3 per cent.

The number of Omani guests reached 411,551.

Meanwhile, the number of guests from the GCC countries stood at 99,947, marking a rise of 19.1 per cent. The number of the European guests also increased by 44.4 per cent to stand at 259,649.

The Americans were 33,420 were Americans (up by 3.3 per cent), 6,365 were citizens from African countries (37 per cent up), while the number of hotel guests from Asian countries stood at 163,779, marking an increase by 47.1 per cent. The number of hotel guests from Oceania countries surged by 242.7 per cent to 24,755.

— ONA

Sultanate of Oman's first tyre recycling plant opens

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate of Oman's first tyre recycling plant opened under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yusef Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in the presence of other dignitaries, officials, and local community members in Saham on Monday.

Initiated by Global Recycle LLC, a subsidiary of Tinna Rubber and Infrastructure Limited, India, a leading player in the recycling industry, in cooperation with Dr Hilal bin Nasser bin Mansoor al Rawahi, a local partner, the facility is equipped with the latest technology and operated by a highly skilled team to process 6000 metric tonnes of discarded tyres annually will contribute to reducing the environmental

impact of waste tyres, a challenge faced by many nations.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Hilal bin Nasser bin Mansoor al Rawahi, Managing Partner of the project, said that the recycling plant signifies technological advancement and demonstrates Oman's dedication to becoming a regional leader in sustainable practices.

"This initiative to process tonnes of used tyres annually is a manifestation towards the national commitment to minimising waste and conserving valuable resources while producing constructive, developmental products," he added.

Gaurav Sekhri, Joint Managing Director of the initiative, notified that Oman's most advanced tyre recycling plant aligns perfectly with its mission to create a cleaner, greener future.



"Through cutting-edge techniques, we will transform discarded tyres into valuable resources, thereby reducing pollution and contributing to Oman's sustainable development

goals," he said.

The tyre recycling process at the plant adheres to the highest international standards, ensuring that the resulting materials can be utilised in various industries. This

not only reduces the burden on landfills but also conserves energy and raw materials, contributing to a circular economy.

The inauguration ceremony also served as a platform to express gratitude to the Oman government, regulatory authorities, local communities, and industry partners who played pivotal roles in making this project a reality. Their support reinforces the collaborative spirit necessary for driving positive change in the region.

As Global recycle continues its journey towards a greener future, the tyre recycling plant stands as a testament to innovation, environmental stewardship, and sustainable progress.

The advanced regional process plant enables the recovery of materials such as crumb rubber, steel, and fibre from waste tyres

and will recover 99 per cent of materials from the waste tyre.

The promoters further hoped that ELTs are a valuable resource that can be recycled up to 99 per cent of its weight. The recycled materials can be used for various applications by making new rubber products like tyres, conveyor belts, rubber mats, rubber insulation, brake pads, sports turfings, auto components and roads, thereby supporting the circular economy.

Their business model has been highly successful in India and will be able to generate hundreds of direct employment create export possibilities where Oman can become an ideal location to export recycled rubber materials to the Indian sub-continent and central Asia for the various finished products that are extensively used in making new rubber products.



Oman seeks to further promote tourism in international market



KABEER YOUSUF
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In an attempt to enhance the global demand for Oman tourism, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism organised a session on Global Distribution Systems (GDS) for representatives of Oman's hospitality sector on Tuesday.

GDS systems simplify the booking process for both travel agents and tourist hotels, provide a seamless and efficient booking experience that enables international visitors to explore the tourism potential of the Sultanate of Oman.

The workshop aimed to propel the tourism industry in the Sultanate of Oman towards new horizons by increasing bookings in Omani hotels and enabling tourism establishments to leverage these systems in attracting a larger number of visitors to their facilities.

GDS systems are central

The workshop aimed to propel the tourism industry in the Sultanate of Oman towards new horizons by increasing bookings in Omani hotels and enabling tourism establishments to leverage these systems in attracting a larger number of visitors to their facilities

booking platforms that provide travel agents from various countries with real-time access to tourism services, such as flight and hotel rates, car rentals, and other essential traveller products.

These systems serve as a crucial link between travel service providers (hotels) and reservation sources (travel agents), allowing them to efficiently manage bookings and distribute their offerings on a global scale.

"The workshop stems from the initiative of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism which seeks to enhance Oman's presence in the global tourism market

and boost revenue flows in line with the Omani tourism strategy and comprehensive tourism development plan," said Haitham al Ghassani, Director General of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

This workshop is part of the implementation of several initiatives and programmes aimed at promoting the Sultanate of Oman as a tourist destination while ensuring a prosperous future for the hotel sector in the country.

The event brought together representatives of various hotel establishments in the Sultanate of Oman, along with two major

providers of GDS services, Travelport and Amadeus.

Representatives of these platforms presented their innovative solutions by facilitating direct communication between service providers and the representatives of hospitality sector in Oman across its various categories.

"The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism recognises the positive impact that the hospitality sector in the Sultanate of Oman will gain from the collaboration of the representatives of hospitality sector with these platforms," Al Ghassani said.

He stated that integrating hotels into the global platforms offer a multitude of benefits, including expanding the reach to a wide network of travel agencies and online booking platforms, leading to a significant increase in reservations from around the world.

Talented students honoured at Talenko Hackathon

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, AUG 29

Highlighting the Sultanate of Oman's Strategic National Pursuits in Research and Innovation, Sohar University played host to the conclusion of the Talenko Hackathon's maiden session for the year 2023. The event, spanning both scientific and literary domains, was organised by the New Talents Company under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation.

In his opening speech, Ahmed al Ghafri, CEO of the Talents and Innovations Organisation, and the visionary behind the Talinco Global Talent Project Innovations, expressed his pride in the achievements and successes of the talent incubator's activities, notably the Hackathon Talenco, in first session of 2023. He acknowledged the diverse talents from all walks of Omani society and acclaimed the event's widespread international recognition and acclaim.

Al-Ghafri extended

gratitude to the parents, emphasising the collaborative efforts that led to realising the project's goals. He urged parents to nurture their children's talents in a rapidly evolving era of innovation, underlining the importance of creating a conducive environment for their growth and development. Al Ghafri reiterated the significance of reforming education paradigms to align with the demands of a changing job landscape, fostering minds that can alleviate burdens and contribute to national progress through ingenuity and creativity.

Dr Hamdan al Fazari, Vice-Chancellor of Sohar University, shared in his closing speech that the university is a trailblazer in supporting talents and innovations. The institution has incorporated this ethos into its very structure, designating a position for research and innovation oversight, ensuring that research, creativity, and innovation endeavours by students, faculty, and the community at large are duly recognised and supported.



Al Aswad Fort opens window to Shinas past



SHINAS: Al Aswad Fort in the Wilayat of Shinas in the Al Batinah North Governorate embodies the legacy of history with its archaeological character.

Hassan bin Sulaiman al Jabri, Director of the Heritage and Tourism Department in Al Batinah North Governorate, said that Al Aswad Forts is one of the important historical forts in the wilayats and restoration was completed in 2015.

He added that the fort takes its name from the village is located, about 8 kilometres west of the main street, and 22 kilometres from the centre of the wilayat.

He pointed out that the fort is rectangular in shape consisting of one floor and has two towers, and it was restored in the same shape and materials with which it was

previously built. It is located in the northern corner of the village, surrounded from the north by the farms separated by falaj. It stands guard between the village and its farms. He stated that the fort was used for housing and defence, and this explains the presence of two towers.

It was used to store supplies and essential items. Its spacious internal courtyards may have been used as an open market to exchange of goods in the past. In order to preserve its historical status, the fort was restored by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, including all its components and redesigned as it was in the past. The restoration project included its outer wall, gates, halls and internal facilities, as well as its two main towers. — ONA

Oman's trail running champions ready for 2023 UTMB® Mont Blanc

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 29

Oman's trail running champions are poised to shine on the international stage as four exceptional athletes – Hamed al Harthy, Hamdan al Khatri, Issa al Abri, and Mohammed al Shizawi – prepare for the epic challenge of the 2023 UTMB Mont Blanc event.

This year's race will see these exceptional runners from Oman compete across varying distances, embodying the nation's spirit of endurance and adventure.

With the kick-off of the Omani runners' respective distances set for 1 September 2023, these athletes are not only striving for performance goals but also proudly representing Oman on a global platform. The journey that awaits them is a physical one, but also a testament to the nation's spirit and determination.

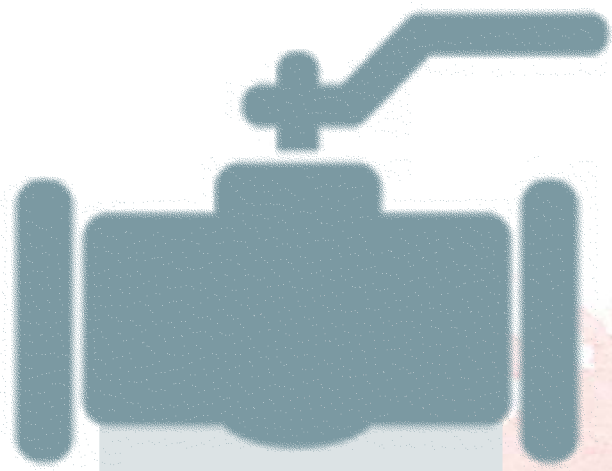
Hamed al Harthy, speaking on behalf of the group, emphasised the honour of representing Oman at the UTMB Mont Blanc: "We carry the heart of Oman with us as we



prepare to embrace the challenges of this prestigious event. It's not just about competing; it's about showcasing determination and resilience." "We are immensely grateful for the support we receive from our technical team representing Himam Trail Run Race, Ahmed al Fahdi, Ali al Balushi, and Sultan al Shereiqi. Their expertise in preparedness, diet, planning, and recovery are

invaluable to our performance." Hamdan al Khatri shared a sentiment echoing Hamed's words: "Our participation in the global event is a testament to Oman's growing prominence in the world of trail running. We are excited to showcase what we can achieve and push the boundaries on an international level." Oman has been witnessing a surge in popularity of trail running, attributed to the

country's abundance of natural and traditional trails that span its varied landscapes. The extensive Al Hajar mountain range, with peaks reaching up to 3,000 metres, offers a unique setting for trail enthusiasts. The diversity of terrains and captivating beauty of the Al Hajar Mountains have garnered attention from athletes and adventure seekers around the world.



VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT

The Ministry of Housing and Urban planning and other authorities have made several announcements to make Muscat smarter by using advanced technologies.

Digital transformation has been taking place in all spheres of our lives with the introduction of online payment of utility bills, digital banking, app-based delivery services, and electronic and water meters. One aspect of daily life where the country has been making slow or no progress is related to the delivery and storage of LPG cooking gas cylinders.

There have been several instances of house fires due to explosions of cooking gas cylinders in recent times, mainly due to poor connections or inadequacies while placing these cylinders, considering the extreme conditions of the Sultanate.

According to the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA), most fire incidents occur in homes in Muscat – the short circuit is seen as the main culprit. Cooking gas cylinder explosions have been quite fatal.

Industry sources highlight several benefits of having piped cooking gas in our apartments, which include continuous supply 24/7 without bothering about running out of gas in the middle of cooking.

Piped gas is a low-pressure cooking and heating fuel used in domestic and non-domestic applications. It is two times lighter than air, allowing it to dissipate freely into the atmosphere.

Unlike LPG cylinder tanks, gas pipelines can also avoid storage space in kitchens.

Some years ago, Oman Gas Company had announced plans to supply cooking gas in some areas of Muscat Governorate, which would have helped to replace LPG cooking gas with piped natural gas.

Speaking to the Observer, several households said the gas pipeline should be available at least in some parts of the city.

“I agree that old apartments in the cities are not equipped or may not have adequate infrastructure to support such systems. But new projects should

TIME TO HAVE PIPED COOKING GAS IN OMAN



have provisions for piped gas even if facilities are not available for now,” said S. Patel, who has been a witness to a significant cooking gas explosion in an apartment near his home. “Piped gas is also a necessity of the time, considering the climate conditions of the country and Muscat in particular. Cooking gas cylinders are transported in open trucks, which can be dangerous for all road users. However, it may be noted that these trucks are frequently monitored by the authorities to ensure that no untoward incidents take place,” said Mohammed Hussain, a resident of Bausher.

He added, “Another problem faced is the time taken to deliver cylinders, which can take even hours, though it has improved with the emergence of app-based booking facility.”

“I agree that there are challenges facing such projects in a city like Muscat due to its terrain. Still, it is possible and perhaps is only a matter of time.”



MoHT marks Omani Associations Day

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism on Tuesday organised ‘Omani Associations Day’ event with participation of different professional associations. The event was organised under the auspices of Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism. The event aimed at contributing to enhancing the local society of associations, developing cooperation, and exchanging knowledge between them. This is due to its vital role in strengthening the events industry and promoting the Sultanate of Oman as a hub for the activities of associations, as well as exchanging knowledge, communication and collaboration with international associations. Khalid al Zadjali, Director of Oman Office of Conference at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, stated, “By organising this event, we aimed at exploring the various means in which the local associations can further improve their operations, strengthen member services



and make a more impactful contribution to their industries and communities by leveraging the valuable insights with best practices for international associations. Further, there were also many key areas where local associations can benefit from the experience and expertise of their international counterparts”. AlZadjali added that it is important for the local associations to maintain the strong bonds with the international networks, to participate in conferences and events and to search proactively

for learning and cooperation opportunities with their international peers. By doing so, local associations can improve their performance and create value addition to their members and stakeholders. The event included three different sessions. The first session “Building Resilient Communities” explored the vital role that ICCA (the International Congress and Convention Association) played in promoting resilience within communities and highlighting the strength and potential of

associations in leading positive change and supporting society development. The second session included presentations presented by international associations about their best practices. Local associations had the opportunity to learn from these presentations, gain insights about successful strategies and methods implemented by associations. The session aimed at inspiring and providing local associations with practical ideas that can be applied to their associations and promote growth and success in their respective fields. The third session “Building Bridges” examined the importance of hosting international conferences and the possible benefits to be achieved by involving the local associations in international meetings and to raise awareness in the local community through presenting successful case studies and exchanging ideas with industry experts. The workshop aimed at highlighting the economic, social, and cultural advantages. — ONA



Oman chairs meet of GCC Social Development Undersecretaries

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, on Tuesday chaired the 9th meeting of the Committee of GCC social development ministries’ undersecretaries. The meeting, held via videoconferencing, reviewed the decision of the GCC Supreme Council on the unified guiding bylaw (system) for empowerment of people with disabilities. The meeting also studied the unified guiding bylaw on volunteer action and the GCC Supreme Council’s decision on the protection of moral, religious and family values in Gulf societies. Later, the undersecretaries

discussed GCC Supreme Council’s decisions on the functions of the GCC charitable action committee. They also elaborated on the GCC joint strategy on women’s affairs. The meeting explored measures to generalise privileges granted to people with disabilities in GCC states so that the advantages could benefit all citizens in member states. It also looked into the proposal of the State of Kuwait on allocating an award for talented and outstanding people with disabilities in GCC states. The meeting exchanged views about developing criteria for honouring pioneering social action projects and personalities. — ONA

Salalah Airport reports 45% hike in int’l arrivals



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 29

The number of International passengers arriving at Salalah Airport increased to 38,945 in July this year, an increase of 45 per cent

from 2022. According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the number of passengers departing from Salalah was 30,701, an increase of 57 per cent from July 22.

The airport reported 47,715 domestic departures (up 27 per cent) and 65,806 (up 21 per cent) domestic arrivals during the same period. Hotel guests at the airport went up 7 per cent in July this year to 31,733 of which 31,733 were

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

Six arrested for violating marine fishing law

MUSCAT: Six expatriates were arrested for violating the marine fishing law in Al Wusta Governorate, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR). A statement issued by (MoAFWR) said, ‘The fisheries control team in the Directorate General of Agricultural, Fisheries

and Water Resources in Al Wusta Governorate, in cooperation with the Coast Guard Police, arrested six expatriate workers for violating the Law on Fishing and Protection of Marine Living Resources and the Labour Law in the Wilayat of Mahout and seized three fishing boats.’ Legal action has been taken against the violators.

Rain reported in villages of Al Awabi



MUSCAT: Heavy to moderate rain associated with hailstone and downdraft wind was reported in the Wilayat of Al Awabi and some parts of Wadi Bani Kharous. The centre of the wilayat also

experienced heavy downpours accompanied by gale-force winds. Stal village in Wadi Bani Kharous received torrential rains, causing wadi Man’a to overflow. Meanwhile, rain of varying

intensity fell over villages of Sanib’a, Shawh, Thaqb, Misfat al Shuraiqyeen and Al Mhasnah, which had led to power outage and internet disconnection. — ONA

سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان مناقصة

Tender Notice

The Internal Tenders Committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology invites for the Following Tenders:

TENDER NUMBER	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
MTCT/170/2023	WIDENING OF THE EXISTING TRACK ROAD AT MAQAL VILLAGE IN AL JABAL AL AKHDAR AL DAKHILIYYA GOVERNORATE	29-8-2023	11-9-2023	16-10-2023	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (FIRST CLASS)	(25/-) TWENTY FIVE OMANI RIAL (10/-) TEN OMANI RIAL (FOR SME) NON-REFUNDABLE
MTCT/169/2023	CONSULTANCY SERVICES OF SUPERVISION FOR COMPLETION OF UPGRADING OF SEIH QATNAH ROAD, AL JABEL AL AKHDAR	29-8-2023	7-9-2023	28-9-2023	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (FIRST CLASS)	(47/500) FOURTY SEVEN OMANI RIAL & FIVE HUNDRED BAISA (10/-) TEN OMANI RIAL (FOR SME) NON-REFUNDABLE

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

CORRESPONDANCE:

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■ DEMOLITION IN HEBRON



A Palestinian man gestures as machinery guarded by Israeli forces demolishes a Palestinian house in Hebron in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on Tuesday. – Reuters

Sudan army chief visits Egypt as deadly violence grips Darfur

CAIRO: Sudan’s army chief on Tuesday visited Egypt on his first trip abroad since the outbreak of war in April, with the latest violence killing dozens of civilians in battle-scarred Darfur.

As Abdel Fattah al Burhan headed for talks with key ally Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, medics and witnesses said 39 civilians were killed, most of them women and children, in shelling of Nyala, Sudan’s second city in South Darfur state where fighting between the army and paramilitary forces has intensified. Burhan swapped his

trademark military fatigues for a suit and tie and flew from Port Sudan to El Alamein on Egypt’s north coast, where he said his forces faced “rebel groups who have committed war crimes in their attempt to seize power”.

Sisi’s office said he had “reaffirmed Egypt’s firm position in standing by Sudan and supporting its security, stability and territorial integrity”.

The war between Burhan and his former deputy-turned-rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, has raged since April 15,

killing thousands and uprooting millions. For months, the RSF had besieged Burhan inside a military headquarters in Khartoum, but last week the general made his first foray outside the compound.

On Monday he was in Port Sudan where he made a fiery address to his troops, vowing to “put an end to the rebellion”.

His comments came a day after Daglo released a 10-point “vision” to end the war and build “a new state”. It calls for “civilian rule based on democratic norms” and “a single, professional, national military institution”. — AFP

Imran Khan stays in jail despite court relief

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani court on Tuesday suspended former Prime Minister Imran Khan’s recent conviction on corruption charges, his lawyer Naeem Panjutha said, but it will not lead to his release as a judge has ordered his detention in another case. The 70-year-old former cricket hero has been at the centre of political turmoil in the crisis-ridden nuclear-armed state since his ouster in a parliamentary vote of confidence in April 2022, and his relations with Pakistan’s powerful generals have deteriorated badly over the past year.

Khan was imprisoned on Aug. 5 after being sentenced to three years jail for unlawfully selling state gifts during his tenure as prime minister from 2018 to 2022. As a result of the conviction, and with a national election expected in the coming months, Pakistan’s Election Commission also barred Khan from contesting elections for five years.

“The sentence has been suspended,” Panjutha said X, adding: “God be praised”.

Khan’s legal team had lodged an appeal on the grounds that he was convicted without being given the right to defend himself. The court also ordered Khan’s release on bail, another one of his lawyers, Shoaib Shaheen, told reporters outside the court. But he will not be freed as he has been detained in at least one other separate case on charges of



Lawyers and supporters of Imran Khan celebrate outside the High Court in Islamabad on Tuesday, after suspension of Khan’s prison sentence for a graft conviction. — AFP

leaking state secrets.

A special court in Islamabad has ordered prison authorities to keep Khan in judicial custody and present him before the court on Wednesday, according to an undated order seen by Reuters.

A Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) official, who requested anonymity, said Khan was charged with making public the contents of a confidential cable sent by Pakistan’s ambassador to the United States and using it for political gain.

Khan’s top aide, former Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, has already been arrested in the same case.

Khan alleges that the cable proves that his removal was at the behest of the United States, which he said pressed Pakistan’s military to topple his government because he had visited Russia shortly before its attack on Ukraine.

Both the United States and the Pakistani military have denied that. The suspension does not mean Khan’s graft conviction has been overturned, which is pending a detailed hearing in the court, according to constitutional lawyer Abdul Moiz Jaferii.

“(Khan) being left at liberty is now hindered by him being required by the police and relevant investigation agencies in the multitude of other cases instituted against him,” Jaferii said. He said Khan would need to seek bail from the other courts hearing those cases.

Khan faces dozens of cases, including charges of abetment to murder and orchestrating violent protests that followed his initial arrest in May.

He denies all the charges. It is unclear how the ban on his contesting polls will be affected with the suspension of his sentence. — Reuters

UK air traffic failure set to disrupt flights for days

LONDON: The British government was working with airlines on Tuesday to help ensure passengers stranded in airports across Europe can get home after an air traffic control glitch caused widespread disruption to flights that is expected to last for days.

Over 1,500 flights were cancelled on Monday — a public holiday in parts of the UK, and one of the busiest travel days as the school holidays draw to close — when air traffic controllers were forced to switch to manual systems due to a technical problem.

That left thousands of passengers stuck at airports in Europe and further afield.

“We were stuck in the airport for about seven or eight hours yesterday. We were left high



A family awaits their flight in London on Tuesday. — Reuters

and dry,” said Maria Ball a holidaymaker from Liverpool, in the northwest of England.

She said she ended up at Paris’ Charles De Gaulle airport from another one in the city, having finally found a flight to Edinburgh and then facing a four hour journey in a hire car to get home when she lands.

Mark Harper, the transport secretary, warned it would

take days to resolve the issues even though the fault was fixed after a few hours on Monday as cancellations hit airline schedules meaning planes and crews were out of place.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he understood people were frustrated.

“The transport secretary is in constant dialogue with all the industry participants. He will be talking to airlines specifically later today and making sure that they support passengers to get home as quickly as possible,” Sunak said.

Harper said government officials did not believe the technical problem, the first on this scale for a decade, was the result of a cyber attack.

Aviation analytics firm Cirium said 790 flights departing UK airports were cancelled and 785 flights due to arrive were cancelled on Monday, meaning just over a quarter of all flights into or out of the country were affected.

British Airways said it was working hard “to get back on track” and had offered passengers flying short-haul routes to change their flight dates free of charge.

EasyJet said that the knock-on impact meant some flights were cancelled this morning.

“While this is outside of our control, we apologise for the difficulty this has caused for our customers and we remain focused on doing all possible to assist and repatriate them as soon as possible at this very busy time of year,” a spokesperson said. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TEHRAN West has failed to isolate Iran, says President Raisi

Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi said on Tuesday that the West had failed to isolate his country, while also holding out the prospect of resuming talks on reviving a nuclear deal.

“The enemy tried to follow two strategies: one was to isolate Iran from the world and the other was to discourage the Iranian nation,” Raisi said. “It failed with both strategies. It didn’t succeed in isolating Iran,” he told a news conference in Tehran.



Raisi was referring to sanctions imposed on Iran since the United States torpedoed the nuclear deal in 2018, as well as protests that erupted in September 2022 over a young woman’s death in custody.

GENEVA Fighting in Ethiopia’s Amhara kills at least 183

Fighting between Ethiopia’s military and militiamen in the Amhara region has killed at least 183 people, the UN human rights office said on Tuesday, providing the most comprehensive independent death toll to date of the month-long conflict.

Over 1,000 people have been arrested nationwide, many of them reported to be young people of ethnic Amhara origin, under a state of emergency the government decreed to respond to the violence, the UN said.



The conflict has been fuelled by accusations among many in Amhara, Ethiopia’s second most populous region, that the government is trying to undermine its security.

LONDON UK foreign minister to visit China to repair ties

British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly will make a long-awaited trip to China on Wednesday in a sign that relations between the countries are normalising after years of tensions over security concerns and alleged human rights abuses.

Cleverly will meet his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi and Vice President Han Zheng, marking the most senior visit to China by a British minister in five years.

Britain is trying to improve ties with China after the relationship



sunk to its lowest point in decades under former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, when London restricted some Chinese investment over national security worries.



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In brief

■ SEOUL



KIM CALLS FOR BOOSTING NORTH KOREA'S NAVY

Kim Jong Un has called for boosting North Korea's navy, saying the country's waters brimmed with "the danger of a nuclear war," state media reported on Tuesday, as Seoul, Washington and Tokyo carried out joint naval drills.

Kim slammed growing trilateral cooperation between the "gang bosses" of the United States, South Korea and Japan, saying they had recently "closeted with each other," the official Korean Central News Agency reported, in an apparent reference to this month's Camp David summit.

■ COLOMBO



DUTCH TO RETURN STOLEN SRI LANKAN TREASURES

The Netherlands returned formal ownership to Sri Lanka of six colonial-era treasures on Monday, including a more than 275-year-old cannon inlaid with gold, silver, bronze and rubies. At a ceremony at the cultural ministry in Colombo, Dutch deputy minister for culture, education and science, Gunay Uslu, signed over the ownership of the objects to Sri Lanka, officials said.

Sri Lanka's national museum in return granted authority to Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum to hold the artifacts until they are transported to Colombo in December.

■ SAO PAULO



LULA WANTS TO DISCUSS UNSC MEMBERSHIP WITH BIDEN

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said on Tuesday he wants to discuss the possibility of making changes to the United Nations Security Council with his US counterpart Joe Biden.

Lula, who has long campaigned for Brazil and other countries to be permanently included in the council, is expected to meet Biden on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York. Last week, the leftist leader called on fellow BRICS members China and Russia to support more countries entering the council as permanent members.

Hurricane Idalia strengthens as it churns towards Florida and Cuba

ATLANTA: Hurricane Idalia strengthened on Tuesday as it lumbered towards Florida's Gulf Coast, where officials ordered evacuations and urged millions of residents to brace for a possible major Category 3 tempest to make landfall on Wednesday.

Idalia was expected to attain major-hurricane status — with sustained winds topping at least 179 kph — on Wednesday morning before slamming ashore later in the day, according to the Miami-based National Hurricane Center (NHC).

The NHC projected Idalia's centre would likely cross Florida's coastline somewhere in the Big Bend region, where the state's northern panhandle curves around into the Gulf side of the Florida Peninsula.

The intensifying storm was on an uncertain path as it spun northward over the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

It put most of Florida's 21 million residents, along with those in the southern parts of Georgia and South Carolina, under hurricane, tropical storm and storm surge warnings and advisories. Authorities said Idalia's chief threat to human life stemmed from surging walls of seawater that would be driven inland by high winds, inundating low-lying coastal areas.

Storm surge warnings were posted for hundreds of miles of shoreline, from Sarasota in



A man carries a woman on his back as he wades through the water in a flooded area of Batabano, Mayabeque Province, Cuba, on Tuesday, as Tropical Storm Idalia approaches the western tip of the island nation. — AFP

the north through Tampa and stretching to the sport fishing haven of Indian Pass at the western end of Apalachicola Bay.

In some spots, the surge of water could rise 8 feet (2.44 m) to 12 feet, the National Hurricane Center said.

Storm surge and urban flash flooding made previous hurricanes deadly, FEMA Chief Deanne Criswell said on CNN on Tuesday. "The No. 1 killer in all of these storms is water," she said.

St. Petersburg residents

living in areas prone to flooding were urged to leave by Tuesday afternoon, the city's police chief Anthony Holloway said on CNN.

"Those surges are going to be what we're really worried about, about flooding in our city," he told CNN, adding that the city had opened four shelters for those who needed to leave their homes.

Idalia intensified into a hurricane early on Tuesday. It was expected to reach Category 3 force - classified as a major hurricane - on the five-step Saffir-Simpson

wind scale by the time it makes Florida landfall on Wednesday, the NHC said.

It would mark the fourth major hurricane to strike Florida over the past seven years, following Irma in 2017, Michael in 2018 and Ian, which peaked at Category 5, last September.

The NHC said Idalia was churning about 320 miles (515 km) southwest of Tampa as it crept northward, packing maximum sustained winds of 130 kph.

— Reuters

Greece blaze is 'largest wildfire ever in EU'

BRUSSELS: A forest blaze in Greece is "the largest wildfire ever recorded in the EU" and the bloc is mobilising nearly half its firefighting air wing to tackle it, a European Commission spokesman said on Tuesday.

Eleven planes and one helicopter from the EU fleet have been sent to help Greece counter the fire north of the city of Alexandroupoli, along with 407 firefighters, spokesman Balazs Ujvari said.

The EU's civil protection service said the fire has burnt over 810 square kilometres (310 square miles) — an area bigger than New



Smoke rises after a wildfire at Dadia National Park in Evros on Tuesday. — Reuters

York City.

"This wildfire is the largest in the EU since 2000, when the

European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) began recording data," the service said.

Greece's fire service said that the blaze was "still out of control" in the northeast region's Dadia National Park, a major sanctuary for birds of prey.

Since it began on August 19, the blaze has claimed the lives of 20 people, 18 of them migrants whose bodies were found in a region that is often used as an entry point from neighbouring Turkey.

The EU currently calls on a fleet of 28 aircraft — 24 water-dumping planes and four helicopters — supplied by member countries to help battle blazes in the bloc and in nearby neighbours. — AFP

Google courts business with enterprise AI tools, AI chip

SAN FRANCISCO: Google unveiled a swath of fresh artificial-intelligence technology and partnerships on Tuesday that were geared towards bringing more of the growing technology to large businesses.

The batch of announcements from its Google Next conference in San Francisco included new customers for its cloud software such as General Motors and Estee Lauder Companies.

The Alphabet subsidiary made public a new version of its custom-built AI chips, unveiled an enterprise-scale tool to watermark and identify images generated with AI - plus tools for security and its office suite.

The flurry of announcements is part of Google's recent effort to showcase its AI plans, after Microsoft caught the company off guard with an ambitious AI strategy it has been rolling out since last year.

But its big business customers need to be deliberate and move at a different pace, Google Cloud chief Thomas Kurian said. "We've generally told enterprise customers, 'Go slowly and methodically because it's important that you treat this as a strategic software development,'" he said. "There's been this sort of FOMO of, 'I need to be in generative AI for generative AI's sake.'"

FOMO refers to fear of missing out, a common refrain in AI in recent months. To bolster Google's enterprise cloud service it added 20 AI models to its collection, bringing the total to 100. The AI infrastructure includes deals to bring Google Cloud customers access to Meta Platforms' AI model LLaMa 2, and to the start-up Anthropic's Claude 2.

Google announced new versions of its AI infrastructure that improve performance and add features. The new version of its text model called PaLM, for example, increased the amount of text users can input to make it easier to process longer documents such as legal briefs and books. — Reuters

'Pope did not aim to glorify Russian tsars' imperialism'

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis did not intend to glorify Russian imperialism when he extolled tsars that expanded the Russian empire, the Vatican said on Tuesday, after remarks last week that were criticised by Ukraine while welcomed by the Kremlin.

Francis had told Russian youths in the unscripted remarks on Friday to remember that they are the heirs of past tsars such as Peter I and Catherine II.

The two monarchs, both referred to as "the great" by historians, expanded Russia into a huge empire in the 17th and 18th centuries, including conquering parts of Ukraine. President Vladimir Putin invokes their legacies in justifying his war and annexation of Ukrainian territory last year.



"The pope intended to encourage young people to preserve and promote all that is positive in the great Russian cultural and spiritual heritage, and certainly not to exalt imperialist logic and government personalities, (which he) mentioned to indicate some historical periods of reference," Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni

said. Francis had said: "You are heirs of the great Russia — the great Russia of the saints, of kings, the great Russia of Peter the Great, of Catherine II, the great Russian empire, cultured, so much culture, so much humanity. You are the heirs of the great mother Russia. Go forward."

Kyiv called the remarks "deeply regrettable". "It is precisely with such imperialist propaganda, the 'spiritual ties' and the 'need' to save 'great Mother Russia' that the Kremlin justifies the killing of thousands of Ukrainians and the destruction of Ukrainian cities and villages," Oleg Nikolenko, spokesperson for the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, said.

Former Estonian president Toomas Hendrik Ilves, whose country was conquered by Russia

under Peter I, called the pope's remarks "truly revolting", in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Eastern Rite Catholic Church in Ukraine loyal to the pope, said that the pontiff's words had caused "great pain and worry".

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov praised the remarks: "The pontiff knows Russian history and this is very good," he said. "What the (Russian) state, activist groups, school and university teachers are doing now is carrying this heritage to our youth, reminding them of it," Peskov said.

The Vatican embassy in Kyiv said in a statement that the pope was a "staunch opponent and critic of any form of imperialism or colonialism" and rejected

what it described as media "interpretations" of the pope's comments.

Pope Francis has been an outspoken critic of Russia's war of Ukraine, but has occasionally angered Kyiv for unscripted remarks perceived as supporting Moscow's narrative.

Kyiv summoned the Vatican ambassador last year after the pope described Darya Dugina, a Russian ultra-nationalist killed in a car bomb near Moscow, as an innocent victim of the war.

Putin has long sought to deny that Ukraine has a tradition of statehood and says Russians and Ukrainians are one people. Ukrainian and Western scholars call this a false account aimed at erasing Ukraine's thousand-year history. — Reuters

A window to American legal system



Rasha al Raisi
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The writer is a certified skills trainer and author of *The World According to Bahja*

Lately my mother had developed a sort of addiction to Netflix series. Every evening — even if it’s nearing 11 o’clock- she’d insist on watching ‘just half an hour of the show before bedtime.’

Of course, the half an hour becomes exactly an hour and she’d hurriedly leave the living room when the clock strikes 12 grumbling about having to wake up early for Fajr prayers and later baby-sitting my niece. After many seasons of senior friendly series, mom decided that she’d had enough of that and would like to go for something different. “Crime series?” I suggested and she agreed at once.

I picked *The Lincoln Lawyer* (2022) that’s been on my list for ages. It comprised of 10 episodes, which was perfect in case it was boring or too gory for her taste. Luckily, the show was neither. In fact, it was one of the most enjoyable crime shows that I’d watched in ages. The series tells the story of Mickey Haller (Manuel Garcia-Rulfo) a criminal defence lawyer who finds himself inheriting a law firm from a murdered fellow lawyer along with all it’s cases. To Haller, it’s a blessing in disguise as he’d been

on a long leave after an accident and can’t think of a better way to restart his career. However, the major case he’s in charge of is that of the billionaire video game designer Trevor Elliot (Christopher Gorham), who’s accused of murdering his wife and her lover in their house. The case is tricky as all evidence points to Elliot although he maintains his innocence.

While trying to build this case, Haller also must work on other petty cases which introduces him to different characters and events that could be closely linked to Elliot’s case. Haller’s personal life is highlighted as he deals with two ex-wives who work in his field, a teenage daughter, a former gangster who now works as his private detective and a driver with a drug abuse past.

Haller’s style of work is what gives the show its name: he owns Cadillac cars where the backseats are turned into a mobile office. As he travels on the road, he gets to review and work on all his cases. The show is captivating and there is not a boring minute in it as it’s fast paced and always ends with a cliff-hanger that makes you want to know more. The best surprise of the show is Neve Campbell who plays

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Haller’s first wife and the mother of his daughter. All the characters of the series are humane, likable, and easy to relate to.

On his daily rides to and from the court, the viewers get the chance to understand the American legal system — especially when it comes to choosing the jury — as well as ponder about ethics and moral dilemmas that face lawyers representing different parties. Not to mention, get a glimpse of Haller’s daily routine. The series is based on the novel *The Brass Verdict* (2008) by Michael Conolly. Conolly is a crime fiction and a detective novelist who published a few books with Mickey Haller as his main character.

Mathew McConaughey played Mickey Haller in a movie with same name in 2011, which was the first book in the *Lincoln Lawyer* series while the TV series were based on the second book. After the huge success of the series, Netflix announced a second part that started streaming last month and is based on the fourth book of the series called *The Fifth Witness* (2011). I’m looking forward watching the second part, and hope you enjoy watching both parts consecutively.

Moscow residents learn to live with drone strikes

Strolling in Moscow on a summer’s day as pop music blared from a cafe, Tigran is one of the capital’s residents who say they have come to terms with a surge in Ukrainian drone attacks.

Day-to-day life in the city of some 12 million people has changed little since the Kremlin launched large-scale hostilities in Ukraine last February, upending the lives of millions of Ukrainians.

But a recent uptick in aerial assaults have hit the capital’s financial district, ripped holes in commercial buildings and even struck the Kremlin, a reminder of hostilities playing out hundreds of kilometres away.

Still, some residents have accepted with a shrug the ripple effect of the conflict in Ukraine.

“Living in Moscow isn’t scary,” Tigran, a sunglass-wearing 40-year-old who declined to give his last name, said. “I feel safe.”

The attacks point to a broader phenomenon of how crucial drones have become for both sides, being deployed on an unprecedented scale for reconnaissance and precision artillery targeting.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, whose country has weathered waves of assaults from Iran-made attack drones, warned late last month that “war” was coming Russia.

In the weeks since, Moscow has suffered at least eight aerial attacks that Russian authorities have blamed on Kyiv.

Residents voiced confidence in the military’s ability to intercept them.

Konstantin, a 70-year-old retiree who also declined to give his last name, said he felt “absolutely calm”, citing his trust in the army.

“There are enough personnel and equipment,” he said, referring to air defence systems around Moscow. Authorities have reported those systems increasing ability to repel the wave of assaults, and have claimed the drones have caused relatively little damage.

Since the Kremlin strike in May, the Russian defence ministry has said most attacks have been foiled by electronic air defence systems.

“The most important thing is that they stay alert. The rest doesn’t matter,” Konstantin said, referring to Russian forces.

He however did complain that the electronic jamming techniques used to down Ukrainian drones were interfering with his car’s navigation system. “It’s hard without a navigator in Moscow,” he said.

Apart from minor inconveniences, like difficulties getting around the city or repair work at drone crash sites, analysts also said the Ukrainian aerial attacks were having little impact.

— AFP

Checking email? You’re not breathing



Alisha Haridasani Gupta

“SCREEN APNEA” REFERS TO THE DISRUPTION OF BREATHING MANY OF US EXPERIENCE DOING ALL KINDS OF TASKS IN FRONT OF A SCREEN.

In 2007, Linda Stone, a former Microsoft executive, realised that even though she did breathing exercises every morning, when she sat down at her laptop and opened up her inbox, it all went out the window. “I would be like, ‘Huh, I was just breathing, but I’m not breathing anymore,’” she said. Her inhales and exhales became barely detectable and shallow, she noticed.

Stone decided to conduct an informal study (“dining room table science,” she called it), inviting 200 people into her home — friends, neighbours, family members — and monitoring their heart rate and breathing while they checked their email. Roughly 80 per cent of participants periodically held their breath or altered their breathing, she said. She named the phenomenon “email apnea” and described her findings in a widely read 2008 piece in *The Huffington Post*.

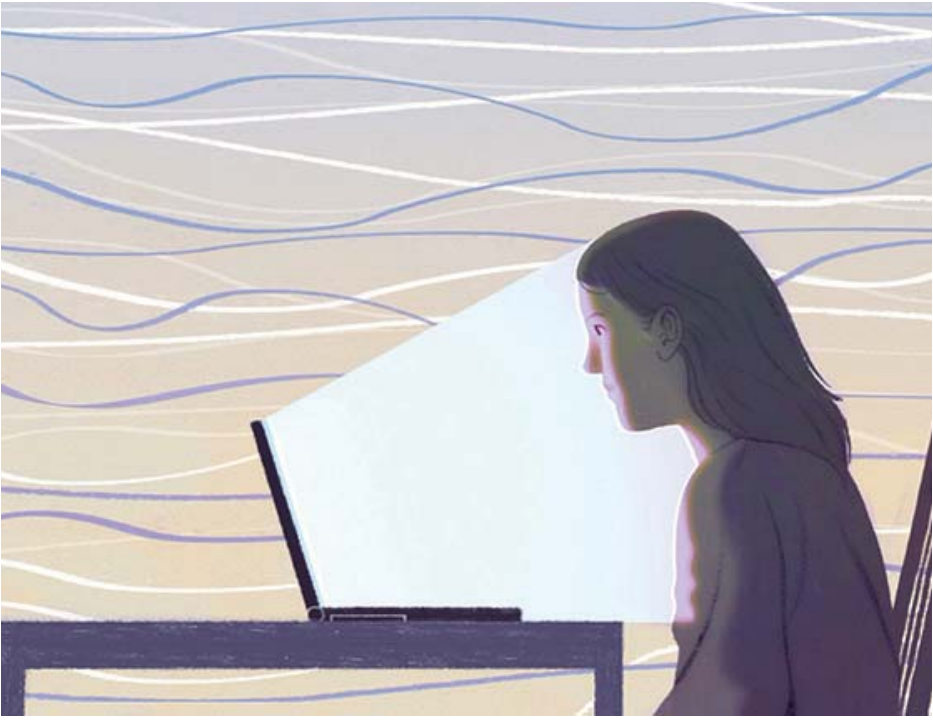
Stone has since expanded the concept and renamed it “screen apnea,” referring to the disruption of breathing many of us experience doing all kinds of tasks in front of a screen.

The issue has most likely worsened with our increased use of screens, said James Nestor, who examined the phenomenon in his 2020 book, “*Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art*.”

“You have 10 different screens open. Someone’s texting you, someone’s calling you, someone’s e-mailing you,” he said, adding that we have not evolved to be “constantly stimulated.”

Screen apnea is a manifestation of our body’s stress response, said Stephen Porges, a professor of psychiatry at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who specialises in the autonomic nervous system. When we’re faced with any kind of stimulus, our nervous system looks for signals to decipher whether or not it’s a threat, Porges said.

That kind of focus and attention requires mental effort, which kicks off a chain of physiological changes including shallower breathing and a slowing of heart rate to “quiet” your body and divert resources to help you focus, he said. He gave the example of cats stalking their prey; often right before they attack, they will freeze and their breathing will become shallow. That, he said, is essentially what is happening when you get an email, text



or Slack message: You freeze, read and come up with a plan of action.

The more unexpected a stimulus is — say, getting a text notification out of the blue — the more likely the body is to perceive it as a threat.

Although these reflexes aren’t harmful on occasion, they become an issue if they’re switched on all day, everyday, because it shifts “the nervous system into a chronic state of threat,” Porges said. Hours of shallow breathing can make you feel exhausted after a day of work, he said, even if that work isn’t particularly stressful.

The lack of movement that comes from sitting in front a screen might also be a contributor to screen apnea, said Dr David Spiegel, director of the Center on Stress and Health at Stanford Medicine. Disrupted breathing is the result of “a combination of not just what you’re doing but what you’re not doing,” he said, adding that he noticed screen apnea among patients who worked high-stress jobs for long hours without getting much exercise or sleep.

There are a few simple practices you can adopt for better breathing habits, even in our increasingly screen-bound lives. Set up breath reminders

A few gentle-sounding alerts throughout the day can remind you to check in on your breathing, Nestor said. Ask yourself: Are you breathing through your mouth (often an indicator of shallow breath)? Are you breathing at all? The awareness helps you snap out of it, he said.

If you catch yourself breathing shallowly or not at all, try sighing audibly, Spiegel said. Studies suggest that can be a quick and easy way to reset breathing patterns. In a study published in January, Spiegel and his team found that although many breathing techniques are valuable, cyclic sighing — in which the exhale lasts longer than the inhale — is particularly effective for improving mood.

Try larger screens

Porges hypothesises that the larger your screen, the less mentally taxing it can be. “As you narrow the visual field, you’re increasing the demand on your nervous system to exclude everything outside of it,” he said. Responding to messages on a desktop monitor often feels easier than responding on a phone, which “is a more intensely focused constriction of movement,” Spiegel said.

Make your breaks count

People will often step away from their computers for a break only to end up responding to messages on their phones, Porges said. He suggested carving out a few moments to do things that don’t require too much mental effort — such as listening to music — so that your nervous system can switch from a state of focus and vigilance to one of relaxation.

Adding physical activity to your breaks — such as walking in nature — is another way of restoring balance, Spiegel said. It’s a simple thing, he said, “that can help our bodies work better.”

— **The New York Times**

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A walk down a festival memory lane

Festivals are an expressive way to embrace our culture, heritage and traditions which hold a unique place in our hearts. No matter in which part of the world we are, festivals are special moments of excitement that are meant to rejoice with our loved ones and build bonds with all people. They are the occasions when we try to imbibe our social values.

During festival time we become nostalgic and think about our childhood more than ever. Definitely, each one of us will have our own sentimental childhood reminiscences that bestow a sense of belonging and root connection.

This year I am back in my hometown in this south Indian state of Kerala, after over four decades of migrant life, to experience those past times exactly the same way one more time with the beginning of my favourite and cherished Onam — a festival of flowers, happiness and prosperity.

I had the privilege in my life to witness its celebrations unfold in three different geographical spaces – from my hometown in Kerala to different states in north India and a few countries in the Gulf region.

Onam or the harvest festival of Kerala is part of the cultural repertoire of every Malayalee, who cherishes the memory of the legendary King Mahabali and his prosperous reign during which perfect communal harmony and prosperity prevailed.

Although this festival has its origin in Hindu mythology, Onam is for all people of all classes, creeds, and religions. And what I love about this festival is that the whole concept of it is that everyone is equal.

Though the festival comprises 10 days of fun and revelry, traditional art forms and games, they peak on Thiruvonam, with family and friends gathering together for an onasadhya, a feast which is quite elaborate and sumptuous home-cooked delicacies on plantain leaf.

While I write these lines, memories flood back into my mind! Reminiscences about my childhood and the simple ways of life that



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DURING A FESTIVAL TIME WE BECOME NOSTALGIC, THINK ABOUT OUR CHILDHOOD MORE THAN EVER

prevailed in my village back in those days. They spell a magical inner journey consisting of those priceless moments notwithstanding the fact that today, I really miss the lush green surroundings, full of blossoms, making an ideal backdrop for traditional Onam celebrations!

As children, Onam for us meant freedom and fun as we had holidays during this state festival. As teens, my friends and I would prepare at least a month before to find how best we could execute this year.

Eating was of less significance for us as compared to the elders as we enjoyed playing games, and joining in the folklore celebrations. I remember getting together to prepare a floral carpet called ‘pookalam’, in the courtyards.

Unfortunately, there is a huge difference in the celebrations that I experience now when compared to my childhood days. The festival has undergone several changes. It has been commercialised like many others.

As a result of commercialisation, festivals now mean spending money on frivolous stuff and slavish indulgence. They have become just a platform to build business and to show one’s capabilities to others. They are little more than gigantic shopping sprees.

Look at the kitchen, it is full of readymade Onam kits. Unlike before when everything was homemade, people now do not want to spend time cooking a large feast. Even the Pookkalam has artificial flowers over the fresh ones!

Now, when I remember those golden days it really shook up my emotions. Regrettably, even love and friendship are measured by the cost of the gift. Young children are mostly affected by this trend of commercialisation because they are acquiring this materialistic view from their childhood.

As we celebrate this year’s Onam or any festival, let us not only cherish the festivities underlying them but also regenerate the genuine experiences that define this celebration. Festivals bind us together and nurture a sense of nostalgia and happiness! After all, what we gain from our life is all such happiest moments!

SHIELDING FROM RAIN!



A girl looks on as she takes shelter under a shed during a downpour in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Tuesday. – Reuters

The poorest miss out in digital system

Jovana Andjela, a single mother from Belgrade, has done odd jobs as a cook, cleaner, even a tour guide, but she relied on state benefits to make ends meet — until last year, when Serbia’s new digital welfare system locked her out. Anti-poverty campaigners say Andjela is among thousands of low-income Serbians whose benefits have stopped since the government rolled out its Social Card system in 2022 — hailing it as a way to make welfare fairer and tackle fraud. Andjela, who said she should be entitled to a benefit of about 10,000 Serbian Dinar (\$96) each month, received no explanation or means to challenge the decision when she went to a social worker for help.

“(The social worker) said... we believe the Social Card, it’s from the government. And that was it... I can do nothing,” the 43-year-old said.

“I started to cry... I was shocked,” she said, adding that she suspected the system had rejected her because it mistakenly registered several short-lived seasonal jobs and a one-off vocational grant as regular income.

According to local nonprofit A11, up to 27,000 people, about 15 per cent of all recipients, have been removed from the benefits scheme since March 2022, when the Social



Adam Smith

The writer is a Technology Correspondent at Thomson Reuters Foundation

ACCORDING TO LOCAL NONPROFIT A11, UP TO 27,000 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN REMOVED FROM THE BENEFITS SCHEME SINCE MARCH 2022

Card law took effect. It based its estimates on government data. Officials have said the decline reflects a stronger economy, but opposition lawmakers and advocacy groups have linked it to the new digital system, warning that marginalised people, such as the Roma community and the homeless, have been put at risk.

“It sends the message that you’ve got to rely on yourself,” said Biljana Đorđević, a member of parliament from the Green-Left Front who presented a legal filing to the country’s Constitutional Court in July, arguing that the Social Card could cause “de facto violations of the right to social security”.

It is not clear when the case will be heard.

The government, which did not respond to a request for comment, has said previously the system would “enable a fairer distribution of money for the most socially endangered groups and the establishment of a better control of social benefits.”

Much of the criticism from nonprofit groups has focused on the way the new system collects personal data, and uses it to make benefit assessments. The Social

Card system collects 130 pieces of data from numerous state organisations, but recipients do not know how this is used and have little means to challenge refusals or correct apparent mistakes, critics say.

Amnesty International criticised the scale of data collection in an April report, saying that increased the risk of erroneous or outdated information being used.

Many of those excluded had received letters that “make general reference to the ‘data from electronic database’ (but) do not include any further information, nor offer the applicant an

opportunity to clarify or correct the information”, it said. As in Andjela’s case, the rights group said social workers were often poorly equipped to help fix any errors in the system.

The government said last year that the Social Card system is merely a “legal source of facts”, dismissing criticism that applicants’ benefit claims were being “decided by an algorithm”.

Campaigners say the switch to a digital welfare state has also taken a heavier toll on marginalised groups because they have fewer means to challenge any issues that might arise.

This is because they may have

restricted access to information services including the Internet, as well as less time and money to spend fighting decisions.

According to 2019 estimates by the UN children’s agency Unicef, 84 per cent of Serbia’s Roma settlement households received some form of social benefit.

In Jaluki Rit, a suburban settlement 23 km from Belgrade, 36-year-old Roma woman Nadja is currently receiving social benefit, but worries that she could be locked out of the system.

“Often we are in a situation where we have to choose between paying the bills or living,” she said as a group of children gathered around. One watched videos on an old smartphone with a shattered screen. Like Nadja, who collects and sell snails for use in cooking and soap-making, many Roma claimants fear any earnings at all could trigger the Social Card system to cut off their benefits.

Another Roma woman, a 42-year-old who asked to remain anonymous, said her benefits had been refused even though her husband was in prison serving a sentence for electricity theft on the grounds that he was still fit to work.



Jabučki Rit, a settlement outside of Belgrade that is home to numerous Roma people. – Reuters

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India and Bangladesh players fight for the ball during the Men's Hockey5s Asia Cup in Salalah on Tuesday. – Abdulwahid al Hamadani

INDIA, PAKISTAN MAKE STRONG STARTS

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, AUG 29

Favourites India and Pakistan made thumping starts to their campaign in the Men's Hockey5s Asia Cup 2023 in Salalah on Tuesday.

India started brightly with a 15-1 thrashing of Bangladesh while Pakistan hammered Japan 26-1 in a later match to take the top spot of the Elite group.

The top three teams in the Asia Cup will qualify for the first-ever

Hockey5s World Cup Oman 2023 to be staged in Muscat's Al Amerat Stadium from January 24 to 31, 2024.

The Women's Asia Cup concluded on Monday with India emerging champions while finalists Thailand and third-placed Malaysia also made it to the World Cup.

In the Men's Asia Cup's first Elite group match at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex, India dominated against Bangladesh.

For India, Maninder Singh (10, 18, 28, 30 minutes) hit four goals

while Mohammed Raheel (2, 15, 24 minutes) netted three.

Sukhvinder (13, 22), Pawan Rajbhar (19, 26) and Gurjot Singh (13, 23) scored two goals each while Mandeep Mor (8) and Dipsan Tirkey (9) netted one each.

Bangladesh's lone goal came through Sawon Sarowar in the second minute as a 1-1 equaliser.

After that the Indian players displayed their supremacy to pump in goals past Bangladesh goalkeeper Asim Gope.

India led 7-1 at the half-time and added 8 goals after the break.

PAKISTAN RAIN GOALS

Knowing they needed a better goal tally to beat India for a top place in the group, Pakistan delivered more than required with a mammoth score of 26-1 against a hapless Japanese side.

Pakistan led 9-0 at the break and added 16 more in the second-half.

Japan scored their lone goal after conceding 15 goals with captain Naotaka Tani netting the consolation goal in the 23rd minute.

For Pakistan, captain Abdul

Rana led the assault with eight goals to his credit.

Arshad Liaqat netted five goals, while Muhammad Abdullah and Zikriya Hayat scored three apiece in the rout.

Muhammad Murtaza, Abdul Rehman and Abdul Wahab scored a brace each while Ahtisham Aslam also found the target in the huge win.

Pakistan goalkeeper Ishtiaq Abdullah Khan and Ali Raza were the only players not to score against Japanese goalkeeper Koichi Takeyasu.

IRAN, KAZAKHSTAN WIN

In the Challenger group, Iran thrashed Hong Kong 7-2 to open their account. Iran led 5-1 at the break.

Kazakhstan beat Indonesia 4-1 in another match.

Malaysia beat Oman 10-4 in a late match in Elite group.

India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Japan, Bangladesh and hosts Oman are placed in the Elite group.

Kazakhstan, Indonesia, Iran, Afghanistan and Hong Kong are slotted in the Challenger group.

Oman Olympic team to take on Iraq in friendly

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 29

The Oman Olympic (under-23) football team will take on Iraq on Thursday at Basra International Stadium in a warm-up match ahead of both teams' participation in AFC U23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024 Qualifiers. The Oman Olympic team's delegation arrived in Iraq on Monday for their last external camp ahead of the Asian qualifiers. The preparatory camp in Basra will run for six days before travelling to Amman city in Jordan to vie for a finals slot in the AFC U23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024. The Asian Qualifiers will be held in Amman from September 4 to 12. Oman were drawn in Group A alongside Jordan (hosts), Syria and Brunei.

The Iraq Olympic team recently registered a 3-0 win over Yemen before their friendly game against Sudan in two matches. The first

ended for Iraq at 4-2 while the following match finished in a 1-1 draw.

The forthcoming preparatory encounter against Iraq will address the starting list of the national team in the Asian event as national head coach Akram Habreesh will evaluate the individual performances besides shaping their readiness for the main assignment.

The national team players were supposed to end Turkiye camp with a warm-up match against Algeria's Pardou Athletic Club but the fixture was cancelled as the venue was under-prepared for the match.

The camp in Turkiye took place from August 16 to 27 and featured two friendly games out of four planned matches as two games were cancelled. The first warm-up match in Turkiye camp against Al Waab SC was not completed due to an injury to a Qatari club player

in the 25th minute. Later on, the Oman Olympic team suffered a 2-1 loss against Al Khor SC in the following fixture. Oman's goal was netted by Al Faraj al Kumi while Ahmed al Mohanadi and Locas Rebero scored for Al Khor SC. The third match was against UAE's Fujairah FC which the Oman boys won 2-0. Both the goals were scored by Osama al Hadabi.

The coaching staff took the desired technical outcomes from both games as coach Habreesh tested many players in the match with numerous substitutions to ensure their match readiness for the major assignments. Habreesh's men will target to secure one of the direct tickets to the finals which will be held during April 15 and May 3, 2024. The qualifiers format will be in a single round-robin at a centralised venue with the 11 group winners and four best second-placed teams going through.



MANCINI EYES ASIAN CUP AS HE SEALS LUCRATIVE SAUDI MOVE

RIYADH: Roberto Mancini said he hoped to lead Saudi Arabia to Asian Cup victory within months as he signed a multi-million dollar deal on Monday, just a fortnight after quitting as Italy coach.

The former Inter Milan and Manchester City boss held up a green shirt that read “Mancini 2027” after inking a contract to stay with the Green Falcons beyond the next World Cup.

Mancini, who has insisted that the monarchy had “nothing to do” with his shock Italy exit, was reportedly offered more than \$25 million to join the big-spending Saudis.

“I’m not a magician,” said the Italian, when asked what he could promise the Saudi people -- before pledging to go for Asian Cup glory in January-February in Qatar.

“Our target is to try to win the Asian Cup after 27 years,” he said.

“We have four months. We have four friendly matches. We have two games for the World Cup (qualifiers) and after we have 20 days to prepare for the Asian Cup.

“We know that there are many top teams like Japan, like Australia, like (South) Korea. But I’m sure that we’ll go there and



Yasser al Misehal (L), president of the Saudi Arabian Football Federation, and newly appointed Italian coach of the Saudi national football team, Roberto Mancini, pose for a picture at a press conference and signing ceremony in Riyadh. — AFP

we’ll try to win.”

Mancini, 58, is the latest high-profile acquisition for the

world’s top oil exporter which has snapped up some of football’s biggest players in a spree costing

hundreds of millions of dollars.

He arrived in Riyadh just days after Brazilian superstar Neymar

was presented to fans in the capital, joining Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and a host of others in the Saudi Pro League.

Building a credible national team is seen as a major plank of the Saudi football transformation, which is part of ambitious plans to reshape the oil-reliant economy and burnish the ultra-conservative country’s image.

The Saudis lie 54th in the world rankings, way below some of their Asian Football Confederation peers. The Saudi women’s team, which played its first games only last year, is 172nd out of 186 teams.

The Green Falcons, who upset eventual winners Argentina in the group stage at last year’s World Cup, have been without a coach since March, when Herve Renard left to take charge of France’s women’s team.

TROPHY-LADEN CAREER

Mancini’s resignation from the Italy job came as a major shock, as earlier this month he had been handed responsibility for the country’s Under-21 and Under-20 teams. Mancini, who was replaced by former Napoli coach Luciano Spalletti, had a mixed time in his

five years with Italy, despite victory at Euro 2020 which seemed to revitalise a troubled football nation. But the Azzurri then failed to qualify for last year’s World Cup following a disastrous play-off defeat to North Macedonia, the second straight time they missed the world’s biggest football tournament.

Mancini won the 1991 Serie A title and four Italian Cups with long-time club Sampdoria, where he starred in attack alongside the recently deceased Gianluca Vialli.

Once becoming a coach he won three more ‘Scudetti’ at Inter Milan — one assigned to the club in the aftermath of the ‘Calciopoli’ match-fixing scandal — and then lifted the Premier League trophy with Emirati-owned Manchester City in 2012. His first match will be a friendly against Costa Rica on September 8 at St James’ Park, home of Newcastle United who, like the four top-spending Saudi clubs, are also owned by Saudi sovereign wealth vehicle the Public Investment Fund.

Saudi Arabia will also play a friendly against South Korea that will be held in Newcastle on September 12. — AFP

Al Mouj Marathon returns to challenge athletes

MUSCAT: The Al Mouj Muscat Marathon 2024 returns over the weekend of January 26-27, 2024 where a field of over 12,000 runners of all ages and experience levels will #RunInspired and take the first step towards achieving their own personal goals.

Registration is now open in all five race categories with Early Bird rates available through the official website, www.muscatmarathon.om, until October.

Hosted by Al Mouj Muscat, Oman’s premier destination and title sponsor of the event, runners will have the opportunity to enjoy a healthy lifestyle surrounded by nature across each of the five race distances.

Nasser al Shaibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said, “Al Mouj Muscat is incredibly proud to once again host the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon. As Oman’s premier lifestyle destination, Al Mouj Muscat offers the opportunity for residents and visitors to discover the endless possibilities to take the first steps towards a more active lifestyle and enjoy the areas we have created to support this journey.”

“Al Mouj Muscat is committed to helping the community adopt a healthy lifestyle and enjoy the incredible nature on offer, and our support for the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon is a prime example of this mission. We look forward to welcoming local, and international visitors, to Al Mouj Muscat for a celebration and to having a positive impact on the health and prosperity of our nation.”

Al Mouj Muscat has been meticulously crafted to balance refined urban living with opportunities to enjoy a healthy lifestyle surrounded by nature, and each course showcases the exceptional outdoor environment of the destination. Al Mouj Muscat is committed to supporting a healthy and active lifestyle and along with the ocean and 6km of pristine beach, the destination offers tree lined



Nasser al Shaibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat



Sayyid Aymen bin Hamed al Busaidi, Sabco Sports Vice-Chairman



Shaikh Salim bin Said al Amri, Oman Athletics Association Chairman

walkways, beautifully landscaped parks and 1.5km of cycle trails where residents and visitors can embrace the great outdoors.

Choose from the full 42.2km marathon, 21.1km half marathon, 10km, and 5km runs, as well as three Kids’ Runs of 1km, 2km and 3km. To mark the occasion, everyone finishing a race will receive a tech t-shirt and a medal to celebrate their achievement.

“We are very excited to bring this event back to Muscat in January 2024 with races for everyone, regardless of age, fitness and experience level. The Al Mouj Muscat Marathon has grown to become an important fixture in the running world and has driven the sports and adventure tourism sector in Oman by helping to establish Muscat as an exceptional venue for all manner of sporting activities. From families, children and fun runners to elite athletes, the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon is a weekend festival of running with fun for the entire family.

Whether taking part in the races or experiencing the atmosphere, it will be a spectacle not to be missed,” says Sayyid Aymen bin Hamed al Busaidi, Sabco Sports Vice-Chairman, organisers of the event.

The event has grown in popularity every year since it was first held in 2012 with 135 competitors and continues to grow into one of the most exciting races in the global marathon calendar. The last event set a new record when it attracted 12,290 registered athletes from 99 nations for the two-day festival of running.

Ahmed al Malki, Chairman of Muscat Road Runners, said, “The Muscat Road Runners have been strong supporters of the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon since its inception, and we are delighted to see the event return. For forty years we have inspired people through running and the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon has been able to reach thousands of runners over

the past decade, from beginners to elite athletes.”

Shaikh Salim bin Said al Amri, Chairman of the Oman Athletics Association, added, “Oman has been gaining an excellent reputation as the host of high profile athletics events, and the growth of the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon into a truly international event shows the potential to go even further. We are excited by the prospect of another edition of the event and look forward to welcoming runners of all ages, as well as those taking on their first marathon in such an inspiring setting.”

The Al Mouj Muscat Marathon is certified by AIMS, the home of world running, and is aligned with World Athletics’ standards. This allows competitors to use the Al Mouj Muscat Marathon course to qualify for international marathons, including the World Marathon Majors in Boston, London, New York, Berlin, Chicago and Tokyo.

Qurum Stars lift MOCL trophy

MUSCAT: Qurum Stars beat home team MIS Fighters in the final of the DS Sports — 7th edition of the Muscat Open Cricket League. This 7-month long tournament is one of the top-contested tennex ball cricket tournaments in Oman and was contested between as many as 28 teams.

MIS Fighters stormed into the final with their dominating game play throughout the tournament and were expected to win the final which was being hosted at their new cricket facility in Misfah. They were to face the spirited rivals Qurum Stars, known for their strategical superiority. The match attracted crowds in large numbers.

Winning the toss, Qurum stars opted to bat first. Despite losing early wickets, Qurum Stars were able to post a competitive 169 in their allocated 16 overs, thanks to an extremely late counter-attack by number nine batter Avinash, who smashed a quick-fire 61 runs in just 23 deliveries. Daniah Younis was the pick of the bowler for MIS fighters with figures of 4-40.

Chasing 170 for the championship, MIS Fighters got off to a brilliant start and were well placed at 93-3 in

6.3 overs, just when they lost 4 wickets while adding 3 runs. Requiring just above run a ball, MIS Fighters were bundled out for just 123 runs in 11.2 overs, losing the encounter by 46 runs.

There were numerous achievers at the presentation ceremony which included – Shaheen XI (3rd place), Friendly Stars (4th place), Awais – Sky XI (man of the series), Tahir – Mawaleh Warriors (best batsman), Ishtiaq A – MIS Fighters (best bowler), M Asif – MIS Fighters (best fielder), Awais – SKY XI (most sixes), Awais – Friendly Stars (consolation – man of the series), Fazal Khan – Shaheen Xi (cons - best bowler), Kirit – Qurum Stars (best performer), Ishtiaq H – MIS Fighters (best performer) and Avinash – Qurum Stars (man of the match in final).

The event was organised and managed by Dipak Sports and telecasted live on plenty of social media platform, which accumulated thousands of views from around the world. The presentation ceremony was conducted by Pranav Mehta, in the presence of the committee members of MOCL, MIS Management, Management Committee and sponsors.



Winners Qurum Stars celebrate with the trophy.



NOVAK DJOKOVIC ensured he will return to the top of tennis's world rankings with an emphatic first round victory at the US Open on Monday as women's world number one Iga Swiatek and American rival Coco Gauff advanced. Djokovic, chasing a record-extending 24th Grand Slam singles title in New York, shrugged off a late-night start on the Arthur Ashe Stadium to demolish France's Alexandre Muller 6-0, 6-2, 6-3 in just 1hr 35min.

The win means Djokovic is guaranteed to replace defending US Open champion Carlos Alcaraz as world number one when the tennis rankings are next updated after the tournament.

Djokovic is playing in New York for the first time since suffering an agonising defeat in the 2021 final in New York.

He was barred from entry to the United States in 2022 for his refusal to get vaccinated against Covid-19, meaning he was unable to play the US Open.

On Monday the 36-year-old played like a man making up for lost time, reeling off 32 winners and breaking Muller eight times in a lopsided encounter that finished at around 12.40am local time.

Djokovic, who will face Spain's Bernabe Zapata Miralles in the second round, said he was unfazed by the late start to his game.

"I didn't care if I started after midnight because I was looking forward to this moment for few years, to be out on the biggest stadium in our sport, the loudest stadium in our sport, playing night session," Djokovic said. "It was a great joy to be stepping out on the court.

FLAWLESS TENNIS

"I think the performance explains how I felt tonight, particularly in the first two sets. It was kind of lights-out tennis really, almost flawless, perfect first set.

"Overall I'm very, very pleased with the way I feel, with the way I'm playing. Hopefully I can maintain that level."

Djokovic's arrival on court had been delayed after a gruelling three-set battle between American teenager Gauff and Germany's Laura Siegemund in the preceding night game.

The 19-year-old Gauff, tipped by many as the biggest threat to defending US Open champion Swiatek, was forced to dig deep before winning 3-6, 6-2, 6-4 in 2hr 50min.

An ill-tempered clash was marked by tetchy confrontations by both players with chair umpire Marijana Veljovic.

Gauff accused the Serbian official of failing to properly enforce time violation rules against Siegemund.

"I felt like the rules were being bent," Gauff said. "That's why a lot of players get mad when these time violations are called because one ref is letting them go over, the other is more strict on the time."

Siegemund, 35, meanwhile voiced disgust at the partisan New York crowd, describing them as "respectless" for the way they cheered every error or missed first serve.

"They had no respect for me, no respect for the way I played, no respect for the player that I am, they had no respect for good tennis," Siegemund said.

SWIATEK POWERS THROUGH

In other women's games on Monday, defending champion Swiatek needed less than hour to defeat Sweden's Rebecca Peterson 6-0, 6-1.

The 22-year-old world number one from Poland overwhelmed her opponent with five breaks of serve and 20 winners to complete victory in just 58 minutes on the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"I wanted to start the tournament with everything I was focusing on. I was happy to play a great game, with all the pressure and



Poland's Iga Swiatek returns a shot against Sweden's Rebecca Peterson during the US Open tournament women's singles first round match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City. — AFP

expectations I was happy on the court," said Swiatek after her win.

Swiatek, targeting her fifth Grand Slam title, will face Daria Saville of Australia in round two.

While Swiatek advanced safely, there was no such luck for Greece's eighth seed Maria Sakkari, who became the highest ranked early casualty, beaten 6-4, 6-4 by Spain's Rebeka Masarova, ranked 71st in the world.

Kazakhstan's fourth seed Elena Rybakina was an easy winner over Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk, cruising through to the second round with a 6-2, 6-1 victory.

There was also a win for former world number one Caroline Wozniacki, making her first Grand Slam appearance in over three years. The 33-year-old Danish mother-of-two, who came out of retirement earlier this month, defeated Russian qualifier Tatiana Prozorova 6-3, 6-2.

Back in the men's draw meanwhile, Djokovic's route to a potential final meeting with Alcaraz was made easier as Danish fourth seed Holger Rune was stunned in four sets by Spanish journeyman Roberto Carballes Baena, a clay-court specialist ranked 63rd in the world.

Carballes Baena punished an error-strewn display by Rune to win 6-3, 4-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Last year's US Open runner-up, Norway's fifth seed Casper Ruud, reached the second round with a battling 7-6 (7/5), 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/5) defeat of Emilio Nava of the United States. — AFP

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Major drive launched to support local products

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, AUG 29

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion announced an initiative to support local products and services yesterday in Muscat in collaboration with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board.

The “mandatory products list” will oblige government contractors to purchase products and utilise services from national factories, local suppliers and local providers. The list will be included in all government tenders and procurements.

Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, highlighted the importance of the initiative in his keynote speech.

“In order to prioritise national products in government tenders, the mandatory list initiative was launched as part of the supportive



measures for the industrial sector.

“This initiative is a collaboration with our partners in both the public and private sectors, aiming to enhance local content in national industries.”

“This is achieved by allocating a significant portion of government procurement and tenders, subject to the government tendering system, to industrial establishments. This initiative will encourage existing industries, focusing on the local market and enhancing the quality

of products, potentially expanding production lines.”

“Furthermore, it aims to encourage investors, whether local or foreign, to establish other industries that cater to the local market’s needs. The list will be periodically reviewed to ensure industrial establishments benefit from government procurement.”

According to Sultan bin Said al Khudhuri, Head of the Local Value Added and Local Content Office at the Ministry, the initial

phase of the mandatory list contains 9 product categories amounting to a total of 57 items, whereas the services lists contains 11 categories with a total of 96 services.

Products include building materials, electrical materials, petroleum equipment, iron materials, food products, plastic products, paper supplies, furniture, petroleum and chemical products. Services include electrical work, civil and

construction work, traffic safety, general building maintenance, primary equipment on-site, engineering and professional design, information technology, labour force services, equipment supply, cable provision and transformation, as well as general services.

Furthermore, the Tender Board’s General Secretariat launched “Ma’een”, a programme that aims to support SMEs by offering continual training and education to business owners through a mentoring programme that directly connects specialists with business owners.

In addition, the Tender Board’s General Secretariat signed a collaboration agreement with the “Invest in Oman” platform to localise investment opportunities and promote local enterprises.

The agreement aims to foster effective collaboration and integrated coordination between both parties in terms of data exchange, information

sharing, and investment expertise, according to an ONA report.

In a statement, the Secretary-General of the Tender Board, Engineer Badr bin Salem al Maamari, affirmed that through launching these initiatives and programmes, the Board hopes to boost local products and services in the Sultanate of Oman and support small and medium-sized businesses in government procurements and tenders.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion previously established the National Product Competitiveness Enhancement Committee, to enhance the competitiveness of national products and services.

Earlier this year, Oman Investment Authority, the investment arm of the Government, launched its own local products and service mandatory list in aim to creating in-country value and supporting SMEs.

Oman’s banking sector shows steady growth in RoE



JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUG 29

Oman’s banking sector continues to make strides in its financial performance, showcasing steady growth in return on equity (RoE) amidst an overall positive trend in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) banking sector.

According to Kamco Invest, the aggregate RoE for GCC banks during Q2 2023 reached one of the highest levels in recent years at 13.0 per cent, indicating an improvement from the previous quarter’s 12.6 per cent. This growth was supported by increased 12-month profitability and a controlled expansion of shareholders’ equity.

Leading the region in RoE performance were UAE-listed banks, boasting an impressive 15.9 per cent RoE at the end of Q2. Saudi Arabian and Qatari banks followed suit, reporting RoEs of 12.8 per cent and 12.1 per cent, respectively.

Notably, UAE banks also experienced the largest quarter-on-quarter growth in RoE, with an increase of 110 basis points (bps), driven by elevated trailing twelve-month profits.

In comparison, Oman’s banking sector demonstrated stability and steady progress with an RoE of 8.1 per cent. Although slightly lower than the top-performing countries in the GCC, Oman’s banks showcased resilience and promising growth potential. This

positive performance underscores the effectiveness of the financial management strategies implemented by Omani banks.

While Kuwaiti banks maintained a solid double-digit RoE of 10.5 per cent, Bahraini banks reported an RoE of 7.5 per cent, indicating steady growth with room for improvement. Oman’s banking sector, with its 8.1 per cent RoE, demonstrated its commitment to financial stability and has positioned itself for further enhancement in the future.

Oman’s banking industry has been actively working towards strengthening its financial stability and expanding its market presence. Prudent risk management practices improved operational efficiency, and the diversification of revenue streams have played integral roles in driving the sector’s growth.

Furthermore, the Omani government’s initiatives to promote digital transformation, encourage entrepreneurship and attract foreign investment have created a favourable environment for the banking sector.

The positive outlook for Oman’s banking sector is supported by ongoing infrastructure projects and the country’s commitment to economic diversification. These endeavours are expected to generate new opportunities for banks, fostering sustained growth and increased profitability in the coming quarters.

Forum highlights Salalah’s potential as new economic gateway

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 29

The first edition of the Dhofar 2023 Forum was launched at the Rotana Salalah hotel on August 29, 2023, under the auspices of His Highness Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. Also in attendance were Dr Ahmed al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, Shaikh Salem bin Mustahil al Maashani, and other dignitaries.

The forum was organised in light of the rapid developments that the Dhofar Governorate has witnessed at all levels.

The governorate is a major export and industrial hub, with modern capabilities and integrated infrastructure. It has great potential for future growth and can contribute to facilitating the movement of international trade.

The forum also comes in light of the efforts made to strengthen Dhofar as a tourist destination, given its rich climate, beautiful and attractive nature.

This will enhance its contribution in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. The forum highlighted the most prominent developments that the Dhofar Governorate has witnessed in the last phase and the future growth of key sectors.

Government officials, private sector leaders, experts and specialists participated in the forum. They discussed the efforts made to support economic diversification, inclusive development and sustainable growth.

This will enhance the future of the province and reflect the efforts towards achieving a promising evolutionary vision. The forum focused in particular on the sectors of manufacturing, export, ports, logistics, tourism, mineral



resources, infrastructure, energy, wealth, agriculture and fisheries, real estate, banking, finance, insurance, and the education and healthcare sectors. In his keynote address, Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, highlighted the most prominent developments and efforts to promote and develop the province, as well as the most prominent development projects and their executive plans.

The forum also witnessed a presentation on the structural plan for Greater Salalah, an ambitious project that aims to highlight the city of Salalah as a national economic gateway. The success of economic development in Salalah will have a positive impact on other areas in Dhofar Governorate.

The endeavours to develop the city

of Greater Salalah, coupled with urban planning and future city prospects, were also presented. These collective capabilities significantly contribute to the province’s various economic sectors.

On the sidelines of the forum, a number of companies, initiatives and pioneering projects were honoured in recognition of their contributions to supporting society and enhancing added local value in the governorate.

Companies and organisations that were felicitated on the occasion were Port of Salalah, Dhofar Insurance Company, Al Saad International School, Muriya Tourism Development, Dhofar Municipality, Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, and Oman Tourism College.

Mobility Auto introduces Lynk & Co in Oman

MUSCAT: Lynk & Co, the premium global automotive brand jointly owned by Volvo & Geely, proudly announces the grand opening of its First Lynk & Co Showroom in Muscat.

Under the exceptional new line of auto business called 'Mobility Auto', Lynk & Co, in partnership with Oman's esteemed M/S. Towell Group, wholeheartedly commits to providing clients with unparalleled attention, guaranteeing an extraordinary experience.

Prepare to be amazed as our state-of-the-art showroom showcases our extensive range of vehicles, including the highly anticipated Lynk & Co 09, making its debut in Oman for the very first time.

Founded in 2016, Lynk & Co seamlessly blends innovative design, advanced technology, new experiences, and dynamic new energy. With an impressive presence of five design centres across various continents and a cutting-edge research and development centre, we have achieved an outstanding milestone of close to a million units sold by July 2023.

Lynk & Co has been steadily solidifying its footprint in Oman, having already introduced the acclaimed 01 and 05 models through both online and offline channels.

The opening of our new Lynk & Co Centre on August 22 reaffirms our unwavering commitment to delivering exceptional experiences



to our esteemed customers in Oman.

Situated in the prestigious Ghala Heights, Lynk & Co showroom promises a fully integrated experience encompassing sales, after-sales service, and spare parts.

Towell Auto group, will offer

their ownership journey.

This unwavering dedication reinforces our commitment to delivering unmatched quality and customer satisfaction in the Omani market.

Riyadh Ali Sultan, General Manager of Towell Auto Group, highlighted the brand's unique ability to seamlessly integrate technology into the lifestyles of modern customers.

He added, "Lynk & Co is a brand that comprehends and meets the evolving demands of today's consumers. It caters to the desires of today's connected generation for vehicles that effortlessly align with their tech-driven lives, thus setting it apart from traditional brands."

In response to inquiries about

Lynk & Co's new store opening in Muscat, Derek Peng, Marketing Head of Lynk & Co Asia Pacific, highlighted that the new store in Muscat marks a progressive stride in Oman.

"Driven by the brand's core values of 'Personal,' 'Open,' and 'Connected,' Lynk & Co is introducing high-value products targeted at engaging potential Omani consumers aspiring to enrich their lifestyles.

Nestled in Ghala Heights, the strategically located Lynk & Co Centre emanates a serene ambiance with its gentle gray and white tones, open-layout design, and ample space ensuring a comfortable and delightful car-shopping experience for its customers", he said.

Visa partners with Lahunna Oman to shape young women leaders

MUSCAT: Visa, the world's leader in digital payment, partnered with Lahunna Oman to shape young women leaders and strengthen financial literacy through a local initiative with Sidrah, a Youth Leadership Programme for Omani women.

The Sidrah Leadership Programme supports young women through mentorship and leadership training for personal and professional development. It is a holistic learning experience that focuses on nurturing leadership qualities, personal and professional development and encourages young women to envision themselves as future leaders and change makers.

From workshops to outward-bound experiential learning and networking opportunities, the program equips young women with the skills and knowledge needed to face their future with confidence.

Taking the initiative to a broader audience, another



initiative was introduced called Rialy; which included workshops and a gamified online competition for more than 1,000 students across various educational institutions across the Sultanate of Oman.

Students were exposed to essential financial concepts while enjoying a fun and engaging learning experience which fostered motivation among learners as top performers were also rewarded with prizes.

"The positive impact of the

Sidrah programme is evident in the growth and achievements of our participants.

Visa's support has made it possible to reach a wide audience, ensuring that Sidrah has a far-reaching impact. By partnering with Lahunna Oman, Visa continues to focus on upskilling women and nurturing growth in the workforce," said Carl Manlan, Visa's Head of Inclusive Impact & Sustainability for Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa region.

Oman Arab Bank shares positive half year growth figures

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has reported a consolidated net profit after tax of RO 11.5 million for the first half of 2023, up 64% against the same period of last year. The increase represents the highest year on year growth of the banks listed at the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), after an RO 7 million net profit for OAB in the first half of 2022.

The profit rise led to a positive set of figures that also saw half-year net loans and advances, including Islamic finance, grow 12% to RO 3,258 million (RO 2,907 million in H1 2022), with half-year customer deposits up 11% to RO 3,201 million (RO 2,889 million in H1 2022).

Net interest income from conventional banking and net income from Islamic financing grew to RO 49 million for the six-month period ending 30 June, compared to RO 48.9 million for the same period in 2022.

Operating income remained



steady from last year's first-half results at RO 61 million, while operating expenses were down 1% versus the same period in 2022 at RO 35.8 million.

Sulaiman al Harthi, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, said: "Our performance, which leads the industry in the Sultanate in the first half of 2023, demonstrates Oman Arab Bank's ever-increasing profile.

These gains have been powered by the hard work and dedication of our team, hand in hand with the introduction of several market-leading banking solutions and innovative promotions during this period. OAB's successes reflect positive movements across

the banking sector in Oman and the nation's overall economic performance going from strength to strength, continuing to increase the Sultanate of Oman's regional and global standing. We will be striving to build further on these figures in the second half of 2023, as the bank marks 50 years at the pinnacle of the industry in Oman."

OAB's figures were a highlight of results announced for Omani banks listed at the MSX, with combined half-year net profits rising to RO 235.3 million, up 17.5 per cent. The assets of the eight banks listed on the MSX at the end of June rose to RO 38.0 billion, growing 4.6 per cent.

The bank, which is currently celebrating its 50th anniversary, had its outlook raised to 'positive' by Capital Intelligence Ratings (CI Ratings) in April, with its Long-Term Foreign Currency Rating (LT FCR) and Bank Standalone Rating (BSR) revised from 'stable'.

MHD-ITICS wins contract for ODB's digital banking platform



MUSCAT: Mohsin Haider Darwish Infrastructure, Technology, Industrial and Consumer Solutions (MHD-ITICS) is delighted to announce its recent triumph in securing a significant contract for the design, development, deployment, and maintenance of Oman Development Bank SAOC's (ODB) digital banking platform.

This prestigious project underscores MHD-ITICS' commitment to driving digital transformation in the Sultanate of Oman's banking sector.

The contract was officially signed at the bank's premises, in the presence of Hamed bin Salim al Harthy, Acting CEO of ODB, Jayaprakash Menon, CEO of MHD-ITICS, and key stakeholders.

As per the agreement, the Digital Business Unit of MHD-ITICS Technology and Communications Division will create a custom platform aligned with ODB's digital transformation goals.

"MHD-ITICS is poised to set

new benchmarks for customer experiences at the intersection of finance and technology," stated Jayaprakash Menon, CEO, MHD-ITICS on the sidelines of the signing ceremony.

"In line with this, we are pleased to contribute to, and work closely with Oman Development Bank on their transformative journey.

This collaboration reaffirms our dedication to providing cutting-edge solutions in the banking and financial services sector."

Hamed bin Salim al Harthy, Acting CEO of Oman Development Bank, expressed his optimism about the project: "Our commitment to delivering innovative banking services that meet the evolving needs of our customers led us to select MHD-ITICS for this pivotal project.

We believe this collaboration will enable us to establish new standards in digital banking and enhance customer satisfaction."

Explore more with the powerful Toyota Fortuner

MUSCAT: The Toyota Fortuner beats all expectations with its powerful and impressive performance and capability. Engineered to offer some of the finest experiences both on-road and off-road too, the Fortuner makes the perfect companion for those looking forward to memorable adventures.

The Fortuner is equipped a choice of petrol engines that include a 2.7 Litre Four Cylinder Engine producing 164 HP & 25.0 Kg-m of Torque.

For even more exciting experiences, the 4.0 Litre V6 Engine churns-out 235 HP along with 38.3 Kg-m of Torque. The 6-speed Automatic Transmission, available as a standard option, provides thrilling acceleration. Like its impressive exterior design, the Fortuner also is known for its high standards on the inside.

Premium Leather Seats, Leather and Wood finished Steering Wheel with Paddle Shifts, Cool Glove Box, Cruise



Control and a whole bunch of other goodies augment its interior ambience.

Toyota Fortuner has a powerful Air Conditioner. Other innovative touches include a Navigation System.

The Rear View Camera ensures peace of mind when Reverse Parking. The 6-speaker Audio System enhances its harmonious ambience. And to add to the convenience, there is a Power Back Door System which adds to the sheer convenience.

On the safety front, the Fortuner is equipped with Comprehensive Safety Systems to protect its occupants. These include Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) that prevents the tyres from locking during braking. The Fortuner is equipped with SRS Driver Airbag, SRS Front Passenger Airbag, Side Airbag, Curtain Airbag and SRS Knee Airbag (driver only). In terms of seatbelts, a three-point Emergency Locking Retractor (ELR) seatbelts are equipped.

When impact is experienced

during a collision, the Seatbelt Locks to restrain the passenger. Other reassuring safety features include the Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) and the Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS).

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade.

In Oman, the nationwide parts and service network of Saud Bahwan Automotive supports Toyota's outstanding product quality. No wonder that today, Toyota is one of the most trusted and well-known brands.

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Salalah Port to introduce sea-air cargo connectivity soon

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 29

Port of Salalah, one of the largest maritime ports in the Middle East, is set to introduce sea-air cargo connectivity in the near future. This new shipping method will combine the speed of air freight with the cost-effectiveness of sea freight, offering a more efficient and sustainable way to transport goods.

Sea-air cargo connectivity works by transporting goods by sea to a regional hub, where they are then transferred to air freight for the final leg of the journey. This allows shippers to take advantage of the lower cost of sea freight for the long-haul leg of the journey, while still getting their goods to their destination quickly.

The introduction of sea-air shipping is a major development for Salalah Port. The port is

already a major hub for sea freight, and the addition of sea air shipping will make it even more attractive to shippers. This is expected to boost the port's economy and create new jobs.

Sea-air shipping is also a more sustainable way to transport goods. It reduces the amount of fuel used, which helps to lower emissions of greenhouse gases. This makes it a more environmentally friendly option for shippers.

The sea-air shipping service is expected to be available in Salalah Port in the next few months. The port is currently in the process of procuring the necessary equipment and infrastructure.

Once the service is in place, it is expected to be used by a variety of shippers, including those transporting perishable goods, electronics, and other high-value items.

Marafiq executes new water network expansion in SEZAD

MUSCAT: Within its plan to connect different investment projects as well as residential and commercial properties with its water network, the Centralised Utilities Company (Marafiq) — a joint venture owned by OQ, a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — implemented a water network expansion project in parts of Sayy neighbourhood at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

Commenting on the same, Engineer Said al Sarhani (inset), Acting Chief Operations Officer at Marafiq, said that the new expansion aims at raising efficiency of potable water sector at SEZAD and enabling the zone to attracting new projects in the areas where the expansion projects were executed.

He stressed that the company's strategy focuses on the availability of water in sufficient quantities and of high quality in various investment and residential areas at SEZAD with attention to enhancing efficiency and sustainability of water resources and making optimal use of them.

Al Sarhani added that Marafiq is working according to a time line that includes the expansion of the network in a number of schemes in SEZAD on an ongoing basis in line with urban growth, investment demand and population increase in the region.



The new project, according to Al Sarhani, included the expansion of the water distribution network in parts of Sayy neighbourhood (schemes 53, 54 and 55) with a length of 15 km. The Company completed last year water network expansion project in Sayy new commercial district with a length of 19 km, which contributed to linking the existing projects in this area to the water network and thus reducing dependence on drinking water transportation tanks.

"Currently, length of pipelines transporting water in the region is 46 kilometres, while the length of the pipelines of the water distribution network is 131 kilometres" he indicated. During the project implementation period, Marafiq awarded a number

of works to small and medium-sized enterprises, such as drilling and pipe installation, Al Sarhani explained, pointing out that companies operating in the water sector have achieved many gains as a result of the water network expansion, in addition to the other economic and social benefits.

Al Sarhani elaborated that the schedule followed by Marafiq in cooperation with the SEZAD also includes the expansion of the network in 3 new areas, stressing the Company's keenness to enhance the performance of the drinking water sector in the Zone.

"The Company has carried out many works to enhancing the performance of the sector since it obtained the license to provide potable water in the region in

2019" he said.

He also added that Marafiq is responsible for all operations related to potable water sector in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm starting from water production, transmission, distribution, billing, collection and customers service. He clarified that the Company has opened an office dedicated to manage the operations, maintenance, billing, collection and reception of customers. It also hired staff working alternately throughout the day for periodic maintenance and solving emergency problems in water networks.

Through a specialised technical team working around the clock, the Company monitors water quality, collects samples and conducts the necessary tests to ensure water quality.

"The office receives water service delivery applications, develops plans for the development of the water network to cover most areas of SEZAD, performs periodic inspection of meters and ensure their quality, replace meters in case of a defect affecting the consumption reading, and deal with reports related to network outage or weakness in water pumping" Al Sarhani said, pointing out that by the end of last June, the number of subscribers to the water network service reached about 2720 subscribers.

Oman and Vulcan Green Steel: Making history with the world's largest green steel plant

MUSCAT: Oman is on the cusp of making history in the steel industry with the ambitious launch of Vulcan Green Steel in Duqm, a ground-breaking initiative by Jindal Steel Group. This project aligns with Oman's commitment to reaching Net-Zero Emissions by 2050 and positions the country as a trailblazer in green steel production.

Scheduled for completion by 2026, the mega green steel project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) will establish a six million metric tonnes per annum (6 MTPA) green hydrogen-ready steel plant.

This project is estimated to achieve an astounding 12 million tonnes per annum CO2 savings, making a significant positive impact on global emissions reduction.

The project represents a marquee initiative in the fight against climate change and marks a new era of large-scale green steel production. Powered entirely by renewable energy and green hydrogen, it is set to become one of the largest green steel investments in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries, generating anticipation and excitement worldwide.

In a statement regarding this project, Ibtisam bint Ahmed bin Said al Faroojiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, affirmed, "The Green Steel project, to be carried out by Vulcan Green Steel



and Jindal Shadeed Iron & Steel in Duqm with investments exceeding RO 1.3 billion, represents a pioneering step in Oman's journey to become a global hub for green industries.

These industries will benefit from green hydrogen and renewable energy projects. The project will mark the beginning of large-scale industrial projects that will solidify Oman's presence on the world map as an attractive destination for foreign direct investments in this promising sector and its role in providing meaningful employment opportunities for national talent."

The Under-Secretary, added, "Since its inception in Oman in 2010, Jindal Shadeed Company has been actively engaged in the comprehensive development journey of the country and has established itself as a reliable partner and active contributor to this journey.

With the completion of the

new projects announced by the group, it will contribute to enriching the national economy and participating in achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and the carbon neutrality goals of 2050."

Under the visionary leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Oman fully embraces this transformative initiative as a critical step towards establishing itself as a prominent hub for green industries on the global stage.

Decarbonisation is at the core of the Jindal Group's agenda as they proactively reduce the industry's carbon footprint. Their dedication to implementing greener technologies and investing in talent development has earned them recognition as one of the Gulf region's lowest-emission steel producers.

Khalid Jashmi, Senior Advisor from the Jindal Steel Group, expressed pride in Oman's pioneering spirit and commitment to a sustainable future. He stated, "The Vulcan Green Steel project is

a testament to Oman's pioneering spirit and commitment to a sustainable future. We are proud to be frontrunners in the global Green Steel transition, and we are confident in making the world's one-of-a-kind green steel project a reality.

This venture sets a new standard for green energy to green steel projects, contributing to Oman's journey towards becoming a global hub for green industries."

Duqm's SEZAD is rapidly emerging as a global hub for the supply of green hydrogen, solidifying Oman's position as a pioneer in environmentally sustainable industries. This state-of-the-art Steel facility in Duqm is revolutionising eco-friendly industrial operations and catering to the automotive, wind turbine and consumer goods sectors across the GCC, Europe, and beyond.

As Oman aims to cement itself as a worldwide leader in sustainable steel production, the



SEZAD project is a significant step towards achieving this goal. At its core, this ground-breaking initiative supports international efforts to combat climate change by harnessing the power of green hydrogen.

By utilising this innovative technology, the project significantly reduces the carbon footprint inherent in steel production, making it an irresistible choice for environmentally conscious industries worldwide.

Unlike conventional methods of transporting green hydrogen in the form of green ammonia with minimal value addition, this project will process green hydrogen within Oman to do value addition and make green steel.

This strategic approach encourages the creation and development of a robust green hydrogen ecosystem within the nation. Furthermore, by focusing on in-country value addition, the project

takes significant strides in reducing transportation-related carbon emissions while simultaneously supporting the growth of green technology and steelmaking expertise within Oman.

This commitment to sustainability and the utilisation of renewable resources serves as a powerful testament to Oman's dedication to becoming a global leader in environmentally responsible practices.

As the SEZAD expands in Duqm, it promises to be a shining example of how industrial development and environmental stewardship can coexist harmoniously.

With its cutting-edge facilities and forward-thinking approach, this project positions Oman as a trailblazer in the global steel and automotive industries. It showcases the nation's unwavering commitment to forging a more sustainable future for generations to come.

Ireland firms have highest pandemic survival rate



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

With the lasting affect that the Covid pandemic has had on the economy and business collapses globally, recent figures show Ireland had the lowest rate of business failures of any country in the European Union at the peak of the crisis in 2020, reversing its position among the worst member states for liquidation during the financial crisis.

The government response to Covid was characterised by massive taxpayer-funded support for small business and households, unlike the previous financial crisis when taxes were hiked and incomes hollowed out.

The Irish economy has been the fastest growing in the EU since the start of the pandemic.

New figures from EU statistics agency Eurostat show just 1.6

per cent of Irish companies closed permanently during 2020, compared with an average of 7.2 per cent across the EU. That failure rate was less than in a normal year, despite the lockdown of swathes of the economy.

A prominent small business lender has hailed government Covid supports after new figures showed Ireland had the lowest percentage of business failures of any EU country.

The founder and CEO of SME lender Grid Finance, Derek Butler, campaigned in 2020 for direct business supports to ride out lockdown and says the justification for that policy is borne out by the results.

Butler was the founder of SME Recovery, a group established at the start of the pandemic as tens of thousands of businesses were forced to close their doors.

He said the new Eurostat figures show that schemes such as the employment wage subsidy scheme, where the government spent billions helping companies affected by the outbreak pay their staff, were extremely effective.

“It looks like there is a direct correlation between all the supports which were introduced for the SME sector and the low insolvency rate,” he said. “We’re reaping the benefits of the success of that Government intervention, and I don’t think there has been enough recognition of that.”

However, he warned that some businesses that have been propped up by those supports may yet fail, with insolvencies merely delayed rather than prevented.

Figures recently published by credit risk analyst CRIFVision Net found there were 410 insolvencies in the first six

months of the year, a jump of nearly 50 per cent from the same period in 2022, though still low by historic standards.

Butler said that while the number was still relatively low, it was indicative that some of the companies which can no longer rely on state supports are likely struggling.

“Many of these are businesses which would have naturally failed in 2020 or 2021, but were sustained by Government supports. It’s those ones who are failing now, and the reason we didn’t see it last year is because many businesses would have come out of the pandemic with a cash buffer. However, Butler said despite this, the billions spent supporting SMEs was still a good idea. “Theoretically yes, I would say it would have been better to target it, but like the Pandemic Unemployment Payment for workers, the time

you would have spent designing a perfectly targeted scheme would have been time away from saving the majority of businesses which needed it, so I think it was fair that there was a blanket approach,” he said.

The Eurostat figures also show that Ireland had the highest survival rate for businesses — 68 per cent of firms set up in 2015 were still operating in 2020, compared with an average of less than half across the EU.

Butler said while this figure was encouraging, he felt it was more indicative of the overall strength of the Irish economy.

“Other European countries tend to be more SME-friendly than Ireland,” he said. “

I think the high survival rate has more to do with the fact that there is a rising tide in our economy, our growth rates have been significantly higher than in other countries.”

How more sanctions on Russian diamonds could affect the global market



ELIZABETH PATON

The author is a reporter for the The New York Times Styles section, covering the fashion and luxury sectors in Europe. Her areas of industry focus and interest include business, tech and sustainability, along with Fashion Week coverage from London, Milan and Paris.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, centre, is welcomed to the White House by President Biden and first lady Jill Biden on June 22, 2023. During his visit, the prime minister presented the first lady with a 7.5-carat synthetic diamond. – The New York Times

Nineteen months have passed since Russia attacked Ukraine, sending shock waves around the world — and through the global diamond market. Russia is the world’s biggest diamond exporter by volume, with a state-owned company, Alrosa, mining almost one-third of all diamonds produced in 2021.

To prevent funds from flowing into the Kremlin war chest, the United States — the world’s largest market for finished diamonds — took action last spring when President Joe Biden banned the import of rough diamonds from Russia and the US Treasury Department placed sanctions on Alrosa.

Other countries imposed sanctions of their own, including Britain, which early this year announced an outright ban on Russian diamonds.

Last year the European Union had tried several times to enforce sanctions on Russian diamonds, but was prevented by Belgium because of protests from Antwerp, the Belgian port city that is a leading trade hub for precious stones.

Its representatives have expressed concerns that, aside from the difficulty that comes with tracking a diamond’s true origin, sanctions could hand Antwerp’s rivals, like Dubai and India, a competitive advantage on the Russian diamond trade. Not everyone agreed.

“There are people for whom the diamonds sold in Antwerp are more important than the battle we are waging,” President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine said last year.

Now, the diamond industry is readying itself for the unveiling of sanctions from the Group of 7 nations — Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States — and the European bloc that would prohibit the import of gemstones mined in Russia, including those cut and polished in other countries.

“The current US sanctions only covered rough Russian diamonds

or those cut and polished inside Russia,” said Paul Zimmisky, a diamond industry analyst based in the New York City area. “Given 90 per cent of diamonds are cut and polished in India, and can therefore be classed as Indian gems, the current regulations aren’t as strict as you might think.”

But some responses were “far more stringent than the government regulations required,” he said, with numerous high-profile luxury players, including Richemont and LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, telling suppliers that they would not buy Russian stones, putting the onus on those suppliers to disclose the provenance of their gems.

More governments with considerable economic firepower are expected to be part of the new effort. Brad Brooks-Rubin, a senior adviser in the Office of Sanctions Coordination in the US State Department, said consumers in the G7 nations account for almost 70 per cent of all diamond purchases.

“By cutting off most of their demand, if an import ban were to be agreed, Russian diamonds would have a narrower lane through which to work their way into the marketplace,” he said. “The focus of all discussions is how to target Alrosa and Russia’s diamond revenues that could then be funnelled to their war efforts.”

The formal announcement of G7 sanctions is expected in September, and negotiators are still finalising the exact terms for tracking and tracing individual gemstones and accompanying customs paperwork. The expectation is that these new sanctions would come into effect in January, after the all-important holiday retail season.

Jewellery shoppers may see prices rise if there is a shortage of non-Russian diamonds after more sanctions are imposed, but increases would likely come gradually rather than suddenly. The industry has been expecting the action.

The question is whether an

industry, mainly composed of small businesses, that is organised around the quality, size and colour of stones — not their provenance — could segregate stones and accurately produce paperwork that categorises them by origin. That challenge likely would be further exacerbated by the multiple supply chain loopholes that are possible when diamonds make their multinational journey from a mine, through a hard-to-police global web of middlemen, and ultimately to consumers or into industrial uses.

Diamonds can change hands 20 to 30 times between mine and market, according to Hans Merket, a researcher with the International Peace Information Service, an independent research agency.

It will be important to find the right balance between ambition and realism,” he added, as it could take “years rather than months to get all noses in the right direction and reorganise this complex global supply chain.”

Another headache? Russia

is known for producing small diamonds that are mostly sold in very large quantities. The new G7 sanctions likely would cover only finished stones of one carat or larger, Brooks-Rubin said, although smaller gems may be included later.

Tiffany Stevens, the CEO and general counsel of the Jewellers Vigilance Committee, a non-profit organisation based in New York City that focuses on ethics via legal compliance and policy advocacy in the jewellery trade, said the attack had required the diamond industry to make significant changes in its operations, and it had been given time to prepare for the new requirements that tougher rules would bring.

“The G7 sanctions is a turning up of the heat on Russia and also offers a brightening of the lines for the trade on how to enforce it,” she said. “But our industry is also very fragmented and global, with many in the trade who still won’t fall under its remit.”

— The New York Times

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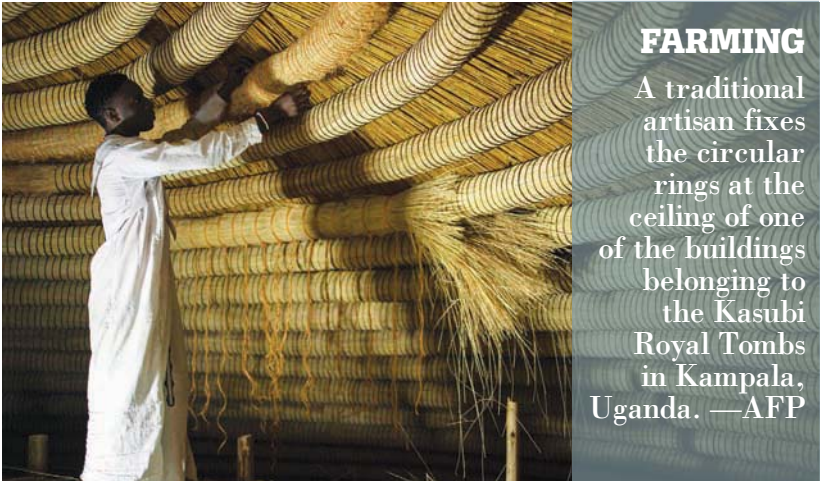
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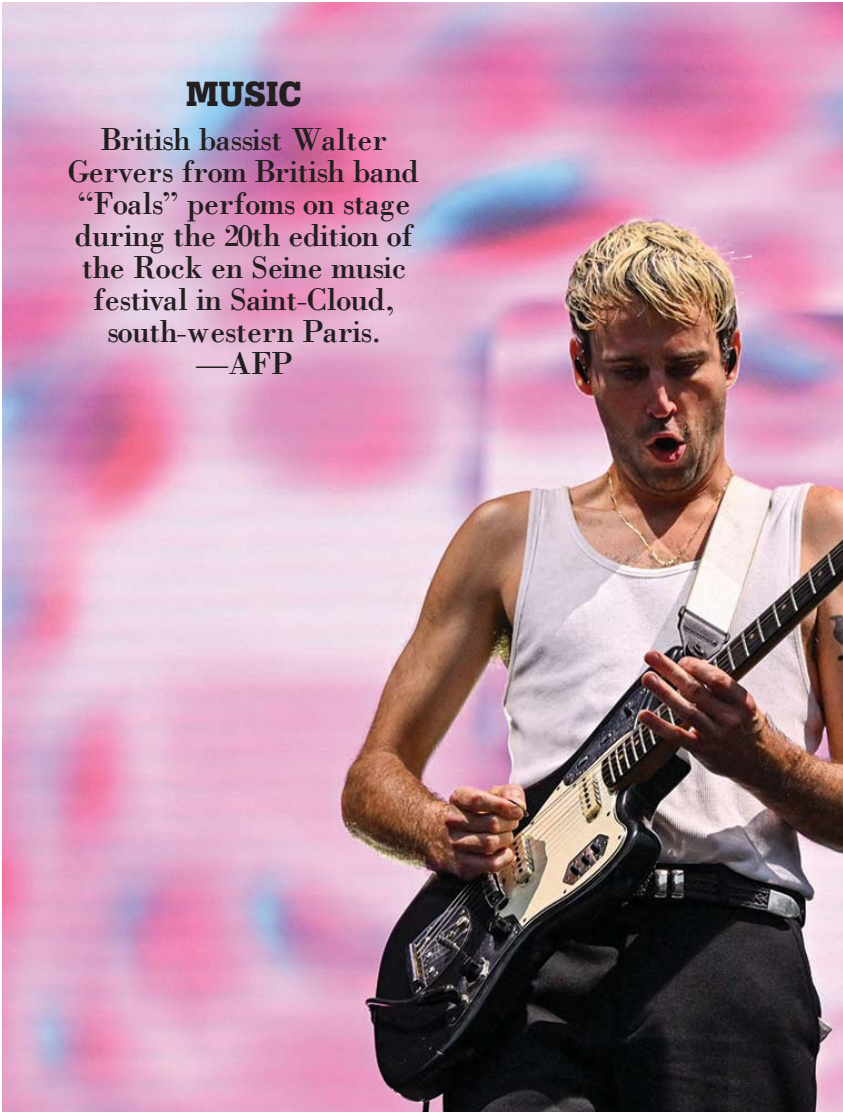
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FARMING
A traditional artisan fixes the circular rings at the ceiling of one of the buildings belonging to the Kasubi Royal Tombs in Kampala, Uganda. —AFP



CULTURE
Children perform a fire dance in front of the historic Buddhist Temple of the Tooth during the Esala Perahera festival in the ancient hill capital of Kandy. —AFP



MUSIC
British bassist Walter Gervers from British band "Foals" performs on stage during the 20th edition of the Rock en Seine music festival in Saint-Cloud, south-western Paris. —AFP



TRAVEL
Tourists travel down the River Seine on a Bateaux-Mouches open excursion boat in Paris. —AFP



FASHION
A model displays a creation from the Wildfrlein 2024 spring/summer collection by designer Roop Shimura during Tokyo Fashion Week in Tokyo. —AFP

art & life

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Maestro of makeup keeps an inspirational aura for women



KHALID AL BALUSHI

Meet the dynamic and versatile Omani personality, Sarah Ambusaidia, known affectionately as Sarolita. With a multifaceted career, she graces the screen as a charismatic TV host and captivates the airwaves as an engaging FM presenter. Her talent, however, doesn't stop there. She is the visionary force behind Sarolita Company, a venture that seamlessly blends beauty, fitness, and marketing services. A true maestro of the makeup brush, she also shares her artistry as a skilled makeup artist. She is equally active on social media, where her presence is felt across platforms. Sarah's exceptional attributes extend beyond her professional endeavors. An advocate of altruism, she devotes her time to uplifting the lives of children battling cancer and



orphans who deserve a brighter future. Her heart of gold caught the attention of 'Mrs Universal Empire,' a prestigious global competition that handpicked just 11 women from around the world. The honour of representing the Gulf region came via a special invitation from the British organisers. Layla Najafi, Director of Mrs Universal Empire, shared that Sarah's journey to the spotlight started with a mere Instagram post, a testament to the impact of her remarkable activities and talents. This digital connection led to a message that acknowledged Sarah's beauty, talent, and inspirational aura. Sarah's



path forward was paved with a thorough evaluation process, including insightful interviews with the company's visionary founder, Layla Najafi. As destiny would have it, Sarah emerged as the embodiment of Gulf excellence, donning the title of Ms Gulf. Sarah's participation in the competition resonates with a profound aspiration: To become a beacon of empowerment for women worldwide. Her mission is to spotlight the inherent strength, unwavering success, and timeless beauty that transcends challenges. In the realm of 'Mrs Universal Empire,' the focus transcends the superficial, delving into the depths of personality, intellect, community engagement, character, devotion, confidence, grace under pressure, philanthropic endeavours, and the captivating ability to command a stage. The essence of womanhood is celebrated, emphasising inner beauty, remarkable achievements, and the transformative influence that women wield over society. The panel tasked with selecting the torchbearer for this empowering vision is a tapestry of diverse professionals hailing from myriad backgrounds. The very essence of 'Mrs Universal Empire' is rooted in the unity of cultures and the global empowerment of women, acknowledging their pivotal role in shaping society's narrative. A meticulous set of guidelines propels contestants on their journey, ensuring their readiness for the ultimate moment when the chief judge shall anoint the reigning queen. As the conversation with Sarah comes to a close, her words resonate as a universal anthem for women across the globe: "Within you lies a tapestry of beauty and talent; don't allow anything to diminish your self-belief. Have faith in yourself and your aspirations."



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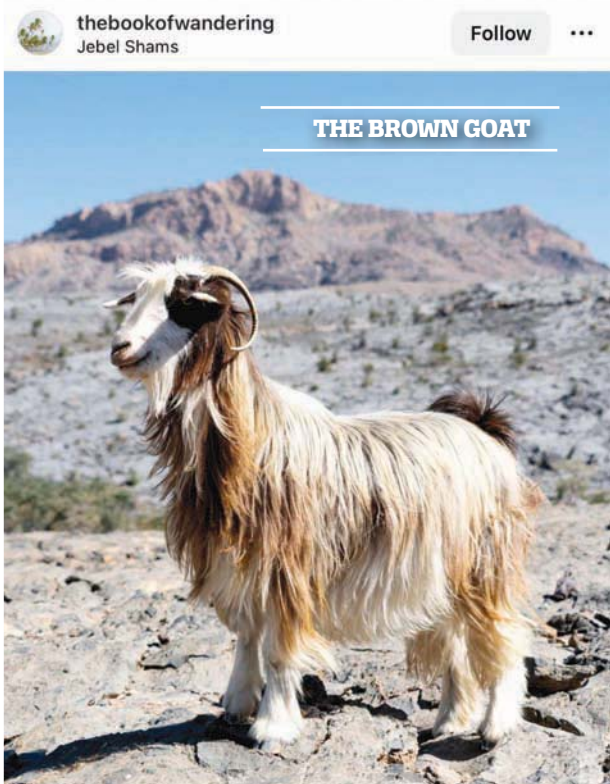
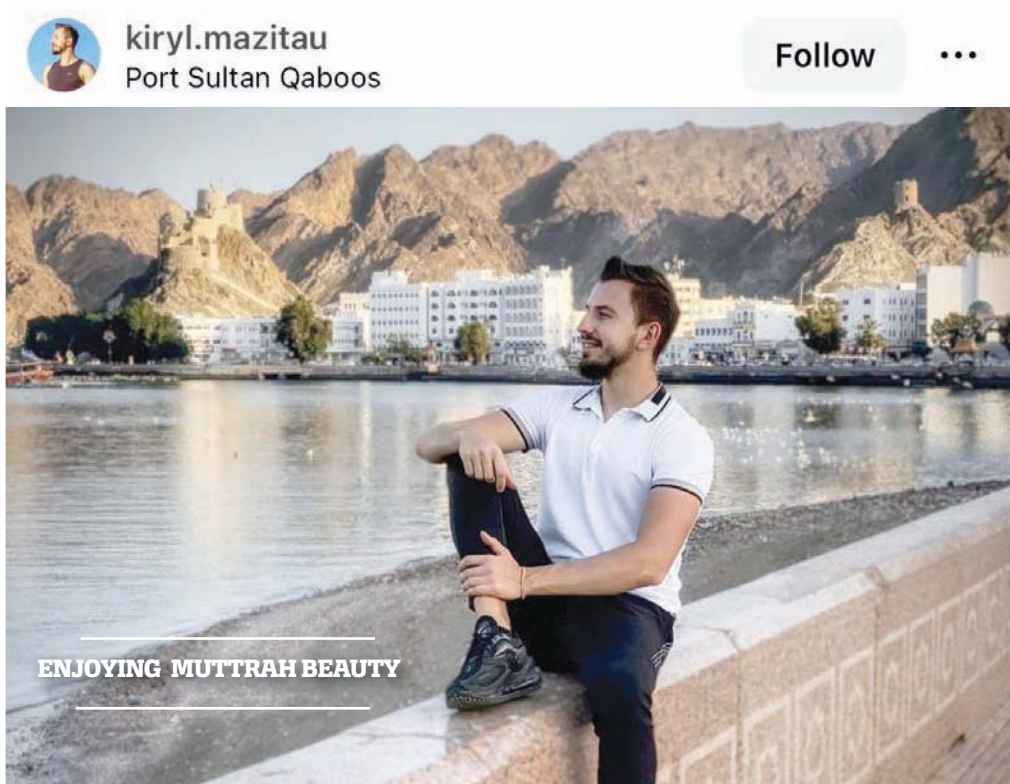
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Maestro accused of striking singer at performance apologises

RENOWNED CONDUCTOR JOHN Eliot Gardiner, who drew widespread criticism this week after he was accused of hitting a singer after a performance in France, apologised on Thursday, saying that he had lost his temper and that "physical violence is never acceptable."

In a statement, Gardiner, 80, said that he had apologised to the singer, William Thomas, 28, and that he would withdraw from the remaining concerts on a European tour with two of his venerated ensembles, the Monteverdi Choir and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique. The incident occurred on Tuesday night after a concert performance of the first two acts of Berlioz's opera "Les Troyens" at the Festival Berlioz in La Côte-Saint-André in southeastern France.

"I deeply regret the incident which occurred at the Festival Berlioz at La Côte-Saint-André on Tuesday evening and apologise unreservedly for losing my temper immediately after the performance," Gardiner said in the statement. "I make no excuses for my behaviour and have apologised personally to Will Thomas, for whom I have the greatest respect. I do so again, and to the other artists, for the distress that this has caused."

"I know that physical violence is never acceptable and that musicians should always feel safe," he added. "I ask for your patience and understanding as I take time to reflect on my actions."

Gardiner provoked an outcry when, on Tuesday evening, he struck Thomas backstage because he had headed the wrong way off

the podium at the concert, according to a person who was granted anonymity to describe the incident because the person was not authorised to discuss it publicly.

After the incident, Gardiner abruptly withdrew from the festival and returned to London to see his doctor, missing a performance on Wednesday night.

Thomas, a rising bass from England who was performing the role of Priam, was not seriously injured and performed on Wednesday.

On Thursday, Askonas Holt, the agency representing Thomas, confirmed in a statement that an incident had taken place and said that



Thomas would continue to take part in the tour, which will next head to the Salzburg Festival in Austria, the Opéra Royal in



said Thomas would not comment on the incident.

"All musicians deserve the right to practice their art in an environment free from abuse or physical harm," the statement said.

The Monteverdi Choir & Orchestras, a nonprofit that oversees Gardiner's ensembles, said in a statement on Thursday that Dinis Sousa, an associate conductor with the organisation, would replace Gardiner for the rest of the tour. Sousa had stepped in for Gardiner on Wednesday in France.

"We continue to look into the events that occurred on Tuesday evening," the group said. "Our values of respect and inclusivity are fundamental to us as a company and we take seriously the welfare of all our performers and employees." Gardiner — a crucial figure in the period-instrument movement and the founder of some of its most treasured ensembles, the

Monteverdi Choir, the English Baroque Soloists and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique — conducted at the coronation of King Charles III of Britain in May. He has made numerous recordings, many of which are considered classics, and wrote "Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven" in 2013 about the life and music of Johann Sebastian Bach.

In a 2010 interview with The Financial Times, Gardiner was asked about his famously demanding style.

"Can I protest my innocence?" he said. "I can be impatient, I get stropky, I haven't always been compassionate. I made plenty of mistakes in my early years. But I don't think I behaved anything like as heinously as you have heard. The way an orchestra is set up is undemocratic. Someone needs to be in charge." — **NYT**

HOLLYWOOD'S

Hollywood CEOs, striking writers at impasse after new talks

THE LATEST MEETING between Hollywood's striking screenwriters and top executives from Disney, Universal, Warner Bros and Netflix ended in an impasse, the writers' union has said.

After more than three months of silence from studios since the strike kicked off in

May, negotiations with the Writers Guild of America resumed earlier this month.

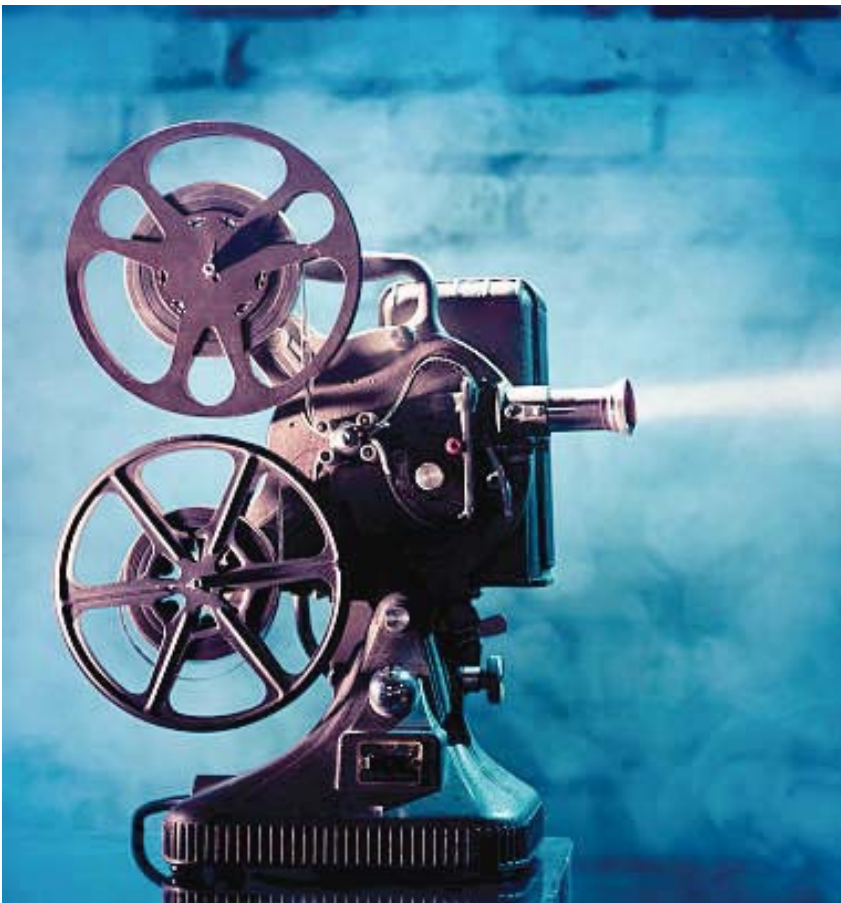
But talks remain deadlocked after an offer from studios to raise wages, improve work conditions and curb — to an extent — the use of artificial intelligence was rebuffed in the meeting late on Tuesday.

"We were met with a lecture about how good their single and only counteroffer was," the WGA negotiating committee said in a statement about the talks.

"This wasn't a meeting to make a deal. This was a meeting to get us to cave," the committee said in a statement.

The writers' strike, which since mid-July has been accompanied by an actors' strike, has brought much of the film and television industry to a standstill, costing Hollywood millions of dollars a day.

The presence at Tuesday's meeting of top CEOs including



Disney's Bob Iger and Netflix's Ted Sarandos, along with Donna Langley, chairman of Universal and Warner Bros's David Zaslav, wasn't enough to make a deal happen.

"We have come to the table with an offer that meets the priority concerns the writers have expressed," said Carol Lombardini, president of the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers.

Lombardini said that the studios and streaming platforms proposed a reasonable offer, including a 13 percent increase in the minimum wage for writers over three years.

They also promised to share with the WGA the number of hours shows are being watched on streaming platforms — figures that are currently confidential.

Studios have said they will be more transparent on streaming's audience numbers, but are not making a concrete offer to revise residual

payments.

As streaming has become more popular, residuals for shows on those platforms have lagged behind traditional television residuals — a key sticking point in negotiations.

The offer on AI consisted of allowing writers to rework scripts originally created by AI, while being credited as the sole author — and thus eligible to be paid as such.

But studios have remained silent on the possibility of training AI on existing scripts — a red line for the WGA.

The WGA countered that the studios' offer contained "limitations and loopholes and omissions" that "failed to sufficiently protect writers from the existential threats that caused us to strike in the first place."

"We will see you all out on the picket lines and let the companies continue to see what labour power looks like," the writers said. — **AFP**



The line-up of this year's performances at the Royal Opera House Muscat looks promising as they centre this year's theme on Stars, Legends, Dreams curating a wide range of world class performances that ensure the enjoyment of differing entertainment tastes. Built upon a repertoire of amazing shows, ROHM announced that Season 2023/2024 will include four popular operas, eight Arab music concerts and shows, four classical concerts, two extraordinary ballets, one jazz evening, two world music stars, and six spectacular shows.

Orchestra conducted by Francesco Lanzillotta, with another line up of incredible artists will take the stage on December 14 & 16. ROHM's stunning co-production of Giacomo Puccini's tragic love story, La Bohème, with Opéra de Monte Carlo will have Emmanuel Villaume conducting the Orchestra Filarmonica Italiana on November 23 & 25. An exciting highlight is the new opera production, realised in collaboration with Teatro Carlo Felice di Genova and scheduled on the 8th and 10th February 2024, of A Midsummer Night's Dream by

ing Al Nour wal Amal Orchestra, the only blind all female orchestra playing classical music alongside Majida El Roumi (Oct 17). A scattering of diamonds light up the season in solo concerts with Arab superstars, Majida El Roumi (Oct 18), Ragheb Alama (Feb 1 & 2), and Asala (Mar 1 & 2). An ROHM first, Asala is invited to perform her concert in the open air of the maidan, ensuring unprecedented access for a wider audience. A week-long series of events and exhibitions, combined with two unique concerts to pay homage to Mohamed Abdul Wahab is also a

(Nov 24), and the best bass baritone of our age, Erwin Schrott performs a concert outside his usual classical repertoire, bringing Spanish song and dance to the opera house stage (Dec 15). We are privileged to invite you to the opera house to hear the Pipe Organ Concert, the annual presentation which features the magnificent ROHM pipe organ front and centre with international organists, orchestra and choir further enhancing the concert (May 4). **BALLETS FROM THE WORLD-FAMOUS BOLSHOI AND THE PRAGUE NATIONAL BALLET**

Colas in La Fille Mal Gardée, with its bucolic setting and farmyard characters is the perfect partner in the season. Sergey Smbatyan returns to the opera house to conduct the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra, with dancers from the Prague National Ballet (Mar 6 & 7). **UNFORGETTABLE JAZZ** The jazz concert with Randy Brecker and Igor Butman stands out in this incredible season. These two jazz artists are jazz stars, touring as a sextet to sell out shows all over the world (Oct 11 & 12). **ICONS OF WORLD MUSIC AND CULTURE** With special pride for the ROHM vision for cultural enrichment and global breadth in programming, the opera house has added two artists at the top of their field in a national genre. Nishat Khan takes the meaning of musicality to a whole new level with the sitar, as the best musician of Indian classical music bar none in the world today (Nov 9 & 10). Cristina Branco will fill the auditorium with the soulful passion of Portuguese fado, hitting notes and

member to enjoy. For 2023/24, there are six shows which add a depth to the season, bringing in new and younger audiences, to begin building or develop further their love of musical performance. Annual festivals of military and folk music will take place on the outdoor maidans of the opera house and Royal Opera House of Musical Arts. In addition to these two extravaganzas, the Xi'An Acrobatic Troupe of China will present Swan Lake, a new take on the classical ballet to music from Tchaikovsky (26 & 28 Oct). The circus comes to town with acrobatics and breathtaking acts in Cirkopolis, in a show designed to get more family audiences to find their way to the opera house (Dec 21, 22, & 23). In the new year, the stage will become an ice rink once again, for the world premiere of Symphony on Ice, a skating performance created especially for ROHM (Jan 4, 5 & 6). The world-famous show Stomp! Finally arrives in the Middle East, after a decade of performing sell out nights across the West End in the UK and Broadway in the US (April 25, 26 & 27).

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME The 2023/24 calendar of educational events includes two Open House days, where the opera house doors are thrown open to students of all ages to take part in workshops and activities. This year, we offer one entitled The Sound of Music (Dec 16), and one entitled Making Music (Feb 24). Each one creates



Season 2023/24 is further distinguished by a new pricing structure designed to encourage and enable wider audiences to access the arts. Major reductions to ticket prices adds even more value to the experience as with the revamped pricing, show prices now start from OMR3. **OPERAS OF ROSSINI, DONIZETTI, PUCCINI, AND BRITTEN** The Barber of Seville begins the season in Gioacchino Rossini's much-loved style, quick with wit and pleasing music. The season starter includes a stellar cast including the Orchestra Sinfonica della Rai, Intermezzo Choir, and the Omani Opera Choir, under the baton of Antonino Fogliani on September 28 & 30. The theme of comedy and mischievous trickery is continued later in the season with Don Pasquale, Gaetano Donizetti's opera, a cautionary tale warning old men off marrying young wives! The Madrid Philharmonic

Benjamin Britten. The production is staged by Laurence Dale and based on the glorious comedy by William Shakespeare. While fairies and mortals mingle on stage, ROHM has created a special educational project for children to inspire greater connection to this literary giant. From Antonino Siragusa as Count d'Almaviva in The Barber of Seville, and Sonya Yoncheva as Mimì in La Bohème, to Ambrogio Maestri as the eponymous Don Pasquale, and Sydney Mancasola as Titania in A Midsummer Night's Dream, the stars who are performing in the operas of this season shine very bright indeed. **ARAB MUSIC STARS FROM ACROSS THE AGES** Programming of Arab Music throughout the season gathers stars and legends that reconnect history and tradition. The annual Omani Women's Day concert celebrates an incredible line up of female musicians, includ-

highly anticipated special for this year. Cairo Opera brings the legend of Scheherazade from 1001 Nights. Respectful Ramadhan series will take place during the holy month, with guests from Morocco, Syria and Egypt lending their voices to the special moments of reflection. A unique concert opens traditional Yemeni music to symphonic orchestra arrangements in Traditional Symphonies – A Journey through Yemeni Music conducted by Mohamed AlGhoom. **CLASSICAL CONCERTS** The first orchestral concert of the season features the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della Rai, conducted by Michele Gamba. With pieces from Paisiello, Rossini, and Cimarosa, cellist Ettore Pagano will lift the concert to new heights (Sep 29). To add to the big names that feature during the season, legendary Leo Nucci comes on board for a concert in homage to Maria Callas



A glorious epic contrasts with a romantic comedy in the two ballets which grace the season. The brilliant Bolshoi Ballet and Opera Theatre Company of Moscow presents Alexander Glazunov's Raymonda (Jan 25, 26, & 27). The sweet romance between Lise and

emotions that will stir audiences very deeply (Apr 19). **SPECTACULAR SHOWS FOR EVERYONE** As always, the opera house strives to present a full and varied programme for every audience

opportunities to delve deep into musical performance from a new and exciting perspective with professional musicians and educators. Summer Camp and School Performances are features of the season, and the highlight for 2024 will be the events surrounding the presentation of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, where Shakespeare will inspire games, crafts, activities, and exhibitions all over the opera house. **OUTREACH ACTIVITIES** The outreach programme includes Lunch Music in the Opera Galleria; Pre-Performance Talks for major productions; Opera Talks with artists in the music library; the Absolute Music Series; the new Open Air Movie Nights on the roof terrace of ROHM, and a special one-off concert entitled Desert Bridge (Nov 16), where Oman becomes the channel for sharing music and culture between ROSO and a Swiss orchestra.