

HM, SAUDI CROWN PRINCE REVIEW BILATERAL TIES

CROWN PRINCE
CONVEYS
GREETINGS OF
KING SALMAN
TO HIS MAJESTY

HM, CROWN
PRINCE REVIEW
HISTORIC, FIRM
AND FRATERNAL
RELATIONS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman is on a private visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

At the beginning of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan welcomed the guest, wishing him and his accompanying delegation a nice stay in Oman.

During the meeting, HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman conveyed greetings of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia, and best wishes of permanent health and



happiness to His Majesty, and the Omani people further progress and prosperity.

His Majesty asked the guest to convey his greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and the brotherly Saudi people further progress and welfare.

His Majesty the Sultan and HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman reviewed the historic, firm, fraternal ties between the two countries. They also reiterated their determination to move forward in promoting aspects of the existing bilateral cooperation in all spheres in a manner that meets aspirations

REITERATE TO
MOVE FORWARD
IN PROMOTING
TIES IN VARIOUS
ASPECTS

LEADERS
DETERMINE TO
BOOST EXISTING
BILATERAL
COOPERATION

of the Omani and Saudi peoples.

The meeting was attended from the Omani side by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, and HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said.

The meeting was attended from the Saudi side by HRH Prince Abdullah bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of National Guard, HRH Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of Defence, and HH Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan al Saud, Minister of Culture.

— ONA
SEE ALSO P2 & 3

MUSCAT

**HM CONDOLENCES
TO LIBYA PRESIDENT**

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Dr Muhammad Al Manfi, President of the Libyan Presidential Council, on victims of the floods that swept through Libya's northeastern regions. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sympathies to President Dr Muhammad Al Manfi, families of the victims and the Libyan people. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty to rest departed souls in peace in paradise and grant their families fortitude to bear the loss, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. — ONA

**ONA LAUNCHES
ELECTRONIC APP**

The Ministry of Information launched the electronic application of Oman News Agency for smart devices. The step keeps pace with modern technical developments in disseminating news content. Ibrahim bin Saif al Azri, Editor-in-Chief and Director-General of Oman News Agency, said that the launch of the application adds a new service to ONA browsers and followers, both in Oman and abroad. Through the app, the readers are constantly informed of news. **SEE P4**



SLOVENIA'S GREGA BOLE CONSOLIDATES TOP SPOT

Slovenia's Grega Bole consolidated his position on top of Tour of Salalah standings with a stage win in the third stage in Salalah on Tuesday. The first 11 riders all clocked the same time in a thrilling conclusion to the 104-km third stage from Al Haffa to Darbat. The stage win earned Bole the green jersey for topping the points classification along with his leader's golden jersey for time classification. **DETAILS ON P10**

Oman to apply for 'A' classification of UN human rights panels

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, SEPT 12

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC), finished preparing its file to apply for Category 'A' in the classification of the UN Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions.

Oman's application will be reviewed by the Office of the International Accreditation Commission in October 2023, so that the same application could be considered for endorsement by March 2023.

Revealing this during Human Rights Institutions Forum, Shaikh Abdullah bin Shuwain al Hosni, Chairman of OHRC, said that the approval of Oman's application is bound with the country's ratification of basic (human rights) agreements and its commitment to Paris Principles



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**SHAIKH ABDULLAH
AL HOSNI**
Chairman of OHRC

(principles pertaining to the status of national human rights institutions).

The activities of the 2-day forum, organised by OHRC in cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council, began on

Tuesday under the auspices of Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, President of the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution.

Shaikh Al Hosni highlighted that the primary objective behind this forum is to strengthen collaboration and underscore the realisation of shared goals among human rights institutions in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and the General Secretariat of the Council. This endeavour is dedicated to advancing human rights and fostering the development of the necessary mechanisms and strategies to achieve them.

He further noted that hosting this forum serves as a reaffirmation of the commitment to adhere to the goals of the United Nations, the Paris Principles, international agreements, and human rights laws. **TURN TO P5**



His Majesty, Saudi Crown Prince review relations



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman is on a private visit to the Sultanate of Oman. – ONA

MBPS Acquires Energy Service Company in the Netherlands



Mr. Mohammed Al Barwani Petroleum Services (MBPS), which is part of the MB Group of Companies, has acquired Balance Point Control, a Netherlands-based Oil Well Services Company, from Superior as part of MBPS' strategy to expand its capabilities in the European in addition to its expansion in the MENA region.

The Netherlands is the latest addition to MBPS' zone of operations, which has expanded in the MENA region to include Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, and KSA, and expanded in Europe to include Germany, Hungary, Romania, and Austria. It provides value in various

Mr. Salim Al Harthy, Chief Operations Officer of MBPS, said: "BPC is a well-

respected company with +21 years of experience providing a range of services onshore and offshore, all the way from live well snubbing to dead well Hydraulic workover and abandonment. To date, BPC has restored +700 wells, and has an exceptionally gifted team developing best-in-class practices which can be shared between Europe and Oman, as well as access to cutting-edge technologies. For example, BPC also provides Eline services, a high-end technology which is a great addition to MBPS. I am truly looking forward to working with the BPC team on the next step of its exciting journey as part of our goal to provide integrated well services worldwide."

Mr. Brian Ellis, CEO of Superior, said: "In discussions with Salim and the MBPS team, we were fascinated by MBPS' versatility and ability to provide value across continents while adhering to the highest standards of quality and safety. MBPS and its subsidiaries also displayed exceptional care in fostering a healthy, collaborative culture. I believe that BPC will continue to flourish and that the team will grow under its new management."

MBPS and BPC are already planning on the way forward for the company, including engaging with the BPC team and having a number of knowledge sharing sessions and crosspostings for both companies to benefit from this acquisition.





OMAN AND SAUDI ARABIA

NEIGHBOURS AND PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

VINOD NAIR
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The political, diplomatic, and economic relations between Oman and Saudi Arabia have been on the upswing since the visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Kingdom in 2021. Sayyid Badr al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, in a statement, said that both countries have made significant strides since the establishment of the Omani-Saudi Coordination Council, which has played a key role in strengthening cooperation across sectors.

Both countries are working on their future visions, Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030, by exploring and developing joint opportunities in logistics, renewable energy, food security, and water resources.

It may be noted that Saudi Arabia was His Majesty the Sultan's first official international visit in 2021.

The first land crossing between the two nations was opened in December 2021, which

coincided with the visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the Sultanate of Oman. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman later also announced the establishment of the 'Saudi-Omani Investment Company' with a \$5 billion fund to take advantage of investment opportunities in different sectors.

According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the opening of the Empty Quarter Road reduced the travel time between countries from 18 hours to six, making the Sultanate of Oman the nearest tourist destination for Saudi citizens and residents.

A report issued by the MHT said that before the opening of this new road, travellers to and from Saudi Arabia had to travel via UAE.

With the Empty Quarter easily accessible via the new road, travellers between Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman can now enjoy desert scenes, especially sand dunes whose heights range between 50 and 250 meters, transverse and linear dunes.

The new road starts from the Ibri roundabout in Al Dhahirah Governorate. It ends at the Batha intersection in Saudi, covering a length of 725 km, passing through

the Empty Quarter desert, of which 161 km in the Sultanate of Oman and the rest 564 km in Saudi Arabia.

MHT said that the total cost of constructing the iconic road was RO1.9 billion, and it is considered an engineering marvel due to the rugged terrain and harsh climate in the Empty Quarter.

Saleh bin Nasser al Jasser, the Saudi Minister of Transport and Logistics, told the Observer last year that the road has been well received, especially the convenience it offers to Haj and Umrah pilgrims and tourism and businesses from both sides.

In the first six months of the opening of the road, nearly half a million tonnes of goods and 400,000 passengers used the new direct link between the two countries.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, told the Observer that the long-term goals between both sides include the possibility of a direct railway link and the short-term goals in the agreements for the quick turnaround of goods via sea and land border crossings.

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Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN) and Dar Al Arkan, the real estate company in Saudi Arabia and the GCC, have signed an agreement to develop AIDA' a premium, mixed-use project nestled within the masterplan of Yiti Integrated Tourism Development. The project marks Dar Al Arkan's first entry into Oman to drive the development of the property market and support the growth of Oman's tourism and real-estate sectors in accordance with Oman Vision 2040. The value of the investment in the project from both parties will reach RO1.5 billion, and it will be developed in three phases on an area of 3.5 million square meters.

The Kingdom is also a strategic partner in several economic projects in the Sultanate of Oman, including the development of Khazaen City, in addition to projects in the energy sector.

There has been an increase in the volume of trade exchange between the two countries. The volume of Omani non-oil exports to Saudi Arabia in 2022 increased 33.9 per cent to RO922 million (\$2.4 billion), compared to about RO650 million (\$1.68 billion) in 2021.

Oman Vision 2040, Saudi Vision 2030 go hand in hand

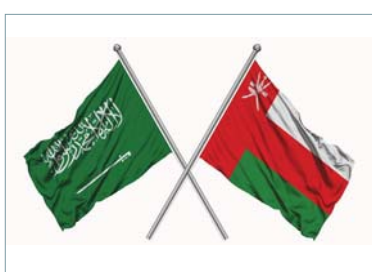
SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shadadm

The current visit of Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), assumes great significance and will reflect positively at various levels of cooperation, which do not only lie in the border crossing but also leveraging the Sultanate of Oman's geographical and strategic location.

Even though the visit of Prince Mohammed is private,

it assumes great significance and reflects positively at various levels. Oman and Saudi Arabia constitute basic pillars in the GCC, and they carry strategic weight towards advancing joint Arab action. The two countries share identical views towards domestic development, and their visions are enshrined in Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030. The 'Saudi Vision 2030' and the 'Oman Vision 2040' are similar in many ways, and both sides can benefit from each other.

While Oman Vision 2040 is



the Sultanate of Oman's gateway to overcome challenges, keep pace with regional and global changes, generate and seize opportunities to foster economic competitiveness and social well-being, Saudi Vision 2030 is a strategic framework to reduce

Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil, diversify its economy, and develop public service sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, recreation, and tourism.

JOINT INVESTMENT
Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the KSA, enjoy economic and investment cooperation in all fields. Previously, the

two countries reaffirmed plans to engage in joint investment in advanced technologies, innovation, renewable energy projects, industry health, real estate, tourism, petrochemical converting industries, supply chains, logistics partnership, information technology and financial technology.

The achievements made over the past year and the active exchange of visits among officials reflect the keen desire of the two countries to work together. This includes the establishment of the Omani-Saudi Investment Forum

held last August in Muscat, where several agreements and memoranda of understanding were signed between business persons.

High-level officials and delegations have made reciprocal visits in recent years to integrate Oman's Vision 2040 and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 — two development and economic diversification agendas designed to create vibrant, modern economies that offer young citizens exciting new career paths and improve the overall quality of life.



Oman hosts 25th meeting of GCC justice ministries

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, chaired the 25th meeting of justice ministries of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. In his opening speech, Dr Yahya bin Nasser al Khasibi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, welcomed the guests in the Sultanate of Oman. “The meeting is part of joint judicial work and to confirm the strengthening of the spirit of cooperation, harmony and brotherhood among the countries



of the Gulf Cooperation Council.” The meeting agenda includes several important issues awaiting guidance and recommendations, including registering lawyers in the GCC countries. It also aims to address the executive controls and mechanisms to regulate the legal profession for citizens of the GCC countries. He also stressed the reality of modern technologies and their best use in decision-making and other judicial work. He praised the efforts of the General Secretariat of (Legislative and Legal Affairs) in following up on implementing the decisions of the Ministers of Justice in the GCC countries. The meeting discussed several

important topics of common interests, including a project to develop an agreement for the implementation of judgments, delegations and judicial declarations in the areas of civil, commercial and personal status matters. It also includes legal and judicial cooperation in matters of penal code, draft unified rules for combating discrimination and hate speech in the GCC, the rules for juvenile crimes, and the agreement to extradite accused and convicted persons between the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Counsellor Sultan bin Nasser al Suwaidi, General Secretary Assistant for Legislative and Legal Affairs, praised the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, in managing all technical meetings during its presidency of this session.

MoL hosts key forum on ‘Project Governance’

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 12

The Ministry of Labour (MoL), in partnership with the Reference Centre for Conferences and Seminar, organised a well-attended forum focused on strategic project management, with a specific emphasis on advancing the principles of good governance. The opening was held under the auspices of Shaikh Salem bin Mustahil al Maashani, Adviser to the Diwan of the Royal Court. In his opening address, Dr Mohammed al Najjar, Director-General of Training at the Ministry of Labour, said, “Project governance comprises an encompassing framework of management systems, rules, protocols, relationships and structures that meticulously guide decision-making processes and skillfully steer projects towards their intended goals and strategic objectives.” Al Najjar stressed that the core purpose of project governance is to empower employees with professional expertise, equipping them with the necessary practical skills, knowledge, and hands-on experience to effectively execute their assigned responsibilities. Modern organisations are intricate entities, featuring



numerous departments and divisions, each tasked with distinct responsibilities and objectives. These entities often collaborate and, at times, possess overlapping duties in their collective pursuit of an organisation's overarching goals. The term “good governance” steps in as an essential catalyst, harmonising and synchronising the roles of these diverse departments, thereby bridging any gaps that may arise between them. This terminology has gained prominence in response to the significant evolution witnessed in contemporary institutional dynamics, underscoring the vital role of leadership in steering organisations towards resounding success. The two-day forum seeks to foster cooperation and enhance communication among the diverse spectrum of strategic projects operating within the domain of governance. It aims to offer valuable insights into the latest advancements in governance mechanisms and tools pertinent to strategic projects. Additionally, it aims to identify key challenges that often hinder the effective management of strategic projects within the framework of governance, proposing practical and viable solutions to surmount these obstacles. Furthermore, it draws inspiration from the experiences of developed nations in the field of governance. All these endeavours are meticulously designed to enhance the governance mechanisms of strategic projects, elevating their performance to seamlessly align with the ambitious objectives set forth in Oman Vision 2040. The forum attracted a diverse cadre of experts, researchers and stakeholders, both hailing from within and beyond the borders of the Sultanate of Oman. Also in attendance are current and aspiring leaders within the government sector, and corporate auditors and legal advisers serving within government entities and projects.

Information ministry launches Oman News Agency mobile app

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Information on Tuesday launched the electronic application of Oman News Agency (ONA) for smart devices. The step keeps pace with modern technical developments in disseminating news content. Ibrahim bin Saif al Azri, Editor-in-Chief and Director-General of ONA, said that the launch of the application adds a new service to ONA browsers and followers, both in Oman and abroad. Al Azri pointed out that, through the app, the readers are constantly and immediately informed of local and international developments and events. The readers can access ONA news under different categories, including Royal News, Oman Today, and Governorates, in addition to economy and international news which include Policy and Miscellaneous news. Al Azri explained that ONA app is also empowered



with an advanced news searching feature that support visual news, audio news and news photos. It displays news content in high quality and allows reader reactions through personal comments, news sharing and offline reading of news in Arabic and English. Readers who wish to browse ONA may upload the app through the following link: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.fictionx.onaapp> Moreover, iOS users may download the app through the following link: <https://apps.apple.com/app/id1624433566>. The readers can also follow up ONA content and news services via: <https://www.omannews.gov.om>. — ONA

World Media Seminar on sustainability kicks off in Sharjah

SHARJAH: The World Media Seminar, organised by the Emirates News Agency (WAM) in partnership with Sharjah Government Media Bureau, kicked off on Tuesday as part of the 12th International Government Communication Forum (IGCF 2023) that will begin at Expo Centre Sharjah on Wednesday. The seminar explores the role of the media in highlighting sustainability issues over two days, with the participation of a select group of officials, experts, specialists and partners of the WAM from inside and outside the country. Addressing the seminar's inaugural session, Mohammed bin Jalal al Rayssi, Director-General of WAM, emphasised the importance of strategic partnerships between media organisations. He stressed that such partnerships enhance the quality of news and media work at the local, regional and international levels.



Al Rayssi noted that the launch of the World Media Seminar highlights key issues that matter to societies, individuals and institutions. “The seminar embodies the UAE's cultural and humanitarian message of spreading knowledge and expertise, and benefiting from global experiences and best practices.” He reaffirmed WAM's commitment to credibility and professionalism in its news production. “Since its establishment, the agency has signed over 120 international cooperation agreements with news agencies, newspapers, radio stations, television networks, and digital media organisations in all parts of the world. These partnerships have helped WAM to reach a wide audience of readers and viewers in the UAE and around the world.” Al Rayssi also acknowledged the challenges that media



organisations encounter today in the face of modern technologies such as social media and artificial intelligence. He stressed the importance of collaborating with strategic partners to address these challenges and ensure that media organisations continue to serve their audiences effectively. He explained that the organisation of the World Media Seminar is a translation of the institutional objectives of the Emirates News Agency and the Sharjah Government Media Bureau, to discuss the global best practices and models. Al Rayssi added, “WAM will be showcasing in its stand at the International Government Communication Forum two interactive platforms that demonstrate the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to generate both real and fake news. “The first platform, titled ‘Make a News Story at WAM’, will allow users to use AI tools to create their

own news articles and reports. The second platform, titled ‘Fake News and WAM's Credibility’, will immerse users in a fake news story that is so realistic that it is difficult to distinguish from real news.” “We want to use these platforms to raise awareness of the importance of media literacy,” emphasised Al Rayssi, adding that “AI is a powerful tool that can be used to create high-quality news content, but it can also be used to spread misinformation. It is important that people are able to identify fake news so that they can make informed decisions.” He invited all participants in IGCF to have first-hand experience of these platforms during the event, extending his sincere thanks to Tariq Saeed Allay, Director-General of the Sharjah Government Media Bureau, and the officials of the International Government Communication Centre for organising the event and its parallel activities.



3 films from Oman win praise at Indian festival

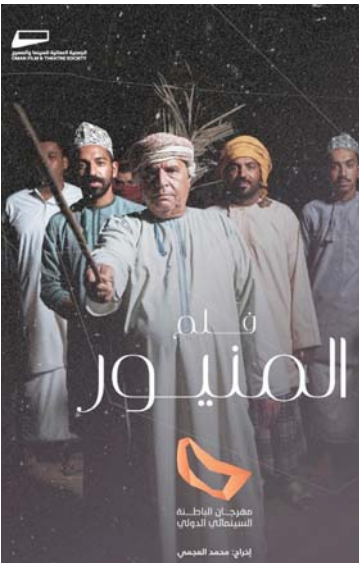
KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Omani film director who won accolades at the 11th edition of the India Film Festival in India last week is all set to highlight the history of Oman on a bigger screen with actors from across the region and beyond marking first of its kind historical series of events.

Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi, the director of ‘Manyour’ said that there has been a sound awakening for film-making in Oman and it is just a matter of time before Oman sends some of its filmmakers to international arena.

“I have my plans of making a film-based on Oman on a bigger scale incorporating all actors and actresses from across the region, thanks to the constant support of the Oman Film Society which paved way for the birth of new filmmakers like me,” he said.

‘Al Maksara’, and ‘Hashf’, both directed by Dalila al Diriyah also took part in the festival. While ‘Manyour’ dealt with the Omani art of Zamat and how to prepare for the start of the competition in the form of a suspenseful documentary, ‘Al Maksara’ documented the custom of Al Maksara in Nizwa Market, which is a traditional heritage custom that means arguing or negotiating the price between the seller and the buyer to agree on a price that both



parties are satisfied with.

The film focuses on the Omani dagger because of its importance in shaping Oman’s emblem, and as an important part of the Omani man’s identity.

‘Hashf’, the third movie deals with the story of a woman who lived in a remote village in the Sultanate of Oman where the series of events revolved around our habit of procrastinating things to do until they are gone and we lost them.

It also deals with the abandonment of the family or children, the lack of consideration for the elderly who are still clinging on to their lives, their village, their pets and all that were dear to them until their last breath. Al Ajmi’s movie, ‘Manour’ has earlier won the ‘Audience Award’ at the Tire Film Festival in Lebanon and

the Best Omani Film Award at the Al Sharqiya Film Festival. It has also participated in the 4th Casablanca International Film Festival and gained rave reviews at the fest.

“Participating in international festivals gives great exposure to us and Omani film-makers can benefit out of them and learn about cinematic experiences, and these festivals are also a unique opportunity to gain more experiences to understand different cultures,” Al Ajmi stressed.

Through international participations, Oman can introduce the cultural heritage that we are rich in, and a cinema culture evolving around this should be nurtured for the present and future generations to support a cinema culture in the country, which can also provide jobs for thousands.

Commander of the Peninsula Shield Joint Force visits MSC



Maj Gen Abdulaziz Ahmed al Balawi, Commander of the Peninsula Shield Joint Force and his accompanying delegation on Tuesday visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). Upon their arrival, the delegation was received by Commodore Adil bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Head of the MSC. 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 also toured the centre’s facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies used in carrying out its national duties. – ONA

Forum on Alzheimer’s today

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The National Alzheimer’s Forum 2023 will begin on Wednesday at Sultan Qaboos University. Many regional psychiatrists, general practitioners, community nurses and social workers will attend the forum organised by Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, Ministry of Health and Oman Alzheimer’s Society. Held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah al Futaisi, adviser to the Vice Chancellor of SQU, an Alzheimer’s month forum began at the university’s Cultural Centre to mark World Alzheimer’s Month.

The forum is an initiative by the Department of Behavioural Medicine at SQU Hospital and Oman Alzheimer’s Society. The conference objectives are to present recent advances in dementia diagnosis and treatment, discuss challenges in dementia care in Oman, explore caregiver’s needs and experiences, and practice screening tools.

After the welcome speech by Dr Hamed al Sinawi, the opening address will be delivered by Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, the Regional Director for the MENA Region, World Health Organisation. Dr Ahmed al Harrassi will be presenting a paper on Neurocognitive



disorders. Ohood al Saadi will address social development’s role in supporting people with Alzheimer’s.

An important topic that will be addressed is legal issues facing people with Alzheimer’s, which Dr Huda al Qutaibi will present. A workshop conducted by Dr Ahmed al Harrasi will focus on screening for dementia in primary care, as it has been noted that early diagnosis is best in the case of Alzheimer’s as well.

A major highlight is the smartwatch launch for tracking people with Alzheimer’s, the brainchild of White Horse Company.

Oman Alzheimer’s Society, the National Alzheimer Society of Oman, and a member of ADI, the federation of national Alzheimer’s and dementia associations, are calling on governments around the world to urgently fund dementia risk-reduction research, education,

and support services and for governments to make risk reduction a core element of National Dementia Plans.

Adopting a healthy lifestyle can prevent the onset of dementia, and it’s never too early or too late to reduce one’s risk of developing dementia.

Oman Alzheimer’s Society says tackling dementia risk factors for individuals, both before and after a diagnosis, could reduce or slow down the oncoming 124,800 projected dementia cases by 2050 in a way that is accessible and affordable for people across the globe.

Dr Hamed al Sinawi said there are risk factors for dementia. These include smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, infrequent social contact, head injuries, and conditions including diabetes, hearing loss, depression, obesity, and hypertension.

Oman chairs GCC municipalities meet



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman chaired the 26th meeting of GCC ministers of municipalities. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat. Al Busaidy said that the meeting comes within the framework of the council’s efforts to approve the recommendations of the municipal action strategy. Moreover, the meeting discussed several topics, including conferences, workshops and training programmes in the municipal action field. — ONA

Oman to apply for ‘A’ classification of UN human rights panels

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This commitment is upheld through the continuous efforts of Gulf human rights institutions and the General Secretariat of the Council to enhance all aspects and methodologies within this field by collaborating and coordinating with governmental and societal entities.

He emphasised the importance of organising gatherings and conferences of this nature that unite officials, experts and specialists in human rights. These events enrich knowledge, promote awareness and support initiatives to achieve these vital principles, objectives and foundations.

In his speech, Mohammed al Nasoor, Head of the Middle East

and North Africa Department at the Commission, commended the positive developments in the establishment of a common human rights strategy for the GCC countries and the completion of the establishment of human rights institutions in accordance with international standards known as the Paris Principles. This represents a practical implementation of one of the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 16, which calls on countries to establish independent and robust institutions that serve the rule of law and safeguard the rights of citizens.

He expressed his hope that the partnership efforts with the General Secretariat of the GCC would lead to the signing of a



memorandum of understanding between the Secretariat and the Commission in the coming weeks. He added that the idea of signing a memorandum of technical cooperation by the GCC reflects the member states’ commitment to upholding the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights values and their efforts to promote and protect the rights of citizens and residents alike.

He pointed out that this year marks the 30th anniversary of the Paris Principles Declaration, which established national human rights institutions and their evaluation. Over the past

decade, the significance of these national institutions has increased as they serve as a bridge between governmental entities and civil society, particularly in addressing imbalances and obstacles in citizens’ enjoyment of their rights and freedoms.

They also advise governments in a manner that serves societal security and ensures compliance with international human rights law.

Ambassador Mohammed bin Rashid al Suwaidi, Human Rights Adviser at the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council, praised the role of national human rights institutions in the GCC countries despite their differing titles in each country. He described them as a prominent

qualitative leap witnessed by the Gulf states and one of many noble initiatives by the Majesties and Highnesses, the leaders of the Council’s countries, to develop mechanisms, legislation, regulations and procedures that enhance fundamental rights and freedoms in Gulf societies.

He stated that human rights and sustainable development are complementary and integrated, where each aspect strengthens the other. National human rights institutions play a crucial role in implementing sustainable development goals at the national level by aligning legislation and policies, overcoming challenges, building capacities and collaborating with stakeholders to achieve these objectives.



At least 2,300 dead in ‘epic’ Libya floods, thousands more missing



People look at the damage caused by freak floods in Derna, eastern Libya. – AFP

BENGHAZI: At least 2,300 people were killed in Libya and thousands more were reported missing after catastrophic flash floods broke river dams and tore through an eastern coastal city, devastating entire neighbourhoods.

As global concern spread, multiple nations offered to urgently send aid and rescue teams to help the war-scarred country that has been overwhelmed by what one UN official labelled “a calamity of epic proportions”.

Massive destruction shattered the Mediterranean coastal city of Derna, home to 100,000 people, where multi-storey buildings on the river banks collapsed and houses and cars vanished in the raging waters.

Libyan emergency services on the ground reported an initial death toll of more than 2,300 in Derna alone and said more than 5,000 people remained missing while about 7,000 were injured.

“The situation in Derna is shocking and very dramatic,” said Osama Ali of the Tripoli-based Rescue and Emergency Service. “We need more support to save lives because there are people still under the rubble and every minute counts.”

The floods were caused by torrential rains from Storm Daniel, which made landfall in Libya on Sunday. Derna, 250 kilometres west of Benghazi, is ringed by hills and bisected by what is normally a dry riverbed in summer, but which

has turned into a raging torrent of mud-brown water that also swept away several major bridges.

The number of dead given by the Libyan service roughly matched the grim early estimates provided by the Red Cross and by local authorities in the eastern region, who have warned the death toll may yet rise further.

“The death toll is huge and might reach thousands,” Tamer Ramadan of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies earlier told reporters.

“We confirm from our independent sources of information that the number of missing people is hitting 10,000 persons so far,” Ramadan said.

Footage on Libyan TV showed

dozens of bodies, wrapped in blankets or sheets, on Derna’s main square, awaiting identification and burial, and more bodies in Martouba, a village about 30 kilometres to the southeast.

More than 300 victims were buried on Monday, many in mass graves — but vastly greater numbers of people were feared lost in the waters of the river that empties into the Mediterranean Sea.

Access to the eastern region is limited. Phone and online links have been largely severed, but the administration’s prime minister Oussama Hamad has reported “more than 2,000 dead and thousands missing” in Derna alone. — AFP

Race against time to find survivors 4 days after Morocco quake

MARRAKESH: Hopes dimmed on Tuesday in Morocco’s search for survivors, four days after a powerful earthquake killed more than 2,800 people, most of them in remote villages of the High Atlas Mountains.

Search-and-rescue teams from the kingdom and from abroad kept digging through the rubble of broken mud-brick homes, hoping for signs of life in a race against time following the 6.8-magnitude quake late on Friday.

The Red Cross appealed for more than \$100 million in aid to meet the “most pressing needs”, including water, shelter, health and sanitation services.

“We need to make sure we avoid a second wave of disaster,” said Caroline Holt, global director of operations at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

In the tourist hub of Marrakesh, whose Unesco-listed historic centre suffered cracks and other major damage, many families still slept out in the open, huddled in blankets on public squares for fear of aftershocks.

reachable via winding dirt roads, where traditional adobe homes crumbled to rubble and dust.

Dozens of quake survivors crowded around the open back doors of a truck in Amizmiz waiting for the packages of food aid being handed out by volunteers on Tuesday.

Rescuers, aid trucks and private volunteers kept travelling to stricken villages in the barren foothills of the High Atlas, many accessible only via dusty dirt roads affected by rockfalls.

In the village of Asni, in the worst-hit province of Al-Haouz, the army set up a field hospital with medical tents where more than 300 patients had been treated by Monday, Colonel Youssef Qamouss said.

“The hospital was deployed 48 hours ago,” he said, adding that it has an X-ray unit, pharmacy and other facilities. “It started operating this morning and we’re already at more or less 300 patients.”

Many Moroccan citizens have rushed to help quake victims with food, water, blankets and other aid or by donating blood to help treat the injured, an effort joined by the national football team. — AFP



Rescue workers search for survivors in the rubble of damaged houses near Amizmiz in Morocco’s worst-hit province of al-Haouz. – AFP

Afghan-Pakistan crossing at a standstill a week after gunfight

TORKHAM: Hundreds of trucks and travellers were stranded on Tuesday on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, a week into the closure of the nations’ busiest crossing after a gunfight erupted across the frontier.

Islamabad and Kabul have been in diplomatic deadlock since border guards opened fire at the Torkham crossing, halfway between the two capitals, in a dispute over an under-construction Afghan outpost.

Each blamed the other for firing the first salvo last Wednesday, souring already poor relations between Islamabad and Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers.

The Pakistan side of the border was abandoned on Monday, with markets and offices shut and crowds of travellers sheltering in nearby mosques.

Pakistan is in the grip of an economic downturn, while Afghanistan is still reeling from

the mass withdrawal of foreign aid in response to the Taliban’s return to government two years ago.

Jamal Nasir, deputy commissioner of Khyber district, said 1,300 vehicles, including trucks and trailers, were sitting idle waiting for the international trade hub to reopen.

“Fruit and vegetable trucks have been turned back because their cargo was either rotten or feared to rot,” he said.

On the Afghan side, officials and residents staged a small protest on Monday, marching towards the closed border gates.

“Pakistan should not involve traders in politics,” said truck driver Siddiqullah, who goes by one name. “How are traders and the poor at fault?”

Diplomatic ties have frayed over frequent flare-ups along their border, including sporadic gunfights and crossing closures.

Islamabad also complains Kabul is failing to secure its frontier — a colonial-era demarcation that every Afghan government has disputed — allowing militants to cross and strike on Pakistan’s soil.

There was an increase in attacks of almost 80 per cent in the first half of 2023 compared to last year, according to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies.

The United Nations Security

Council has said the Pakistan Taliban, the largest threat to Islamabad, is considered by Kabul to be part of their state and given “safe haven and material and logistical assistance”.

Afghan authorities have repeatedly denied the allegations.

The Pakistan foreign ministry said on Monday “unprovoked firing by Afghan border security forces invariably emboldens the dispute elements”. — AFP

JAKARTA

Police arrest 43 after riot over industrial park

Indonesian police have arrested 43 people accused of causing a riot and attacking police during a protest over a plan to relocate communities for a multi-billion dollar industrial park, police said on Tuesday.

Violent scenes erupted on Monday on Rempang island, located about 44 km from Singapore, where about 1,000 demonstrators had gathered in front of the office of BP Batam, one of the developers of the planned Rempang Eco City.



Demonstrators were hurling bottles and rocks at police and breaking down a fence, with officers responding with water canon and tear gas.

— Reuters

TOKYO

PM to replace foreign and defence ministers

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida plans to replace his foreign and defence ministers in a major reshuffle that will increase the number of women in cabinet posts, reports said on Tuesday. The changes, expected to be announced on Wednesday, also come at a time when the key US ally is facing heightened tensions with North Korea.

Public broadcaster NHK and other media reported on Tuesday that Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi will be replaced by



former justice minister Yoko Kamikawa, 70.

Kamikawa would be one of five women in the new lineup, NHK said, up from the current two members. — AFP

SINGAPORE

Malaysian court upholds ex-leader Najib’s audit

A Malaysian court upheld on Tuesday the acquittal of jailed former prime minister Najib Razak on an audit tampering charge in the investigation into corruption at the 1MDB state wealth fund. Najib is serving a 12-year prison term on other graft charges.

The plundering of the fund led to investigations around the world into the use of their financial systems to launder money.

Malaysia’s Court of Appeal



struck out the appeal by state prosecutors against the acquittal of the audit tampering charge after prosecutors did not submit documents in time, Najib’s lawyer said. — AFP



In brief

WASHINGTON



US POLICE WARN ESCAPED KILLER IS ARMED

US police hunting escaped killer Danelo Cavalcante warned early on Tuesday that he was armed as they searched for him in a township northwest of Philadelphia.

The 34-year-old Brazilian national scaled the wall of Chester County Prison in Pennsylvania on August 31 and for two weeks has evaded a massive manhunt by hundreds of law enforcement officers with helicopters, drones and search dogs. Cavalcante's jailbreak came a week after he was sentenced to life for stabbing his girlfriend to death. Pennsylvania State Police said early on Tuesday they were pursuing the fugitive in South Coventry Township, Chester County. — AFP

MADRID



\$12.85 BN TO ALLEVIATE DROUGHT IMPACT

Spain will spend more than \$12.85 billion to alleviate the impact of the long-running drought afflicting the country, Environment Minister Teresa Ribera said on Tuesday.

Since September of last year, average rainfall in Spain has been 17 per cent lower than the average, leading water levels in reservoirs to drop and crippling output in the agriculture sector, ministry data showed.

"We require structural responses and constant investment," Ribera told a news conference. The funds will be mainly destined towards reusing water, building desalination plants and improving water infrastructure. — Reuters

VATICAN CITY



VATICAN SAYS PAPAL ENVOY TO VISIT BEIJING

Pope Francis' peace envoy to Ukraine Cardinal Matteo Zuppi will visit Beijing this week, the Vatican said on Tuesday.

The trip from Wednesday to Friday "constitutes a further step in the mission desired by the Pope to support humanitarian initiatives and the search for paths that can lead to a just peace," the Vatican said in a brief statement. Zuppi, who is head of the Italian bishops' conference, was asked in May by the 86-year-old pope to lead a peace mission to try and stop the war.

The cardinal travelled to Kyiv in June, where he met President Volodymyr Zelensky.

In July, Zuppi met with US President Joe Biden about Vatican humanitarian efforts in Ukraine. — AFP

North Korea's Kim Jong Un in Russia amid US warnings not to sell arms

SEOUL/MOSCOW: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un arrived in Russia by private train to the strains of a military band on Tuesday for talks with President Vladimir Putin — amid warnings from Washington they should not trade weapons.

Kim left Pyongyang for Russia on Sunday on board his train, which sports a signature olive green paint scheme, the North's state media reported on Tuesday, accompanied by top arms industry and military officials.

Video footage released by Russian state TV showed Kim as he stepped off his train onto a red carpet at a station in the Russian far east to be greeted by a welcome delegation. A military band arrayed on the platform at the railway station struck up soon afterwards.

Kim had arrived on Tuesday morning, leaving his train to meet Russian officials in Khasan, the main rail gateway to Russia's Far East, before continuing on.

Footage released by Oleg Kozhemyako, governor of Russia's far eastern Primorsky region,



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un appears during a meeting with Russian Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Alexander Kozlov upon his arrival in Khasan in the Primorsky region, Russia. — Reuters

showed Kim, sat in a big white chair, talking with a delegation led by Alexander Kozlov, Russia's minister for natural resources.

"It will be a fully fledged visit," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. "There will

be negotiations between two delegations, and after that, if necessary, the leaders will continue their communication in a one-on-one format."

Discussions could cover humanitarian aid to North Korea

and the UN Security Council resolutions imposed against Pyongyang, Russian officials said.

US officials said arms talks between Russia and North Korea were actively advancing and that Kim and Putin were likely to

discuss providing Russia with weapons for the war in Ukraine.

There has been no confirmation of the site of the summit, but Kim's train passed the junction for Russia's Pacific port of Vladivostok, where Putin was attending a conference.

The make-up of Kim's delegation, including top defence industry and military officials with the notable presence of Munitions Industry Department Director Jo Chun Ryong, suggested an agenda heavy on defence industry cooperation, analysts said.

Kim could offer artillery rounds from North Korea's large stockpile, which could replenish Russia's capabilities in the short term, but questions about the ammunition's quality may limit the overall impact, military analysts said.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's office said many countries were watching with concern the summit between "North Korea which has been sanctioned by the United Nations, and Russia, which is a permanent member of the Security Council". — Reuters

Kyiv may seek arbitration over grain export as Poland stands firm



Farmers harvest wheat, in the Donbas region, Ukraine. — Reuters file photo

KYIV: Kyiv warned on Tuesday it could seek international arbitration over restrictions on its grain exports after Poland said it would continue to block domestic imports of Ukrainian grain even if Brussels lifts a ban.

Restrictions imposed by the European Union in May allowed Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia to ban domestic sales of Ukrainian wheat, maize, rapeseed and sunflower seeds, while permitting transit of such cargoes for export elsewhere.

The restrictions, designed to ease excess supply, are due to expire on Friday. Poland, which holds a parliamentary election on October 15 and says cheaper Ukrainian grain makes domestic production unprofitable, has said it will not lift its ban even if the EU does not extend the arrangement this week.

"We have no intention of

harming Polish farmers. We greatly appreciate the support of the Polish people and Polish families!" Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said on social media platform X.

"But in the case of a violation of trade law in the interests of political populism before elections, Ukraine will be forced to turn to WTO (World Trade Organization) arbitration," he added. Shmyhal's comments are the latest by Kyiv calling for an end to the restrictions as Russia wages war on Ukraine, and for the unimpeded export of all Ukrainian agriculture products to the EU.

The five central European countries want the EU ban extended at least until the end of the year. Poland's government is under pressure from domestic farmers to stand firm as next month's election approaches.

"We will not open the borders

to Ukrainian grain! Embargo stays," Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said on X.

The Polish government said: "In the event that the European Commission does not extend the ban on grain imports from Ukraine beyond 15 September, Poland will introduce such a ban on a domestic level."

Maintaining grain exports is important for Ukraine, especially since Russia quit a deal in July that had enabled Kyiv to ship grain safely via the Black Sea.

Ukraine will overall be able to export around 50 million metric tonnes of agricultural goods in the 2023/24 July-June season, the government has said.

Before the war, eastern European countries were not among the main importers of Ukrainian grain, but the export of Ukrainian grains and oil-seeds to Poland and Romania rose sharply last year. — Reuters

EU Parliament passes bill hiking renewable energy targets

BRUSSELS: European Union lawmakers gave their final approval on Tuesday to legally binding targets to expand renewable energy faster this decade, a central part of Europe's plans to curb climate change and shift away from fossil fuels.

The law significantly raises the EU's renewable energy targets, requiring 42.5 per cent of EU energy to be renewable by 2030, replacing a current 32 per cent target for that date.

It faced a tough passage through negotiations among EU countries' governments, and only secured support after France won carve-outs for nuclear energy — which is low-carbon, but not renewable.

The European Parliament voted on Tuesday to pass the law with a large majority — 470 lawmakers voted in favour, 120 against and 40 abstained. EU member countries must also green light the final bill before it enters into force.

Markus Pieper, the EU Parliament's negotiator on the law, said it would allow faster approval of new renewable projects and encourage new technologies.

"I am looking forward to seeing pilot projects for floating solar cells, wind kites, run-of-river power plants or other projects we cannot imagine yet," Pieper said.

EU countries and lawmakers had negotiated a deal on the renewable energy law in March which was supposed to be final, but was held up by countries seeking greater recognition of nuclear power.



European Union flags fly outside the EU Commission headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. — Reuters

EU countries informally okayed the deal in June, after Brussels offered written assurances that it would consider exempting certain ammonia plants from renewable fuel targets — allowing them to run on nuclear-based fuels instead.

France says Europe's shift to green energy will require hydrogen produced from both renewables and nuclear, and EU laws should support both.

The new targets — which include specific goals to increase renewable use in transport and industry — aim to spur investments to massively expand wind and solar.

Brussels hopes this can be done using more local manufacturing. China currently supplies most of the parts used in European solar power installations.

Europe's solar industry warned the European Commission on Monday that a drop in module prices — driven in part by fierce competition among Chinese suppliers — was pushing European manufacturers towards bankruptcy. — Reuters

Firefighters use AI to battle wildfires



ROMAIN FONSEGRIVES

When a wildfire erupted in the middle of a recent California night, it could have been a disaster.

But thanks to a new monitoring system that uses artificial intelligence to scan for danger, firefighters were able to quell the blaze long before it got out of hand.

“It was less than a quarter acre,” Captain Kris Yeary of Cal Fire said. “Had the AI not alerted us to it, it could have gotten much bigger.”

Computers watching live feeds from the Cleveland National Forest spotted what their algorithm had been taught to understand was a column of smoke.

Human operators were able to verify the machines were correct and alerted Yeary, whose firefighters quickly extinguished the flames.

Artificial intelligence is a rapidly developing field of computing that seeks to mimic human abilities to “think.” Unlike a traditional computer, which can only produce answers based on the concrete information it has, AI can infer answers, using experience it has gained from similar problems it has seen before —

similar to a human being.

Over the last few years, its application has spread to include areas as diverse as weather forecasting, stock-picking, art and journalism.

That has brought with it worries from people who fear it will do them out of their jobs — the writers’ and actors’ strike currently paralysing Hollywood is in part about the use of AI in films and television.

But firefighters battling California’s wildfires say they will take all the help they can get. For several years firefighters have used a network of more than 1,000 cameras to monitor possible fire hotspots.

Since the end of June, the ALERTCalifornia system has had AI computers “watching” these feeds, and flagging to human operators when they see wisps of smoke that could be a fire — with promising results.

Currently, the system can erroneously flag dust raised by tractors, insects in front of the camera or even a bit of fog.

“When a cloud will go over... it can cast a shadow on the ground and sometimes (the computer) can actually think that that’s possibly smoke,” says Suzann Leininger, an intelligence specialist at Cal Fire.

ALERTCALIFORNIA SYSTEM HAS HAD AI COMPUTERS “WATCHING” THESE FEEDS, AND FLAGGING TO HUMAN OPERATORS WHEN THEY SEE WISPS OF SMOKE THAT COULD BE A FIRE

The feedback that experts like Leininger give — no, that’s just a bit of weather — is helping the AI to get better at what it does.

But even in its current state, it’s a boon. “It’s getting us time to react in a faster manner,” says Leininger.

And when you’re talking about fire, time can be everything. As California grapples with the effects of human-caused climate change, fires are becoming bigger and more destructive.

The state has experienced 18 of its 20 largest wildfires on record in the last two decades.

With terrifying blazes ripping through Europe, Canada and Hawaii this year, the devastating impact of the changing climate is becoming ever-more apparent worldwide.

“I think that as we see these devastations in other areas, like in Greece, and Maui, that systems like this that provide early confirmation will be a step in the right direction,” says Driscoll of UC San Diego.

Faced with the scale of the threat, the scientist has chosen to grant public access to the data on his platform, so that other companies or academics can work on it. — AFP

Biden faces US showdown after G20 trip

DANNY KEMP

US President Joe Biden is counting his wins from a gruelling trip to Asia, but at home he faces a string of political showdowns to keep his reelection bid on sure footing.

The 80-year-old had 2024 in his sights when he said on his return from India and Vietnam on Monday that his travels had “strengthened America’s leadership on the global stage.” With his Democratic Party reportedly alarmed by his poll ratings, Biden used his time at the G20 in Delhi and in Hanoi to talk up his credentials as US commander-in-chief and international statesman.

But the situation on his return to Washington looks increasingly like an uphill battle.

Despite positive economic signs, America’s oldest-ever president is polling neck-and-neck in a likely rematch with Donald Trump, his 77-year-old Republican predecessor.

A possible US government shutdown looms at the end of the month; a potentially disruptive strike of US automakers is also in the cards. And headline Republicans are even pushing for an impeachment inquiry over Biden’s embattled son Hunter.

But the really bad news after an exhausting journey through all 24 time zones on Air Force One? Foreign policy is not top of mind for most US voters. “I don’t think going to other countries for summit meetings is going to make a big difference to him in terms of poll numbers,” David Karol, who teaches government and politics at the University of Maryland, said. The issue in particular won’t win over the small number of swing voters he needs to convince next year.

“Most voters are not focused on foreign affairs unless there’s a war with American troops in it.” — Panic — Biden the statesman was on display even at home this weekend, in television campaign ads hailing his support for Ukraine against the Russian invasion.

At the G20 summit in Delhi, Biden “stepped into the void left by Xi (Jinping of China) and secured new infrastructure deals aimed at connecting India, the Middle East and Europe,” said Josh Lipsky of the Atlantic Council, a think tank. In Vietnam he won a major upgrade in ties to rein in rival Beijing.

In Hanoi Biden riffed — at considerable length — on a favourite story about a supposed quote from a movie starring legendary US actor John Wayne, describing climate change sceptics as “lying, dog-faced pony soldiers.” But that, and a tired-seeming Biden’s parting words that he was “going to bed” risked playing into the hands of his biggest electoral liability at home — his age. — AFP

Ukrainians know corruption a threat



Farah Stockman

NO ONE KNOWS BETTER WHAT AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT CORRUPTION CAN BE, SAPPING THE PUBLIC TRUST AND THE LEGITIMACY OF THE STATE. UKRAINIANS CONSIDER CORRUPTION THE COUNTRY’S SECOND-MOST-SERIOUS PROBLEM, BEHIND ONLY THE RUSSIAN INVASION

President Joe Biden talks of the world being divided into autocracies and democracies. But a more important division exists: between kleptocracies, where leaders treat their nations like personal piggy banks, and places where corruption is the exception rather than the rule.

Since 2014, Ukrainians have been fighting to drag their country into that second category. The Maidan revolution, which sent a pro-Russian president packing, wasn’t just about freeing Ukraine from Russian influence. It was also about breaking the stranglehold of oligarchs who — as in so many former Soviet republics — controlled everything from television stations to the politicians on ballots. The fight against corruption amounts to a second front in Ukraine’s war against Russia.

Ukraine is making progress, no small feat in the middle of a hot war. But it is still ranked the second most corrupt country in Europe, after Russia, according to Transparency International. Since the February 2022 Russian invasion, a host of characters — from arms dealers to suppliers of soldiers’ meals — has stood to reap big profits, creating vested interests in prolonging the conflict.

Corruption has been the elephant in the room since the invasion — an unpopular subject in Washington, since it risks undermining the American support that Ukraine desperately needs.

But guess who hasn’t shied away from calling out corruption in Ukraine? Ukrainians. No one knows better what an existential threat corruption can be, sapping the public trust and the legitimacy of the state. Ukrainians consider corruption the country’s second-most-serious problem, behind only the Russian invasion, according to a poll conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology this year. They know that they must root out money laundering and the influence of oligarchs as a condition of joining the European Union. Since the war started, the percentage of Ukrainians who say they are willing to stand up for their rights when they interact with bureaucrats doubled — from 26% in 2021 to 52% this year.

That raises hopes that Ukrainians are starting to resist corruption with the same can-do spirit that repelled the Russian invasion.

Yuriy Nikolov, a founder of the online news platform Nashi Groshi (Our Money), broke stories about the Ukrainian Defence Ministry paying huge markups for supplies — 46 cents for eggs that should have cost 5 cents, \$86 for winter coats that were worth just \$29. A week ago, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy dismissed his defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, who, although not personally implicated, had been tarnished by the scandal.

Zelenskyy has been on a mission to convince Ukrainians and donor countries that he has things under control. In May the chief of Ukraine’s Supreme Court was arrested on bribery charges. In June another judge, who hid \$150,000 worth of bribes in pickle jars and fled the country to Moldova, received a 10-year sentence after a bizarre incident in which he was forcibly returned to Ukraine. This month, Ihor Kolomoisky, an oligarch who once served as a governor, was arrested in Ukraine nearly two years after the US Department of Justice accused him of embezzling billions of dollars from a private Ukrainian bank that he owned and laundering the money by buying real estate in Cleveland and other US cities.

His arrest will boost the Ukrainian public’s confidence that the war on corruption can be won. But anti-corruption watchdogs in Ukraine aren’t thrilled with how he was taken into custody. The security services grabbed Kolomoisky before the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, which is seen as more independent, got the chance. The bureau had been preparing to prosecute him on far more serious charges.

The Ukrainian people should be applauded — and supported — for battling corruption. In one sign of support, the White House recently met with a delegation of anti-corruption groups.

But there’s a danger that these arrests will weaken American enthusiasm for the war.

That’s perhaps the biggest lesson of Afghanistan. We didn’t fail in Afghanistan because we couldn’t stop

corruption. We failed because we didn’t foster Afghan institutions that could withstand a US withdrawal. Americans were so worried about stamping out corruption that they micromanaged everything, creating a shadow government — staffed by temporary, highly paid consultants that answered to Washington. They wrote beautiful reports but weren’t accountable to the people who mattered most: Afghans.

The special inspector general of Afghanistan reconstruction acknowledged as much in a report released this year: “In order to control for corruption,” it read, Americans took control of more and more processes, “which in turn led to a lack of Afghan mission and logistics ownership.” It would have been better to spend far less money in Afghanistan but in a way that empowered local leaders. Instead, we spent more than \$1 trillion on a war that ended disastrously. Does it matter that we had a special inspector general perfectly documenting the disaster? Ukraine is a different place, of course. US boots aren’t on the ground there — yet. Pallets of cash aren’t being delivered to military leaders and politicians, as far as we can tell. Corruption scandals seem to involve Ukrainian funds, not US money. But the lessons of Afghanistan are not lost on Ukrainians. Last year an article in Foreign Affairs by Tymofii Brik, the rector of the Kyiv School of Economics, and Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili of the University of Pittsburgh argued that donor countries should work with local Ukrainian government entities to rebuild the country instead of using “vast armies” of foreign contractors and nongovernmental organisations.

Such methods “undermine local governance institutions, not just by sweeping up the best talent from them but by giving foreigners a greater say in what happens in communities than the people who live there,” they wrote. When the war in Ukraine finally ends, the money to rebuild the country will most likely dwarf anything we’ve seen in our lifetime. That’s when the real feeding frenzy will begin. Ukrainian institutions and watchdogs had better be ready.

— The New York Times

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Need bold steps to tackle climate change

Even though the G20 during its New Delhi summit agreed on scaling up renewable energy targets, it sidestepped on phasing down the unabated use of fossil fuel and fell short of steps to achieve the goal of capping global warming.

Climate experts and environmental scientists argue that the outcome of the G20 in the Indian capital loosely mirrors events from several summits in the past, and bears worrying indicators for the UN Climate Conference to be held in Dubai this November.

“Despite record-shattering temperatures, raging wildfires, drought, floods and other climate disasters over recent months impacting tens of millions of people, G20 leaders have collectively failed to deliver anything meaningful on climate change this year”, Tracy Carty, Global Climate Politics Expert at Greenpeace International, said.

G20’s reckless failure to act will be measured in further lives and livelihoods lost. Leaders failed to reach an agreement on the phase-out of all fossil fuels. They also made a timid commitment to triple renewables, but only through ‘existing targets and policies’, he said.

Experts insist that the leaders of the world’s leading economies must have at least doubled to stop the rise in global temperature above 1.5 °C.

“The richer G20 countries had a choice. On the one hand, climate catastrophe and the other, to drastically reduce their emissions and provide sufficient levels of climate finance to the Global South. If G20 countries do not agree to change their positions on these issues, they are guaranteeing failure at the COP28 conference in Dubai,” said Oxfam Climate Change spokesperson Ashfaq Khalfan.

G20 members include the world’s biggest economies – the United States, China, Japan, the European Union, Germany and Britain – and together account for 80 per cent of global gross domestic product and 75 per cent of international trade. The G20 is responsible for 78 per cent of all territorial greenhouse gas emissions.

New research commissioned by Oxfam International shows global greenhouse gas emissions are set to rise by 10.6 per cent by 2030 instead of falling by the 45 per cent needed to limit the increase in global temperature to 1.5 °C.

Experts point out that the G20



Samuel Kutty
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DESPITE THE LACK OF RAPID STEPS AND A CLEAR TIMELINE TO END PRODUCTION OF FOSSIL FUELS, AND STEPS FOR CLIMATE-RELATED CHANGES — THE G20 SUMMIT WAS HAILED AS A SUCCESS FOR ITS COMMITMENTS UNDER THE DECLARATION

countries are the worst and most-responsible offenders with their per capita greenhouse gas emissions in 2030 will collectively remain at similar levels as they are today – nearly double the amount needed to avoid catastrophic impacts.

They emit the equivalent of 7.4 to 7.7 tonnes of CO2 per person on average each year, of territorial emissions. To keep below 1.5 °C, they must at least halve this to between 2.9 to 3.8 tons per person by 2030.

However, the New Delhi declaration insisted that emissions worldwide have to fall by at least 43 per cent by 2030 from the levels in 2019 to achieve the key goal under the Paris Agreement, which was signed in 2015.

Since then many countries have strengthened their climate commitments during the annual UN climate conferences known as COPs. At the end of the 2021 gathering, countries pledged they would come to the next year’s conference, COP27 in Egypt, with even more ambition.

They came, and vowed many steps... still, they are not enough to prevent catastrophic warming or adapt to its consequences.

Despite the lack of rapid steps and a clear timeline to end production of fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas, and steps for climate-related changes -- the summit was hailed as a success for its commitments under the declaration.

Among them are an agreement to triple renewable energy production and a \$4 trillion spending goal to achieve a clean energy transition. The Group also admitted the African Union as a member to amplify the voice of developing economies in the south.

Climate change is caused by human activities and threatens life on Earth as we know it. With rising greenhouse gas emissions, climate change is occurring at rates much faster than anticipated. If left unchecked, climate change will undo a lot of the development progress made over the past years. It will also provoke mass migrations that will lead to instability and wars.

As Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General pointed out in New Delhi prior to the summit, “All of this is within reach — but it will take all hands. No nation, no region, no group - not even the G20 — can do it alone. We must act together as one family to save our one earth and safeguard our one future”.

A TRIBUTE



The ‘Tribute in Lights’ 9/11 memorial light display is seen on the 22nd anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, in New York City, on Monday night. – AFP

Rice price spike offers preview of climate food disruption

A 15-year high in rice prices, prompted by top exporter India’s restrictions on overseas sales, should be a wake-up call on how climate change can disrupt food supplies, experts say.

Rice prices jumped 9.8 per cent in August, bucking decreases in other staples, the Food and Agriculture Organization said last week. That followed the July decision by India, which accounts for 40 per cent of global rice exports, to ban the overseas sale of non-basmati rice.

The government cited soaring domestic prices for the staple, caused by geopolitics, the El Nino weather pattern and “extreme climatic conditions.”

This year is expected to be the hottest in human history, and the impacts of the seasonal El Nino weather pattern could make conditions even harsher.

Despite severe flooding in parts of northern India, this August was the country’s hottest and driest on record.

The monsoon season that brings up to 80 per cent of the country’s annual rain has been far below normal levels.



Sara Hussein

The writer is Future of the Planet reporter for AFP, covering climate, science and environment stories across Asia and is based in Bangkok

RICE PRICES JUMPED 9.8 PER CENT IN AUGUST, BUCKING DECREASES IN OTHER STAPLES, THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION SAID LAST WEEK

India’s July restrictions followed a decision last September to ban exports of another variety of rice that is a staple in parts of Africa. Up to eight per cent of global rice exports for 2023/24 could now be taken out of the market, according to analysis by BMI, Fitch Group’s research arm.

For now, the crisis offers an opportunity for India’s rivals, including number two and three exporters, Thailand and Vietnam. Both have increased exports this year, with Nguyen Nhu Cuong, an official with Vietnam’s agriculture and rural development ministry, touting a “bumper crop” and plans to increase planting.

But the dry conditions that tend to accompany El Nino mean smooth sailing ahead is unlikely, warned Elyssa Kaur Ludher, from the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute’s Climate Change in Southeast Asia programme.

“My question is whether they can continue to do this once El Nino comes into force towards the end of this year, when water

becomes more scarce,” she said.

“I think the end of this year and especially the beginning of next year will be very, very tough,” she added.

A naturally occurring weather phenomenon, El Nino typically lasts nine to 12 months and is expected to strengthen late this year. Even before India’s latest restrictions, its effects were boosting rice export prices, according to BMI.

And in Thailand, national

rainfall levels are currently 18 per cent lower than expected for the time of year, the Office of National Water Resources said this month. Late rains could still make up the difference, but the agency said it is “concerned about a drought caused by El Nino.”

The consequence is one of price rather than supply, said Charles Hart, agricultural commodities analyst at Fitch Solutions. “This is not a running out of rice moment,” he stressed,

noting India’s restrictions have not been followed by other exporters.

Instead, the situation is likely to force the drawdown of stocks rebuilt after pandemic-era depletions, and prompt importers to seek new deals and impose local limits.

Top importer the Philippines this month signed a deal with Vietnam to help stabilise supply, days after announcing a national price cap. For some though, unaffordable prices amount to the same as a lack of supply: less food.

“It’s not just a food availability issue, but it’s also a social stability issue, it’s a political issue,” said Ludher.

The current disruptions should be a wake-up call for policy-makers, she added, with more attention needed to the plight of farmers across various sectors. Climate change can affect productivity, with lower crop yields as temperatures rise, but also increases the likelihood of extreme events like the 2022 Pakistan floods. — AFP



India accounts for 40 per cent of global rice exports. – AFP

sport

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UAE’S ABDULLA JASIM SECOND, UNI’S VERHOEFF THIRD IN PHOTO-FINISH

BOLE CONSOLIDATES TOP SPOT WITH THIRD-STAGE WIN

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, SEPT 12

Slovenia’s Grega Bole consolidated his position on top of Tour of Salalah standings with a stage win in the third stage in Salalah on Tuesday.

The Shabab Al Ahli Dubai team cyclist prevailed in two hours 34 minutes in a photo-finish race as UAE’s Abdulla Jasim al Ali came a close second ahead of Netherlands’ Stefan Verhoeff (Universe Cycling Team).

The first 11 riders all clocked the same time in a thrilling conclusion to the 104km third stage from Al Haffa to Darbat.

The stage win earned Bole the green jersey for topping the points classification along with his leader’s golden jersey for time classification.

Abdulla Jasim kept his young rider white jersey while Tom Wijf Je kept his silver jersey for most aggressive rider. The Tour of Salalah

TOUR OF SALALAH STAGE 3 RESULTS

Read as position, rider, country, team, timing

1. **Grega Bole** (Slovenia) SAD 2:34:00
2. **Abdulla Jasim al Ali** (UAE) UAE 2:34:00
3. **Stefan Verhoeff** (Netherlands) UNI 2:34:00
4. **Ahmed Naser** (Bahrain) VIC 2:34:00
5. **Campo Schmitz** (Germany) TSM 2:34:00
6. **Jip Steman** (Netherlands) UNI 2:34:00
7. **Azzedine Lagab** (Algeria) Algeria 2:34:00
8. **Kenny Nijssen** (Netherlands) UNI 2:34:00
9. **Lauric Schwitzgebel** (Germany) TSM 2:34:00
10. **Eusebio Pascual** (Spain) VIC 2:34:00

concludes on Wednesday with the fourth and last stage with a 147km race from Ain Razat to Ittin Public Park.

Universe Cycling Team led the team standings with Team Storck-Metropol Cycling and United Arab Emirates taking the second and third positions respectively. Victorious Club are fourth and hosts Oman are fifth.

Bole is the front runner for the Tour of Salalah title (10:11:47) with UAE teenager Abdulla Jasim 10 seconds adrift and Netherlands’ Kenny Nijssen of Universe Cycling Team 50 seconds adrift of the leader in the overall general standings.

The third stage witnessed 53 riders in action and second-stage winner Ahmed Naser of Bahrain came fourth while German rider Campo Schmitz of TSM finished fifth. Best Omani rider of the day was Said al Rahbi in 17th position (2:37:29) while his team-mate Mazin al Riyami finished 19th (2:37:46) for the Oman national team.



KOHLI, RAHUL SHINE WITH TONS

INDIA CRUSH PAKISTAN BY 228 RUNS IN RAIN-HIT ASIA CUP ODI

COLOMBO: Virat Kohli and returning KL Rahul hit unbeaten centuries to lead India's 228-run thrashing of Pakistan in a rain-hit Super Four clash of the Asia Cup on Monday's reserve day.

Kohli (122) and Rahul (111) put together 233 runs as India reached 356-2, a total defended after they bowled out Pakistan for 128 in the 50-over contest in Colombo.

Pakistan ended on 128-8 in 32 overs with injured bowlers Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah not turning out to bat. India spinner Kuldeep Yadav returned figures of 5-25 to hand India their biggest ODI win over Pakistan.

India resumed on 147-2 after rain ended play early on Sunday and pushed the match into an additional day set aside by the tournament, which is a precursor to the ODI World Cup.

Rain again delayed the start but no overs were lost and then the Kohli-Rahul pair roused the Indian fans at a largely empty stadium. "KL and myself are both conventional players. And when you have him batting the way he was and me playing, its tough to break these partnerships because we don't play fancy shots," man of the match Kohli said on the marathon stand.

Kohli added, "It is one of the memorable partnerships we've had and for Indian cricket as well. He (Rahul) hit form for us straightaway, good for us."

Rahul, who returned from an injury lay-off, raised his bat to celebrate his hundred and was hugged by Kohli, who soon brought up his own ton after surpassing 13,000 ODI runs.

It was Kohli's 47th ODI ton and extended his century score to 77 in internationals.

TIRELESS GROUNDSTAFF

Half-centuries from skipper Rohit Sharma and fellow opener



India's Virat Kohli (R) and KL Rahul (L) run between the wickets during the Asia Cup 2023 Super Four ODI against Pakistan at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo. — AFP

Shubman Gill got India off to a good start on Sunday with a 121-run stand.

Kohli and Rahul resumed cautiously on their overnight scores of eight and 17 before they took to the Pakistan attack with 100 runs in 102 balls.

Pakistan suffered a blow when officials said fast bowler Rauf had suffered a strain and would take no further part. Later fellow quick Naseem also walked off with some discomfort to his hand.

Rahul smashed 12 fours and two sixes, including whipping

Shadab Khan over mid-wicket, in his 106-ball knock.

Kohli finished the innings with a six down the ground against a bowling attack that lacked sting. Sloppy fielding added to Pakistan's woes. Pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi and Shadab got a wicket each on Sunday.

Ground staff worked tirelessly to get the field ready after Monday's early rain and received "big thanks" from Rohit and Kohli.

Pakistan were never in the chase after they lost two early

wickets including skipper Babar Azam bowled for 10 off an impressive in-swing by Hardik Pandya.

Rain once again interrupted play but not the Indian momentum as the bowlers kept up their charge after resumption and Kuldeep sent back Mohammad Rizwan with his left-arm wrist spin.

Wickets kept tumbling and Kuldeep got three more to get into the Pakistan tail and then claimed his second ODI five-wicket haul.

Azam said, "we lost back-to-back wickets, couldn't build

partnerships".

The extra day was a last-minute addition to the Super Four clash — the only game to get the advantage other than the final — after a previous group game between the two teams was washed out in Pallekele. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

India, who resumed reserve day on 147-2 in 24.1 overs, 356-2 in 50 overs (V Kohli 122 not out, KL Rahul 111 not out; S Khan 1-71, S Shah Afridi 1-79) v Pakistan 128 all out in 32 overs (A Salman 23, I Ahmed 23; K Yadav 5-25)
Result: India won by 228 runs

Pakistan call for back-ups after injuries to Rauf, Naseem

COLOMBO: Pakistan has called up reserves for injured fast bowlers Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah after the pair did not turn out to bat in the team's loss to India in the Asia Cup.

Pakistan suffered a crushing 228-run defeat on Monday's reserve day of the rain-hit Super Four clash in Colombo and soon named Shahnawaz Dahani and Zaman Khan as backups.

The Pakistan cricket Board late Monday said Rauf and Naseem "picked up niggles".

Rauf suffered a strain on Sunday and did not take field when play resumed on day two. Later in the match fellow quick Naseem walked off with some discomfort to his hand.

"This is only a precautionary measure keeping in mind the fitness and well-being of the players ahead of the ICC Men's cricket World Cup next month," the PCB said in a statement.

It further said, "Haris and Naseem will continue to remain under the observation of the team's medical panel.

"The team management will only request replacement from the ACC (Asian cricket Council) technical committee if Naseem or Haris are ruled out for the next seven days."

Babar Azam's Pakistan next take on Sri Lanka on Thursday.

Rauf and Naseem did not bat and are likely to miss Thursday's Super Four match against Sri Lanka, with their participation in the September 17 final also in doubt should Pakistan make it.

— Agencies

Pace guns to 'propel' Australia at WC



Australia's Josh Hazlewood delivers a ball during the third one-day international (ODI) match between South Africa and Australia at Senwes Park in Potchefstroom, South Africa, on Tuesday. — AFP

MELBOURNE: Australia will rely on their full complement of specialist pace bowlers to set the tone at the World Cup rather than mix and match with all-rounders, Josh Hazlewood said.

With Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc recovering from injuries, Australia have taken a 2-0 lead in the five-match one-day series against South Africa after having part-timers share the new ball.

All-rounder Marcus Stoinis opened the bowling with paceman Hazlewood in the three-wicket win in the opener in Bloemfontein, while part-time spinner Travis Head and fast bowling all-rounder Sean Abbott led off in the 123-run win at the same venue.

Hazlewood said Australia were likely to revert to type when captain Cummins and Starc rejoined the squad for the final warm-up series against India in the lead-up to the World Cup, which starts next month.

"I expect with Mitch and Pat back, we'll probably share the first 10 overs between us more often than not," he said. "With Mitch and Pat coming in hopefully for the India series before the World

With Mitch and Pat coming in hopefully for the India series before the World Cup, there's still a lot of games to go, no doubt the quicks will play a huge part not only here but at the World Cup as well

JOSH HAZLEWOOD

Australian fast bowler

Cup, there's still a lot of games to go, no doubt the quicks will play a huge part not only here but at the World Cup as well."

Hazlewood said the South Africa series had been a great opportunity to build depth and create competition in the squad.

"It's definitely great to have some younger guys here pushing us and getting some match experience and creating that depth within the squad," he said.

"We're ticking along nicely, I think, and it's just about keeping building towards the World Cup."

— Reuters

Shotokan Centre, Pioneer Academy hold joint training

MUSCAT: The Shotokan Karate Centre and the Pioneer Karate Academy held a joint training for their trainees recently.

"The joint training helps to develop the players skill level in karate. It is a valuable opportunity to exchange experiences and learn from each other," said Hilal bin Mohammed al Abdali, one of the organisers.

"These training sessions give players the opportunity to learn about the different training methods and techniques used in karate, as experiences and knowledge are exchanged between players. This type of training is an ideal opportunity to expand knowledge and develop the skills necessary to reach the highest levels of performance,"

the karate trainer said.

"In addition, joint training helps create an atmosphere of healthy competition and motivation among players. Where players exchange experiences and knowledge and motivate each other for continuous improvement. This positive atmosphere enhances team spirit and cooperation among players, which enhances team performance and contributes to achieving the desired results," Al Abdali added.

Hilal called for the promotion of joint training saying that it should be encouraged and organised on a regular basis to promote progress and success in karate.



HALEP
GETS

4 YEAR BAN FOR DOPING

LONDON: Romania's former world number one Simona Halep said on Tuesday that she would appeal to sport's highest court against the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) decision to ban her until October 2026 for two separate anti-doping rule violations.

The 31-year-old former Wimbledon and French Open champion has been provisionally suspended since October 2022 after testing positive for banned blood-booster roxadustat at the US Open last year.

Halep said she "refused to accept their (ITIA) decision of a four-year ban.

"I am continuing to train and do everything in my power to clear my name of these false allegations and return to the court," Halep said in a statement. "I intend to appeal this decision to The Court of Arbitration for Sport and pursue all legal remedies against the supplement company in question."

The ITIA said earlier on Tuesday it came to its conclusion based on the collection and analysis of 51 blood samples provided by Halep. Her suspension runs until October 6, 2026.

"The first (charge) related to an Adverse Analytical Finding (AAF) for the prohibited substance roxadustat at the US Open in 2022, carried out through regular urine testing during competition," the ITIA said in a statement.

"The second charge related to

irregularities in Halep's Athlete Biological Passport (ABP)."

DENIES STRONGLY

Halep strongly denies knowingly taking roxadustat and said she had evidence to show small amounts of the anaemia drug entered her system from a licensed supplement that was contaminated.

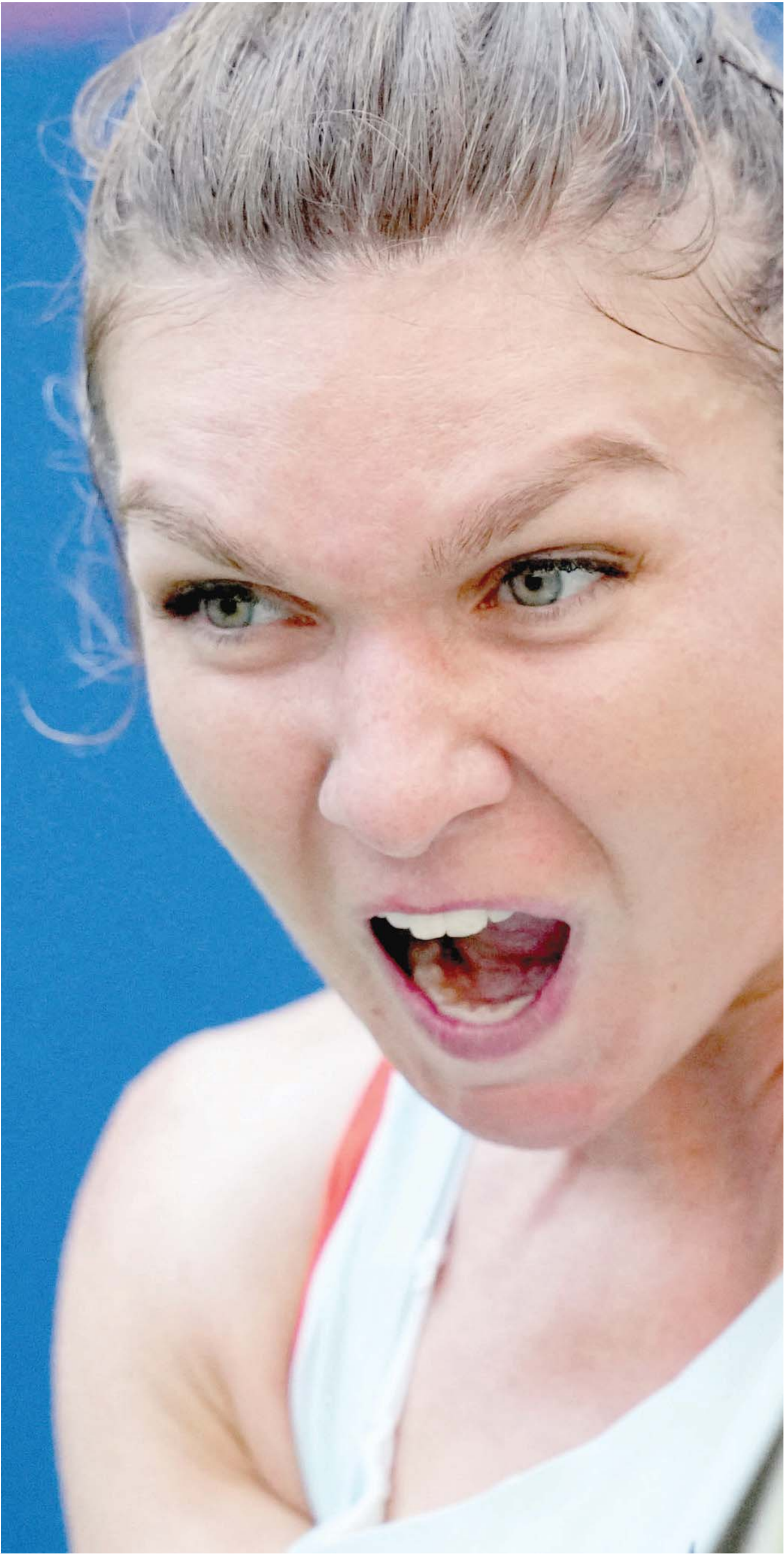
"The tribunal accepted Halep's argument that they had taken a contaminated supplement, but determined the volume the player ingested could not have resulted in the concentration of roxadustat found in the positive sample," the ITIA said.

The ITIA said the ABP charge was also upheld as three independent experts were unanimous that "likely doping" was the explanation for the irregularities in Halep's profile.

"The volume of evidence for the tribunal to consider in both the roxadustat and ABP proceedings was substantial," Karen Moorhouse, CEO at the ITIA, said.

Halep had previously accused the ITIA of seeking to further delay her independent tribunal doping hearing and said she was being denied her right to be heard.

However, Moorhouse said the ITIA had followed the proper processes in accordance with the World Anti-Doping Code. "The panel recognised that appropriate procedure had been followed within the written decision," Moorhouse added. — Reuters



Schroder toasts 'crazy' fans in German welcome

FRANKFURT: Germany captain and tournament MVP Dennis Schroder paid tribute to the team's "crazy" fans at a ceremony in Frankfurt on Tuesday celebrating his side's maiden World Cup victory.

Germany returned home after defeating Serbia 83-77 in Sunday's final in Manila. "Without you, we would not have won the title," Toronto Raptors star Schroder told the crowd. "It's crazy what's going on here. It feels good of course that we're respected."

Germany went through the tournament undefeated, beating five-time winners the United States in the semifinals to qualify for a



first-ever World Cup final. Small forward Franz Wagner, who also plays in the NBA with the Orlando Magic, said it was "wonderful to be welcomed in such a way".

The tournament captured the hearts of the football-mad nation.

The final, played on Sunday afternoon German time, attracted 4.63 million television viewers.

An estimated 1,500 fans were on hand to greet the victorious players, alongside German sports minister Nancy Faeser and Frankfurt mayor Mike Josef. "Thank you for making us proud of German sport again," Josef said.

Germany were eliminated in

the group stage of the most recent men's and women's football World Cups, while the German delegation failed to win a single medal at the World Athletics Championships in Budapest in August.

Among the fans in attendance was 63-year-old Andreas Koch who said the "historic" achievement was "the most important moment in basketball history" in Germany.

Christina Gulya, who came with her eight-year-old daughter, a young basketball player, said, "we are so proud. The sport is not very popular —everyone talks about football—I find it great that basketball is finally getting some attention." —AFP

business

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Oman’s Islamic financial services on a path to success



JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 12

The IFN Oman Forum 2023, held on September 12, brought together financial experts, regulators and industry leaders to delve into Oman’s remarkable journey in the realm of Islamic finance. The event shed light on a decade of Islamic finance in Oman, highlighting its pivotal role in fostering the private sector, key market developments, regulatory challenges and a promising future rooted in Islamic financial principles.

The keynote address was delivered by Ahmed bin Ali Saif al Maamari (pictured), Executive Vice-President of Capital Market Authority (CMA). Oman’s Islamic banking and finance sector may be relatively young in comparison to its GCC counterparts, but it has been rapidly gaining momentum.

Al Maamari said, “The share of the Shariah-compliant capital market reached 12 per cent of the total value of the capital market, reaching RO 2.9 billion until the end of 2022. Takaful insurance accounts for 14 per cent of the total insurance portfolio with premiums exceeding RO 72 million.”

Based on data from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), during the first half of 2023, Islamic banking assets had gained a significant portion of the market, accounting for 17.2 per cent. This noteworthy percentage indicated a year-on-year growth rate of 12.6 per cent, resulting in a total asset value of RO 7 billion. Islamic banking institutions in Oman offered financing amounting to RO 5.8 billion by the end of June 2023, experiencing a growth of 12.8 per cent compared to the previous year.

The total deposits held by Islamic banks and windows showed a 10.5-per cent increase, reaching RO 5.2 billion by the end of June this year, compared to the previous year. This surge in assets illustrated the growing appetite for Islamic financial

products among Oman’s populace.

Furthermore, the Islamic capital market in Oman has flourished, with the government repeatedly issuing sovereign Sukuk instruments for both institutional and retail investors. These offerings consistently attracted strong demand, demonstrating the vibrancy of Oman’s Islamic financial sector.

Additionally, Oman is exploring new avenues for growth, particularly in the fintech domain, which promises to unlock fresh opportunities and innovations within Islamic finance. A key driving force behind Oman’s success story in Islamic finance has been the concerted efforts of regulatory bodies, notably the Capital Market Authority and the Central Bank of Oman.

These institutions have played pivotal roles in shaping the industry’s trajectory. Through the formulation of effective policies and measures, along with ongoing engagement with stakeholders, they have nurtured a conducive environment for Islamic finance to thrive.

One of the prominent discussions at the IFN Oman Forum 2023 revolved around the role of Islamic finance in stimulating the private sector in Oman. Panelists include Kemal Rizadi Arbi, Adviser to CMA Oman; Khalid al Kayed, CEO, Bank Nizwa; Sharifatul Hanizah, Executive Director of Islamic Capital Market Development, Securities Commission Malaysia; and Thamer al Shahry, Lawyer and Partner at Said al Shahry & Partners.

Omani non-oil exports to Saudi Arabia soar to \$2.4 bn in value

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 12

Omani non-oil exports to Saudi Arabia surged to around \$2.4 billion in 2022, up from \$1.68 billion a year earlier — a significant 33.9 per cent uptick that illustrates resurgent efforts by their respective leaderships to bolster trade and economic ties between the two nations.

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, attributed the upturn in bilateral trade to an array of factors, but most notably, the establishment of an Omani-Saudi Coordination Council, coupled with the launch of a first-ever land border between the two countries in the Rub Al Khali (The Empty Quarter).

In an interview featured in *Asharq Al Awsat*, the world’s premier pan-Arab daily headquartered in London, Al Saqri was quoted as saying: “Economic cooperation has witnessed significant advancement over the years.

“This cooperation has unfolded through a series of stages and agreements that reflect the depth of the relationship between the two nations. The



most pivotal milestones in the economic collaboration between Saudi Arabia and Oman include the establishment of the Saudi-Omani Coordination Council in July 2021.

“This council aims to formulate a shared vision for deepening and sustaining the bilateral ties while elevating cooperation in political, economic, security, military and human development domains.”

Reflecting the mutually beneficial nature of blossoming bilateral ties between the two countries, Saudi Arabia’s exports into the Sultanate of Oman also climbed 12 per cent to reach around \$4.6 billion in 2022, up from \$1.45 billion a year earlier, said Al Saqri.

This uptrend in two-way trade

volumes also bodes well for the start of a new, energetic chapter in economic cooperation spanning a wide variety of sectors, the minister said.

He cited in this regard the recent pledge by Saudi Arabia’s sovereign fund, the Public Investment Fund (PIF), to invest around \$5 billion in economic projects in Oman, following the directives of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to this effect.

Following that landmark announcement, PIF plans to establish a company in Oman to oversee investments in a number of strategic joint projects, said Al Saqri.

Those moves have since unlocked opportunities for joint

cooperation across a flurry of projects and initiatives spanning hydrocarbons, manufacturing and industry, infrastructure and tourism, he noted.

An area of particular promise, Al Saqri pointed out, is the clean and renewable energy sector, centring on the deployment of solar and wind capacity for the production of green hydrogen to support the decarbonisation of the two economies.

Re-stressing the distinctive investment appeal of the Sultanate of Oman, the minister stated: “Oman’s investment environment is characterised as encouraging and attractive to foreign investments in general, thanks to its strategic location, economic, political and security stability, a clear and transparent legal and institutional framework, advanced infrastructure, and simplified procedures and incentives for investment and business.”

“All these factors make Oman a reliable and ideal investment destination, especially given the abundance of investment opportunities for investors in general and Saudi investors in particular,” he added in conclusion.

Global hydraulic fracturing conference begins in Muscat

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, SEPT 12

A global hydraulic fracturing conference began yesterday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat. The “International Hydraulic Fracturing Technology Conference and Exhibition” is organised by the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SAPE), with an endorsement from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Under the theme “Fracturing—Growth Engine for Developing Global Oil and Gas Resource”, the three-day conference aims to explore the role hydraulic fracturing can play in the growth of the oil and gas industry.

Mohsin al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, shared the following remarks during his keynote address, “This conference serves as an extended platform for sharing knowledge, fostering collaboration and harnessing innovative solutions that will



continue to propel hydraulic fracturing’s contributions to our world.

“The insights of leading experts, visionary researchers and industry trailblazers that they participated in the conference and who are charting the course for the future of hydraulic fracturing technologies will illuminate the strides we’ve made and the challenges we must surmount to ensure the responsible and

sustainable development of our oil and gas resources.”

The first day of the conference included an executive plenary session, hosting more than six high level executives from prominent oil and gas corporations. It also featured many panel sessions and marked the official launch of the accompanying exhibition, which showcased over 20 industry exhibitors.

Conference Chair and

Petroleum Engineering Function Director at Petroleum Development Oman, Sultan al Shidhani, highlighted the importance of the conference, “This is a reflection of the increasingly deployed hydraulic fracturing technologies and applications for enhancing productivity and improving accessibility to more difficult hydrocarbon resources.”



Start memorable journeys with the impressive Toyota Crown

MUSCAT: Toyota Crown makes an impressive mark with its inspiring style and range of advanced features that make it one of the most amazing vehicles in its segment.

Building on the legacy of one of the world's best-loved vehicles since the 1950s the Crown has been built to provide an intuitive driving experience that will exceed expectations and establish a new benchmark.

When the first generation was launched, the Crown came to symbolise “innovation” and “pushing the limit” within Toyota.

Since then, it has gained recognition in Japan as Toyota's premium sedan.

The Toyota Crown is built around the Toyota New Global Architecture (TNGA-K) platform. The new Crown comes

exclusively with a choice of two environmentally friendly powertrains.

The first hybrid electric powertrain consists of a front electric motor and Toyota's first-ever 2.4-litre inline four-cylinder turbo engine with All Wheel Drive, paired with direct shift six-speed automatic transmission with a combined power of 340 HP and 40.7 Kg.m. torque.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade. Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories. Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications.

MUSCAT: Oman's natural wonders are set to take centre stage once again as the eagerly anticipated whale shark season approaches. From September to November, Al Mouj Marina invites both locals and global travellers to witness the grandeur of these magnificent creatures in their natural habitat.

Whale sharks, the largest living fish species, grace Oman's waters during this season, captivating all who are fortunate enough to encounter them. Contrary to their name, these gentle giants are known for their peaceful disposition, allowing for an up-close experience that leaves an indelible mark on visitors.

With an average length of 6 to 10 metres and a record-breaking 18.8 meters, the sheer size of these creatures is awe-inspiring.

What's more remarkable is their diet – despite their immense size, they sustain themselves by feeding on some of the smallest inhabitants of the ocean, underscoring nature's intricate balance.



For those seeking a once-in-a-lifetime adventure, Al Mouj Marina serves as the ultimate gateway to this extraordinary experience.

Nestled near the captivating Daymaniyat Islands, the marina collaborates with esteemed operators to offer guided whale shark tours. This unique

opportunity allows visitors to immerse themselves in the mesmerising underwater world and witness these majestic beings firsthand.

Diving enthusiasts and nature lovers alike will be enchanted by the opportunity to swim alongside these graceful creatures in the crystal-clear waters. The

experience is bound to evoke wonder and awe as the enormity and elegance of the whale sharks come into view, creating memories that will forever be etched in the minds of participants.

Central to Al Mouj Marina's ethos is its commitment to responsible tourism and environmental conservation.

The operators adhere to strict guidelines that prioritise the well-being of the whale sharks and the preservation of their habitat.

By engaging in this remarkable encounter, visitors become active participants in the ongoing efforts to protect and conserve these magnificent animals.

Whether you're a marine enthusiast, a seeker of adventure, or simply someone looking to connect with the natural world, Oman's whale shark season promises an experience like no other.

Al Mouj Marina welcomes you to join them on a transformative journey, delving deep into the enchanting world of these majestic creatures.

Pact signed to set up aqua feed manufacturing plant in Duqm

MUSCAT: International Fish Feed Company LLC, a pioneering aqua feed company, with its manufacturing base in Duqm, Sultanate of Oman, is proud to announce its strategic partnership with Skretting, a Nutreco Company, and a global leader in aqua feed solutions and animal nutrition.

This collaboration marks a significant milestone for IFFC, empowering them to revolutionise the aquaculture industry with cutting-edge feed and nutrition solutions, for which Skretting is so well known. The first phase of the new state-of-the-art facility is expected to be completed and start its commercial production by the end of 2024 with an annual built-in capacity of 31,200 MT.

The project has been conceived and aligned with Oman 2040 Vision & the



Strategic Development Goals of the UN, committed to promoting economic growth and environmental sustainability in the Sultanate of Oman.

The aquaculture sector is rapidly expanding to meet the growing global demand for sustainable seafood. With this surge in production, the industry faces numerous challenges, including ensuring the highest quality diets for aquatic species while minimising environmental impact.

IFFC recognises these challenges and is committed to providing innovative, sustainable, and high-

performance aqua feed solutions. Nutreco, with its extensive expertise in animal nutrition, has been a trusted partner for numerous industries worldwide.

The partnership between IFFC and Skretting will leverage the strengths and knowledge of both companies to develop next-generation aqua feeds that enhance the health, growth, and sustainability of aquaculture species. With this partnership, IFFC also gains access to Skretting's advanced research and development capabilities, its global network of facilities, and its vast portfolio of high-quality ingredients.

Insurance policies to be serviced under a new brand name — Liva

MUSCAT: National Life & General Insurance Company SAOG (NLGIC) and Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance (Middle East) B.S.C. (c), along with their Omani subsidiary Al Ahlia Insurance Company SAOC (Al Ahlia), joined forces with the vision of creating a fully integrated multi-line insurance powerhouse in the region.

The two entities came together to form a fully integrated multi-line insurance company in the region which now has a new brand identity — Liva. Following the integration, all existing NLGIC and Al Ahlia insurance policies will soon be serviced under the new brand Liva Insurance SAOC with no change to the terms and conditions of the policies.

This will take place after obtaining all necessary



regulatory approvals which is expected to be completed swiftly within the coming few weeks.

In this transition to the new brand Liva, both NLGIC and Al Ahlia will ensure the maintenance and continuity of services across all the product ranges. “We are delighted to share the union of NLGIC and Al Ahlia Insurance, now united under the banner of Liva Insurance.

With the combined experience and technical expertise of NLGIC and

Al Ahlia insurance, we are confident that we will enhance the insurance experience of our customers and stakeholders, we look forward to a new chapter of excellence and innovation,” said Hanaa al Hinai, CEO, of Al Ahlia Insurance, which will become Liva Insurance SAOC.

The integration of NLGIC and Al Ahlia's existing personal and commercial lines businesses will make the newly combined company, Liva Insurance SAOC a multi-line insurer, allowing for the development of a diversified portfolio for both individuals and corporates to drive strategic growth.

Both NLGIC and Al Ahlia will continue to update their customers, intermediaries and business partners on these recent developments and ensure continuity of services.

Bank Nizwa plays vital role as thought leader at IFN Forum 2023

MUSCAT: Cementing its position as a pioneering thought leader in Oman's Islamic finance landscape, Bank Nizwa recently participated as the Lead Partner in the 8th annual IFN Forum, held by the acclaimed Islamic Finance Magazine. The forum highlighted Bank Nizwa's enlightening stance on a number of noteworthy subjects associated with the Islamic Banking sector.

The IFN Forum 2023 brought together the brightest minds in the Islamic finance space to discuss pivotal developments and the ethical impact of Sharia compliant banking practices.

Attended by key dignitaries, industry experts and potential investors, the forum witnessed prominent participation of Bank Nizwa's executive management



in panel discussions that shed light on building momentum with innovative Islamic banking services and driving the development of Shariah

compliant investment and asset management.

Reflecting on the illuminating discussions at the IFN Forum, Khalid al Kayed, CEO, Bank

Nizwa, said, “As the Sultanate of Oman's most trusted Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa is dedicated to raising awareness about best Islamic banking practices, and

partnering with the IFN Forum was in line with this objective. The forum gave us and our peers a platform to engage in insightful discussions, and collaborate to ensure the Islamic Banking sector continues to flourish.

It gave us the opportunity to recognise gaps in available Islamic banking services in the market and helped us visualise a bright future for Sharia compliant banking with our customers at the centre.” As Lead Partner at the forum, Bank Nizwa reaffirmed its position as an irreplaceable part of the Islamic Banking landscape in Oman and the Middle East.

Actively engaging in insightful conversations, Bank Nizwa's CEO Khalid al Kayed was a key panelist at the ‘Omani Islamic Financial Services: A Successful

Strategy for Building Momentum’ discussion, where the progress of the Islamic finance sector, market developments and regulatory framework were deliberated upon.

The bank's top personnel including Salman Kabani, head of enterprise Risk and strategy; and Mohamad Noranuar Sajari, Head of Shariah Structuring, also participated in thought-provoking sessions that reinforced the significance of ethical and sustainable banking practices in the modern world and highlighted the growth potential of the Islamic finance industry.

Recognising the bank's remarkable contribution to Oman's Islamic banking industry, Bank Nizwa was honoured with the ‘Best Islamic Bank in Oman Award’ at the forum.



Global hydraulic fracturing conference begins in Muscat

FROM PAGE 13

That in turn will enable growth through more cost-effective development and faster accelerated production.

The conference is providing valuable platforms for collaboration, knowledge and experience sharing in the industry that is essential to address a wide range of developmental, technological, and economical challenges and to realise the tremendous opportunities that exist in the oil and gas fields."

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, is a procedure that involves injecting high pressure fluids into underground bedrocks in order to induce fractures, resulting in a higher yield of oil and gas.

Last year, Minister of Energy and Minerals, Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, dubbed hydraulic fracturing as a "game changer" stating: "Nothing comes close to hydraulic fracturing.

It changed the fundamentals of oil and gas, whether it's on the oil side or the shale oil and gas revolution that happened in the US," he stated during his keynote address at the previous edition of the conference.

MSX makes strides towards sustainability with green finance

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 12

Following the unveiling of a new platform to facilitate the disclosure of environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) standards by listed companies, the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) is now preparing the groundwork for the growth and development of green finance in line with the goals of the Omani government's Financial Sustainability Program.

According to a high-level official associated with this programme, the drive to embrace green finance was initiated following the noble directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, which is now gaining momentum under the auspices of the National Program for Financial Sustainability and Financial Sector Development.

Oman's Vision 2040, which outlines the nation's long-term development objectives, strongly emphasises sustainability and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) considerations.

The Vision seeks to establish a diversified economy that encourages innovation, provides equal opportunities, harnesses Oman's competitive strengths,



and prioritises environmental conservation and social advancement.

Speaking to the Observer, Mahmood al Awaini, Director of the National Program for Financial Sustainability and Financial Sector, expressed the unwavering dedication of the programme to support this strategic direction.

The Financial Sustainability Program, Al Awaini said, employs a systematic, analytical methodology that commences with a thorough assessment of the current landscape. This includes identifying shortcomings, challenges, and their root causes.

The programme then seeks inspiration from regional and

international best practices to propose optimal solutions and the most efficient pathways to achieve their objectives.

A vital aspect of this approach is a meticulous analysis of risks and opportunities, culminating in establishing performance measurement standards for the proposed solutions and their expected economic impact.

This process identifies a significant challenge: more laws, regulations, and guidelines facilitating access to sustainable green financing. To overcome this challenge, there is a pressing need to develop a comprehensive legal framework for this relatively new sector. Additionally, regulations about triple governance, which

are environmental, social, and corporate governance, must be established. This would include creating a list of government and private projects that align with these governance principles and qualify for sustainable green financing, often at relatively lower interest rates.

In alignment with this vision, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has issued circulars related to financial inclusion per the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These circulars outline the country's strategy for enhancing access to financial services for all population segments and address climate-related financial risk management and green financing.

The circulars are intended to promote adopting green finance practices by financial institutions. Various government and private institutions in Oman have made substantial efforts to align their operations with this global trend.

Key players such as the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), the Capital Market Authority (CMA), the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), and affiliated companies have been at the forefront of this drive.

Oman's Islamic financial services on a path to success

FROM PAGE 13

During the session, moderated by Asad Qayyum, Managing Partner of MAQ Legal, panellists and experts recognised Islamic finance as a catalyst for private sector development.

Its principles align with ethical and sustainable business practices, making it an attractive financing option for businesses looking to expand while adhering to Islamic values.

Another focal point of the forum was the key market developments within Oman's Islamic financial landscape. These included remunerative deposit accounts, the potential issuance of treasury Sukuk, and the introduction of Wakalah money market liquidity management tools.

These initiatives aim to diversify the product offerings in Oman's Islamic finance sector, providing investors with a broader range of opportunities and enhancing the sector's resilience.

Addressing regulatory concerns was also a crucial part of the discussions. The treatment of Islamic banks following mergers with conventional institutions and the development of a robust Shariah governance framework and audit guidelines were examined in detail.

These issues underscored the need for clear and consistent regulatory standards to maintain the integrity and trustworthiness of Islamic finance in Oman.

Furthermore, the forum offered insights into new regulations governing the issuance of bonds and Sukuk in Oman.

These regulations are expected to enhance transparency and efficiency in the issuance process, further bolstering the appeal of Islamic debt instruments to both local and international investors.

Oman's financial wealth to reach \$141 billion by 2027

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 12

Oman's financial wealth is projected to experience a strong Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 4.7%, increasing to \$141 billion by 2027, according to a new report by Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

The report titled 'Global Wealth Report 2023: Resetting the Course,' reveals that Oman's financial wealth represents 1.5% of the region's total.

Over the period from 2017 to 2022, Oman's financial wealth experienced a growth rate of 7.2% per annum, reaching a total of \$112 billion. This significant increase highlights the nation's



positive economic trajectory and solidifies its position within the regional financial landscape.

Markus Massi, Managing Director and Senior Partner at BCG said: "Oman's economic trajectory signals entrepreneurial spirit coupled with calculated risk. This impressive growth reflects the resilience and strength of

Oman's economy despite global market challenges."

Turning to individual wealth distribution, the report indicates that in 2022, a significant portion of Oman's wealth, about 23%, originated from Ultra High Net Worth (UHNW) individuals worth more than \$100 million. Their contribution is expected to

increase to 24% by 2027.

Furthermore, individuals with wealth between \$1 million and \$20 million held 23% of Oman's wealth in 2022, with this percentage expected to remain the same by 2027. Individuals with wealth below \$250,000 held 34% of the wealth, a proportion anticipated to decrease to 33% by 2027.

Farouk al Hosni, BCG Principal, commented: "The success of Oman in retaining high net worth individuals contributes to its growing economic prowess. Not only are they accelerating investment in the region, but they also warrant its sustained growth." The report also highlights the growth of real assets in Oman.

Oman's real assets represent 0.9% of the region's total.

However, there has been a decline in real assets from 2017 to 2022 at an annual rate of -3%, resulting in a total of \$104 billion. Despite this decline, there is optimism for the future as real assets are expected to experience growth at a rate of 4% per annum, reaching \$127 billion by 2027.

Additionally, Oman's liabilities sector declined slightly by -0.2% per annum from 2017 to 2022, but it is anticipated to grow by 2.5% annually to \$9.1 billion by 2027.

This balanced growth demonstrates Oman's confidence in taking calculated risks, enhancing its overall growth narrative.

Construction begins at Oman's Manah 1 Solar PV Plant

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 12

Leading French developer EDF Renewables and its consortium partner, Korea Western Power Co Ltd (KOWEPO), announced on Tuesday, September 12, 2023, the groundbreaking at site of their 500-megawatt (MW) Manah 1 Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Power Plant.

The plant, which is located approximately 120 kilometres south from Muscat city, is setting a new benchmark for the solar power market in Oman. The milestone was marked with a private ceremony supported by congratulatory messages from key partners including the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and the buyer, Nama Power & Water Procurement (PWP).

EDF Renewables and



KOWEPO also finalised and selected Worley as Owner engineer for the project.

Worley will work alongside the Wadi Noor Solar Power Company to deliver the PV plant in a timely manner in accordance with the highest standards on the

market.

The ceremony was held at the project site with a high-level dignitaries to celebrate the achievement of the project's mobilisation milestone.

In the presence of senior delegates, Dr Mansoor al Hinai,

Chairman of APSR, Shaikh Dr Faisal bin Ali al Zaidi, Wali of Manah, Eng Ahmed al Subhi, Chairman of NAMA; Ahmed al Mahrizi, Group CEO of Nama; Yaqoob al Kiyumi, CEO of PWP, the official representatives of the Embassy of France in Oman;

the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea in Oman Kim Kiejoo; Olivier Bordes, CEO Middle East of EDF Renewables, KO; Youn Ho, Managing Director Overseas Business of KOWEPO; and the Project Company reiterated their commitment to contributing to the sustainability targets of the Sultanate of Oman's renewable energy sector.

Olivier BORDES, CEO Middle East, EDF Renewables said: "This project demonstrates EDF Renewables support for Oman's Vision 2030 objectives and its climate goals. Sustainability, low-carbon innovative solutions and nurtured local knowledge are the cornerstone for EDF Renewables. We will continue to work with the Sultanate of Oman's government on driving its clean energy transition, while supporting the Sultanate of Oman in reaching its renewables capacity target of 30%

by 2030".

"Moreover, once fully operational the project will considerably contribute to power with clean electricity 50,000 Omani homes while offsetting over 780,000 tonnes of CO2 per year," he added. Ko, Youn Ho, Managing Director Overseas Business of KOWEPO in the Middle East, said: "We will do our best to work alongside our partner to ensure the smooth implementation of the Manah 1 project to satisfy with the energy transition plan in Oman."

The plant will span over approximately 7.8 square kilometres in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The 500 MW photovoltaic plant will become the benchmark for the Oman's solar market deploying over 1 million bifacial PV modules mounted on a single axis tracker system.

Plans afoot to launch digital bank in 2025

With emphasis on diversity and gender equality in current times, it is most notable to see Nicola Horlick, the veteran fund manager, once dubbed the City’s (financial district of London) “superwoman”, has kickstarted the process to apply for a banking licence that will allow her peer-to-peer lending business to begin taking deposits.

“We are proceeding with our application,” said Horlick, who set up Money&Co in 2013.

“If we get the licence, we hope to launch the bank at the beginning of 2025.”

Horlick’s plan to obtain a banking licence was put on hold last year, following the death of her husband Martin Baker in November.

However, she said the application was now “back on



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

THE INVESTORS
RECEIVE HIGHER
RETURNS THAN IF THEY
HAD LEFT THEIR MONEY
IN SAVINGS ACCOUNTS
WHILE BUSINESSES CAN
TAKE ON RISKIER
LOANS.

track”. She is about to embark on a fundraising round to raise at least £50 million in regulatory capital, which would allow her bank to lend £300 million.

Horlick said her aim is to be lending £3 billion by the end of the first five-year period, which would require further fund-raising rounds.

The fund manager, who met the regulators last year about launching a bank, said she would be able to submit a final business plan to the Financial Conduct Authority and Prudential Regulation Authority once she had evidence of investor backing. The 62-year-old said backing would most likely come from family offices, sovereign wealth funds and other large institutional investors. She also expects interest from Middle Eastern investors.

“It will be a concentrated shareholder list,” said Horlick. “But it is a difficult time to be

raising money. The world is in a tricky place at the moment.” Peer-to-peer lending takes money from retail investors and lends it to individuals and companies.

The investors receive higher returns than if they had left their money in savings accounts while businesses can take on riskier loans.

However, peer-to-peer lending tends to generate lower returns for the firm than conventional bank loans do, as most of the profits are passed on to those who put the money in the pool.

Horlick said there was “a huge amount of tech work to do” to launch the bank, including building an app.

The bank, which will not compete with other digital banks, such as Revolut or Starling, will also have a separate brand from Money&Co, she added.

“We are not going to be doing anything wild here. We are

not going to be having current accounts, which means it will be easier to run and to get to profitability,” she said.

A bank would offer cash ISAs and put investor money to work across three niche areas: finance for litigation, music publishing and agricultural roles.

“It will be more like an old-fashioned savings and loans bank, giving people good rates of interest on their savings and lending to the corporate sector,” said Horlick.

Her plans come after other peer-to-peer lenders have ditched businesses.

Zopa, the peer-to-peer platform set up in 2004, announced in December 2021 that it would exit this part of the business to concentrate on its banking operation.

The platform, which received a full banking licence in 2020, said peer-to-peer lending was no

longer commercially viable.

Meanwhile, Denmark based Lunar, which moved into peer-to-peer lending in 2021, sold that part of its business to Sweden’s Lendify in April in an all-stock transaction worth 100 million euros.

Lunar said operating a peer-to-peer platform and scaling the business would have required “significant investment”.

Horlick gained her Superwoman status during the 1990s for her ability to juggle a large family while running a multimillion-pound investment business.

She gained notoriety in the 1990s following a public spat with her bosses at Morgan Grenfell Asset Management.

Horlick was suspended from the firm when it was claimed she and some of her colleagues were looking to move to a rival.

She later resigned and set up SG Asset Management in 1997.

American economic power is potent but unstable

For the past 15 years, the iPhone has been a totem of US economic power. The global popularity of Apple’s ubiquitous smartphone serves as a worldwide reminder of Silicon Valley’s ingenuity and technological expertise.

Yet in some eyes it now appears to have become a threat. China recently told staff at central government agencies to stop using the devices at work, media reported on Thursday, and the ban could spread to regional authorities too.

Although the reasons Beijing has soured on Apple are unclear, the symbolism is hard to ignore. The iPhone owes much of its success to low-cost manufacturing in China. If the country is cooling on the \$2.8 trillion company, it’s a potent indicator of increasingly frosty relations with the United States. It also underscores the difficulty of reversing two decades of economic integration.

When China joined the World Trade Organisation at the end of 2001, many political leaders hailed the move as a big step forward, not just for the global economy, but also for peaceful coexistence.

Countries with shared economic interests were less likely to become adversaries, or so the thinking went. Over the next two decades, however, the United States increasingly wielded its dominant position in global technology and finance as a foreign policy weapon, eventually prompting others to retaliate.

The theory that economic interdependence deters conflict has a long history. Back in 1909, the English historian Norman Angell published “The Great Illusion”, which argued that European countries had too much to lose by going to war.

Within a few years, that dream died on the battlefields of northern France, alongside millions of men.

When the Cold War ended in 1989, the concept made a comeback. As new nations joined the capitalist international economy and barriers to trade and finance fell, markets and multinational companies seemed more powerful than many governments.

Conflict would threaten the lucrative cross-border flow of



PETER THAL LARSEN

The writer is Global Editor of Reuters Breakingviews, based in London.

EVEN AS ADVOCATES OF
GLOBALISATION
CELEBRATED,
INTERCONNECTED
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MOST SIGNIFICANTLY,
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ON ADVERSARIES AND
THE FINANCIAL SYSTEM
TO SUBDUCE THEM.



An American flag on the US Capitol Building is seen in Washington. – Reuters

money and goods. In 1996, the New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman articulated what he called the “Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention”.

The tongue-in-cheek hypothesis stipulated that two countries that were sufficiently developed to support a McDonald’s would not fight each other. Russian President Vladimir Putin, among others, later proved him wrong.

Even as advocates of globalisation celebrated, interconnected systems became a theatre for bitter battles. Perhaps most significantly, the US government realised it could use the Internet to spy on adversaries and the financial system to subdue them.

US online dominance enabled it to eavesdrop on phone calls and e-mails from around the world, a process that went largely undetected until the National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden blew the whistle in 2013.

Meanwhile, the US Treasury realised it could exclude enemies such as North Korea and Iran from the global dollar-based payments system, while forcing financial

institutions in other countries to enforce its policies.

Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman vividly describe this shift in “Underground Empire: How America Weaponised the Global Economy”.

The authors, respectively professors at Johns Hopkins SAIS and Georgetown University, explain how the unseen network of computer protocols and undersea cables was not built deliberately as a tool of state power.

Indeed, US officials were initially reluctant to exert their authority over foreign banks and fund managers. But the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, just three months before China formally joined the WTO, amplified the urgency of pursuing America’s enemies. The phenomenon the authors call “weaponised interdependence” has expanded ever since.

Years before the Chinese government expressed doubts about iPhones, the United States used financial and technological sanctions to attack Huawei, the Chinese maker of telecommunications equipment.

US regulators imposed a huge

fine on BNP Paribas, the French bank, for circumventing sanctions on Sudan, Iran and Cuba.

When Putin invaded Ukraine, America and its allies initiated a huge barrage of penalties, kicked most Russian banks out of the SWIFT payments network, and opened a new front by freezing a large chunk of Moscow’s central bank reserves.

More recently, the Biden Administration has imposed controls on technology exports to prevent China from developing sophisticated semiconductors.

Far from escaping the clutches of government control, “US intellectual property turned out to be a long and nearly invisible fishing line, with shiny lures and baited hooks that foreign businesses snapped at and swallowed,” write Farrell and Newman.

The tendency of capitalism to produce a handful of giant companies, many of them headquartered in the United States, helped successive administrations exert their authority.

The problem with arming the passageways of global commerce, however, is that it encourages others to fight back. China’s iPhone

ban, however limited in scope, is the latest in a series of attempts to reduce Beijing’s dependence on US-made technology, including Intel chips and Microsoft’s Windows software.

The country also has flexed its muscles by restricting exports of gallium and germanium, used to make microprocessors.

The financial warfare waged on Russia has given new urgency to so-far halting attempts to develop an alternative financial system which does not depend on the US dollar. The European Union is also exerting its will.

France, Germany and others joined the United States in punishing Putin, but their officials also worry about a future US president, perhaps a returning Donald Trump, using the same tools against his erstwhile allies.

It’s unclear where this confrontation will end. Even as authorities have dropped talk of the United States “decoupling” from China in favour of the more benign “derisking”, politicians are still primed to see potential weapons and vulnerabilities in every aspect of interdependence.

— Reuters

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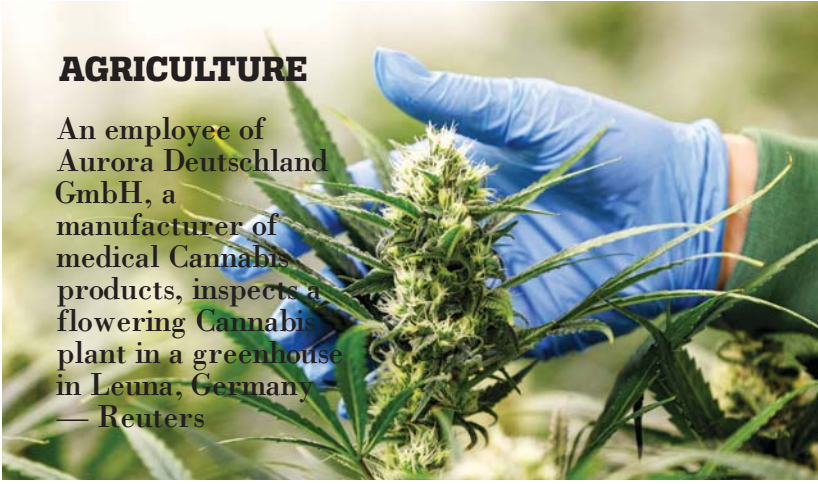
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Dancers perform during the rehearsal of the flamenco show Jaleos Jondos at the Magno theatre in Madrid — AFP



FILM
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FASHION
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AGRICULTURE
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art & life

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An artist's journey from marine biology to eco-artistry

BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

Transitioning from a background in marine biology to a flourishing career as an artist, Elizabeth Davis has embarked on a creative journey that harmonises her love for art with a deep commitment to environmental sustainability.

Her artistic odyssey is a tale of self-discovery, nurtured by an incredible art teacher during her school years. However, her academic pursuits initially led her into marine biology and the corporate world before guiding her back to art. She resided in the Sultanate of Oman for over 30 years and commenced her artistic voyage, primarily working with acrylics.

Painting on canvas is a delight, but recycling and up-cycling are more than a creative satisfaction. It is also a commitment to the environ-



ment.

As an artist, Elizabeth Davis wants to be independent of any particular medium of painting or style.

A self-taught artist, she fell

in love with painting as a school student thanks to an amazing art teacher.

She has ventured into impressionism and semi-abstract form. With a certifi-

cate in 'Creative Imagination' from the National Museum of Oman and in Drawing from the Art Academy in London, she has been exploring, experimenting and evolving

in her journey of art.

Looking closely at her artwork beyond the canvas, one realises her creativity is also connected to the concept of recycling, reusing and up-cycling the topic of cycling, which is very close to her heart.

Step into her art studio, and one will know why she likes to spend so much time there. In her art studio, water bottles have been converted into beautiful lampshades. It seems to her that imagination could be the only limitation anyone can have regarding recycling.

"If people would recycle and upcycle, there would be less junk and more beautiful art out there," noted Elizabeth.

Her work reflects her love for Oman and the impression the country has left on her.

"It is an amazing country with warm people, awe-inspiring landscape along with forts, Falaj and frankincense," she said.

Born in Kerala, India, she majored in Marine Biology, worked as a banker and went on to coordinate training programmes for professionals in accounting. Today, she is a full-time artist.

Elizabeth has participated in various exhibitions in Oman, India, UAE and the US. She has had solo exhibitions in Cochin and Jahangir Art Gallery in Mumbai, India, as well as in Juneau, Alaska. Her work is also part of private collections.

Elizabeth was a winner of the Masterpiece Oman exhibition conducted by the Anglo-Homani Society, London, in 2021.

Meanwhile, taking her granddaughter to Muttrah Sea Front inspired an imaginative hand-crafted sketch-book created by Elizabeth and is now part of a special collection in the Mohammed bin Rashid Library in Dubai. UAE. So is the commissioned book, 'Kiki Goes to Dubai Creek.'



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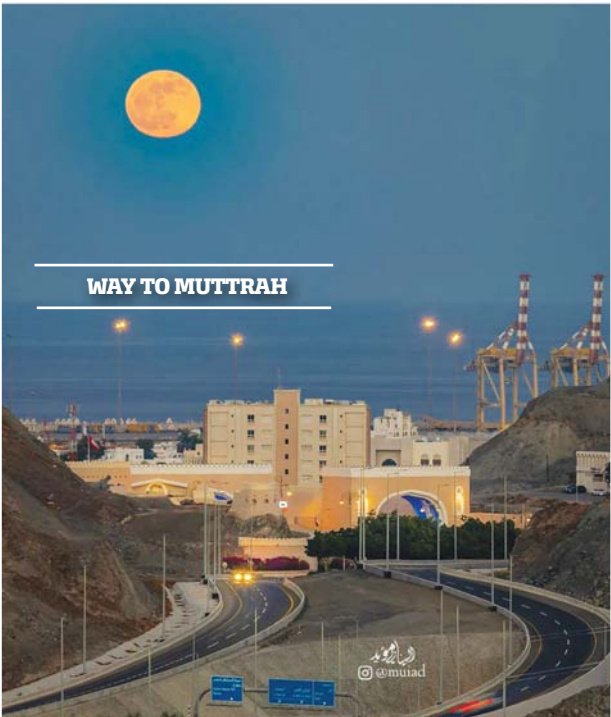
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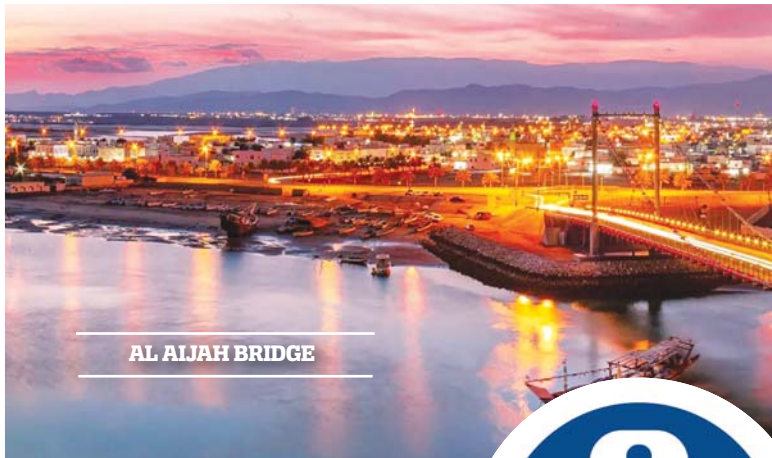
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The boy who defeated autism with music

BY KABEER YOUSUF

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"YOUR CHILD IS autistic; he may prove to be good for nothing, and you can please take him," was the message passed by a doctor far from medical ethics and empathy.

Hearing this, Sabeela, the mother of Marwan Munawar, who was diagnosed as autistic, did not burst out or cry. Instead, she carried her two-year-old first son on her shoulder and walked out in grit and determination.

Her experience may resemble that of Thomas Alva Edison, who was one day sent by the class teacher with a letter saying that Edison was mentally ill. However, she told Edison he was so genius that the school thought he was too good for them. Hence, Edison thought that his mother was the best teacher who knew how to encourage him, and the rest is history.

Today, this 23-year-old Marwan has carved a niche for himself in the music industry. He is a busy musician who has, besides giving some flicks to Indian music, a celebrity name on social media, a public performer and an avid follower of the holy Quran.

Hailing from the Indian district of Kasaragod, born to Munawar Shuaib and Sabeela, settled in Kasab, Musandam, Marwan

today is a master of guitar, keyboard, melodica, Carnatic vocal, and Western music while rendering the verses of the Holy Quran beautifully which has already gained followers from across the world for him. He runs a YouTube channel called 'Marwan's Autism Diary', interacts with similar children, and gives guidance to them to achieve their dreams regularly. He has more than 15 video albums on his channel that keep inspiring other autistic children.

His efforts have been recognised by accolades from across the globe, including the Nobel Book of World Records, the International Book of World Records, the India Book of Records, the World Wide Book of

Records and so forth.

"We were not aware of the growth stages of an autistic child and the stages of acquiring skills of Marwan because he was the first child and we were like a fish out of water when he was diagnosed with autism," admits Marwan Shuaib, his father. He said it a l l

started with a bout of fits during one of their family travels between Kasaragod and Mumbai when a doctor came and controlled fits, but that was the beginning. He began to fall sick very often until he was diagnosed as autistic by a child psychiatrist in Dubai at the age of less than three. This was followed by a series of consultations, doctors, hospitals, mostly in Nimhans Bengaluru, several medicines and so on for quite some time. During this disheartening spree of doctors, hospitals and medicines, his parents cannot forget the day he uttered 'mother'; they still cherish that day on the train.

"It was at the age of 4 that he first sounded 'mother' during one of our journeys from Mumbai to Kasaragod, and I still cannot forget how happy I was. Imagine my first offspring calling me after nearly four years of his birth!"

Sabeela wiped the tears that uncontrollably flowed through her cheeks.

His sister was born when he

was in the UKG, and he was sent to Icons in Shoranur, which was considered the best for these children for their speech therapy and psychotherapy. His second sister was born when he was 12, and they're best friends to Marwan, besides his parents.

"We closely monitored him, and even the slightest changes in his behaviour, the way he spoke, and the like have really had an impact on us. Sooner, he started developing an interest in music and computers."

An ardent lover of Holy Quran: Loving the holy Quran was a genetically grown passion for Marwan, and he spared no stone unturned in learning about the sacred cities of Makkah and Madinah. Believe it or not, he can recite the holy book in the voice of 12 globally renowned reciters (Qari) and he can imitate the Adan (call for prayers) of nearly 8 mu'adins (one who calls for prayers) and

has offered Umra twice in his life. His dream is to wish Abdul Rahman al Sudais one of the nine imams of the Grand Mosque, Al Masjid Al Haram in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

"We hope that we can make it happen one day," his parents are optimistic.

Marwan teaches similar children the holy Quran on a WhatsApp group called 'Quran for Kids', which is a part of the 'Strong Women' group of mothers of autistic children, and hundreds of such children are grateful to Marwan, the teacher after two years of such training. Marwan is still an online disciple of a Quran teacher from Makkah.

The boy who always loved music has been awarded a sequel of recognitions starting with the international song competition organised by 'Drishya', a Mumbai-based organisation. Many recognitions from across the country followed this.

After jumping the barricades in education and obstacles that posed challenges in his ambition to come up in life,

today, Marwan is pursuing his Computer Animation and Multimedia Effects at Govt ITI. In learning the holy Quran, Marwan is a self-trained student who sourced most of the materials online and has completed 15 Juzu (the Quran is divided into one of thirty parts of varying lengths) of the holy book today.

His ambition?

"I want to graduate in music as well as become a 'Hafidh' (Hafiz) in the holy Quran and guide and mentor my peers across the world on how to dream and chase their dreams," a smiling Marwan utters.

"All our family members, relatives and neighbours are very supportive in helping Munawar achieve his dreams, and his sisters, Fathima and Aysha, keep much of their time to take care of their only brother," said Munawar.

"We are indebted to all those who supported Marwan in his journey and special thanks to Akkara Foundation and teacher Yasser, who helped him participate with nearly a thousand artists from across India, Nirshad Nini, who identified Marwan's aptitude in music, Sammohan All India fest which gave him a stage to sing in front of a packed audience, and Gopinath Muthukad who runs Magic Planet to help and support these children to come up in their lives," Sabeela concluded.

'Finished here': A village vanishes in Morocco's quake

IT WAS DELICATE work for the searchers to remove the woman's body from the rubble of a village that effectively ceased to exist in Morocco's deadliest earthquake in over six decades.

Her 25-year-old fiance Omar Ait Mbarek watched the digging on Sunday with his eyes red and full of tears, and surrounded by onlookers, just kilometres from the quake epicentre in the Atlas Mountains.

He was on the phone with her when the shaking started late on Friday and he heard kitchen utensils crash to the floor before the line cut out. He knew she was



gone.

"What do you want me to say? I'm wounded," he said after Mina Ait Bihi, weeks from becoming his wife, was carried away in blankets to a makeshift cemetery that already held 68 others.

The men who had carefully used their hands to scoop away the dirt that covered her also found her phone and handed it over to the grieving man.

All around him the village of Tikht, previously home to at least 100 families, was a tangle of timbers, chunks of masonry as well as broken plates, shoes and the occasional intricately patterned rug.

"Life is finished here," said Mohssin Aksum, 33, who had family living in the tiny settlement. "The village is dead."

TRADITIONALLY BUILT HOMES

Like many of the hardest-hit villages, it was a small rural place with a significant number of buildings constructed with a traditional mix of stone, timber and a mortar composed of mud.

Dozens of residents, mourning relatives and soldiers were gathered at the ruins. Several said they couldn't remember any previous earthquake in the area.

It wasn't something people here thought about when building their houses," said 23-year-old student Abdelrahman Edjal, who lost most of his family in the disaster. But the quality of the building materials was not uppermost in his mind as he sat on a boulder among the rubble under the strikingly blue sky and surrounded by mountains.

He had gone out for a walk after dinner when the shaking began, and saw people trying to escape their collapsing houses. He pulled his own father from the ruins of the family home, but the injuries were too serious. He died with his son close by.

Twisted steel reinforcement rods poked out of the debris in Tikht, so clearly some more recent building techniques were part of the local structures. Daily life was already hard in the area, which is a roughly two-hour drive from the jobs that Marrakesh's massive tourist industry can offer.

LESS THAN NOTHING Aksum, who has local roots but lives in Rabat, said the quake has taken away the little bit that people

had.

As he spoke, he gestured to his nose, and said the livestock that had been kept by locals was now buried under the debris and beginning to rot.

"Now, people have less than nothing," he noted.

While he spoke, two young men in clothing streaked with the white dust of the ruins sat on boulders and cried, but said nothing.

By Sunday, emergency housing in the form of yellow tents was visible on the road into town.

Members of the government's civil protection service were carrying camp beds from a military-type truck toward the tents.

Non-profit groups were also in the area, assessing what the people remaining in villages like Tikht need, beyond the obvious shelter, food and water.

Several people said they were still in shock over their losses and the scale of the damage, and could not say with any certainty what their next steps might be.

But Omar Ait Mbarek said he was sure of one thing.

"I will rebuild my house," he said, still holding his late fiancée's dust-covered phone, before walking away into the debris. — AFP



OPERA

THE BARBER OF SEVILLE



The Royal Opera House Muscat is thrilled to be announcing the start of a new season packed with exciting musical performances filling the calendar from September 2023 to May 2024.

The dazzling opera which will open the season with traditional elegance and fanfare is The Barber of Seville from

popular composer Gioacchino Rossini. The opera will be performed by the Orchestra Nazionale Sinfonica della Rai and Intermezzo Choir conducted by Antonino Fogliani, with a spray of glittering opera stars in the main roles. Antonino Siragusa sings Conte d'Almaviva, Carlo Lepore takes the role of Dr. Bartolo, Nicola Olivieri will sing Don Basilio, Maria

Kataeva will sing the role of Rosina, and Vito Priante takes the main role of the wily fixer Figaro. The Omani Choir Group will also participate in this production.

Rossini's opera is a comic tale of bribery, deception, and disguise. Enjoy Figaro's mischievous escapades as he assists Count Almaviva in prising the beautiful Rosina away from her for-

tune hunting guardian, Dr Bartolo. Figaro contrives to help the Count out-wit Dr Bartolo and ensure true love wins the day.

The Barber of Seville will be performed on Friday 29 and Saturday 30 September at the Royal Opera House Muscat at 7 pm. Tickets are available now and can be purchased at the box office or via the ROHM app. Each performance is preceded

with a talk by the creative team, revealing fascinating insights into their production.

On Saturday 23 September, the opening Lunch Music concert of the new season will take place in the Opera Galleria at 12.30 pm. This popular informal event is free of charge. Singers from the Intermezzo Choir will perform arias from across the Rossini canon ahead

of the performance of his much-loved opera, The Barber of Seville, on the main stage the following weekend. Discover Opera Talks at the beautiful Music Library in the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts of Wednesday 27 at 7 pm. Gaston Fournier leads the discussion on themes within the opera, and opera singers give the audience a close up of Rossini's incredible work.