



Visit to take ties to new heights



OMANI-GERMAN RELATIONS WERE ESTABLISHED ON THE BASIS OF RESPECT, GOOD FAITH AND MUTUAL TRUST

THE NUMBER OF GERMAN COMPANIES REGISTERED IN OMAN BY THE END OF 2022 REACHED 44 COMPANIES, WITH A TOTAL INVESTED CAPITAL EXCEEDING RO 16 MILLION

OMAN HAS A NUMBER OF AGREEMENTS AND MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING WITH GERMANY THAT AIM AT DEVELOPING ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION

MUSCAT: Bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Republic of Germany are witnessing remarkable development in all fields, as established diplomatic relations that extend back to more than 50 years have resulted in a fruitful economic partnership between the two countries.

The visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Federal Republic of Germany in July 2022 reflected the depth of bilateral relations binding the two friendly countries, and represented a new starting point for greater economic relations, especially in the fields of renewable energy and green hydrogen, and the strengthening of close cooperation in various fields.

During His Majesty's visit to Germany, His Majesty the Sultan held official meetings with Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, which discussed the prospects for joint cooperation between the two countries and ways fostering them in various fields to achieve the aspirations of the two friendly peoples.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan met with a number of German businessmen and CEOs of German firms with the aim of developing trade relations and enhancing investment opportunities between the two friendly countries in various sectors.

His Majesty's visit to the Federal Republic of Germany also saw the signing of a joint declaration of intent for cooperation in the field of energy in fulfilment of the desire of the two friendly countries to continue strengthening and developing it on the basis of mutual benefit.

The official visit of Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier to the Sultanate of Oman comes as a reinforcement of these close and strong bilateral relations represented by the enhancement of cooperation between the two friendly countries based on the



good relations and mutual respect between the two countries.

There is no doubt that the political file will be on the agenda during the bilateral meetings between His Majesty the Sultan and Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier in light of the events the region is witnessing, and many issues will be the subject of discussion and

consultation between the two leaderships.

Accordingly, Omani-German relations were established on the basis of respect, good faith and mutual trust in dealing with many contemporary international issues. Their effects were reflected in the two friendly countries to find positive rapprochement in

a number of issues of concern to both sides on the regional and international arenas, and to consider dialogue, peaceful methods and the principles of international law as the most effective foundations and best ways to achieve international peace and security.

— ONA

THE OFFICIAL VISIT OF DR FRANK-WALTER STEINMEIER TO THE SULTANATE OF OMAN COMES AS A REINFORCEMENT OF CLOSE AND STRONG BILATERAL RELATIONS

THE VOLUME OF TRADE EXCHANGE BETWEEN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN AND THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY RECORDED MORE THAN RO 214 MILLION BY THE END OF 2022

THE OMANI-GERMAN JOINT COMMITTEE WORKS CONCRETELY TO DEVELOP AND ENHANCE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO FRIENDLY COUNTRIES



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New e-gates with face recognition soon

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

In line with several technological advancements planned in the near future, new e-Gates have been installed at the Muscat International Airport, which will be operational this week.

Speaking to the Observer, Shaikh Aimen al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports said, "Unlike the old ones, the new gates will have facial recognition and 18 of them have been installed in the departure and arrival sections. We have been investing a lot in the technology, including opening of the new Innovation Lab."

Citizens and residents can use the system directly without showing their passports, visitors to the Sultanate of Oman will have to go through the normal immigration process.

He was speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the Airport Innovate conference in Muscat on Tuesday.

It may be noted that e-Gates were introduced for the first time at the old Muscat International Airport in 2008 to allow holders of residency cards

and IDs to enter and exit by swiping their resident card.

Passengers were not required to wait in long queues to get their passports stamped as they can head straight for the machine and register their entry or exit.

Over the course of two days, participants discussed the latest trends, developments, and technological innovations in the airport sector through 23 sessions, including visual presentations and panel discussions.

More than 45 CEOs from global airport leaders explored the sector's readiness for innovation, artificial intelligence realms, and the latest technologies and innovations designed to enhance the travel experience and operational practices in the airport sector.

Additionally, 14 global institutions displayed their latest products dedicated to airports in the exhibition held on the sidelines of the conference. Local emerging tech companies, alongside global counterparts, participated in the exhibitions to showcase their innovations in aviation.

Dhofar wildfires under control



The Civil Defence and Ambulance Department in Dhofar Governorate deployed fire and rescue teams, effectively containing and extinguishing the blazes

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, NOV 25

Two separate fires have engulfed Dhofar Governorate's picturesque pastoral areas over the past two days, raising alarms among authorities and local residents.

While no casualties or material losses have been reported, the incidents underscore the heightened risk of wildfires during the dry season transition.

Promptly responding to the emergencies, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department in

Dhofar Governorate deployed fire and rescue teams to Salalah and Taqah, effectively containing and extinguishing the blazes.

In Dhofar Governorate, the risk of wildfires increases, posing a significant threat to the region's natural beauty and ecosystem. To mitigate this risk, the Environment Agency urges residents and visitors to exercise extreme caution and adopt simple yet crucial measures such as avoiding open flames near tree trunks, properly disposing of cigarette butts, and ensuring the complete extinguishment of

campfires.

Additionally, reporting any suspicious smoke or fire activity immediately, refraining from parking vehicles on dry grass or brush, keeping a fire extinguisher readily available, and creating a defensible space around homes can further enhance wildfire prevention efforts. By collectively taking these precautions, the general public can safeguard Dhofar Governorate's precious natural heritage from the devastating consequences of wildfires.

Emphasising the importance of

fire safety practices, particularly for those venturing into pastoral areas, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department urges citizens and residents to refrain from starting fires and dispose of waste responsibly. The drying of grasses following autumn rains, coupled with the onset of winter draughts, further elevates the risk of wildfires during this period. Therefore, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department strongly encourages everyone to exercise extreme caution and promptly report any signs of fire by dialing 9999.

Rubbish piles up as long holidays conclude

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Every long holiday makes surroundings unclean with food waste, plastic wrappers, charcoal waste and not the least, the plastic waste, leaving the environment bear the brunt of a holiday.

"It is really appalling to see the pristine beaches, tidy parks and other tourist spots turning out to be small mountains of trash as the holidaymakers, more often than not, fail to dispose them off properly," said a citizen who went to spent holidays at Al Riyam Park.

"What is even more shocking is that waste around the dust bins make a huge pile either because people pay less attention to throw them into the bins or cleaning workers fail to clear them off in time," he added.

During holidays, beaches turn out to be shelves of plastic waste with bottles and bottle caps left recklessly and plastic wrappers floating in the ocean mirroring the heedless action of fellow holidaymakers.

And after holidays, cleaning workers find it extremely difficult to clean

the areas which were waste-laden and it is the sensuous behaviour that fetches the desired results of cleanliness, according to a cleaner from the Muscat Municipality.

The Muscat Municipality had earlier launched a cleaning campaign named 'Be careful' in association with the Environment Authority, and called for the preservation of environment and to follow the systematic initiatives for cleanliness and aesthetic values.

The campaign, implemented as part of the general hygiene campaign in six wilayats of Muscat (Muscat, Muttrah, Bausher, Al Seeb, Al Amerat, and Qurayat), urging both citizens and expatriates to keep the city clean from various wastes, pollutants and residues on an ongoing basis.

"This is because, maintaining cleanliness is hygiene too as improper disposal of waste and pollutants can affect the land, sea and air environments, and cause health and environmental damage to humans and living organisms," Muscat Municipality official said.



It is hard to see pristine beaches and tidy parks turning out to be small mountains of trash



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Salalah welcomes first direct charter flight from Hungary



The introduction of direct charter flights from Hungary aligns with the strategic objective of diversifying Oman’s tourist base

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, NOV 25

Salalah, the captivating capital of Dhofar Governorate, unveiled its doors to the first-ever charter flights from Hungary, marking a momentous occasion in Oman’s tourism sector.

The inaugural flight, carrying 189 eager tourists, touched down at Salalah Airport on Friday, signalling the commencement of a series of weekly direct flights during the winter tourism season.

This groundbreaking development stems from the synergetic efforts of the Ministry

of Heritage and Tourism and its esteemed partners in the tourism industry, aligning with the ministry’s vision to elevate Oman’s global tourism presence.

The introduction of direct charter flights from Hungary aligns with the strategic objective of diversifying Oman’s tourist base and expanding its reach into uncharted territories.

Salalah, renowned for its lush greenery, refreshingly invigorating climate, and rich cultural heritage, beckons Hungarian travellers, offering a unique blend of adventure, relaxation and cultural immersion. The influx of

Hungarian tourists is anticipated to make a significant contribution to the local economy, particularly in the hospitality and retail sectors, while fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding between the two nations.

“The arrival of these charter flights from Hungary marks a pivotal moment in Oman’s tourism journey,” stated Said Ahmad, CEO of Al Fawaz tours.

“This strategic initiative underscores our unwavering commitment to diversifying our tourism offerings and captivating visitors from diverse corners of the globe. We are confident that

Salalah’s captivating beauty and warm hospitality will leave an indelible impression on Hungarian travellers, further strengthening the bonds between Oman and Hungary,” he added.

The commencement of direct charter flights from Hungary aligns with Oman’s vision to establish itself as a premier tourist destination, offering an unparalleled blend of cultural heritage, natural wonders and authentic experiences. With the winter tourism season in full swing, Salalah extends a warm embrace to Hungarian travellers, inviting them to discover the enchanting allure of Oman’s southern gem.

RIGHT DIET, NUTRITION SIGNIFICANT IN DIABETES CARE

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

As the world marked Diabetes Day recently, the right diet and nutrition should be the major priority, says an expert, where diabetes care should be comprehensive and centred around the person living with diabetes.

According to Sumaira Fatima Mirza, Clinical Dietician and Diabetes Educator at IMC Apollo Sugar, diabetes care includes an individualised management plan developed between the person with diabetes and their healthcare providers.

There are three segments of care objectives and they are prevention, diagnosis and management of diabetes and the area of focus is on the approach and systems that are ideally in place to improve care for the people.

“People of 35 years of age and those younger than 40 years with risk factors should be screened for diabetes. Glycosylated haemoglobin (A1C), fasting plasma glucose (FPG) or rarely two hour plasma glucose (2hPG) as part of a 75g oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT) can be used for diagnosis and screening,” explained Sumaira.

She said A1C can be measured every three months to assess if glycaemic goals are met.

“One can consider testing every six months if targets are consistently met and treatment, diet and lifestyle are stable. Goals include reducing hyperglycaemia and its symptoms, reducing risk and occurrence of hypoglycaemia and improving quality of life,” she pointed out.

According to her, a standard care plan should include regular blood investigations, consultation with doctor, clear explanation on dose and time of medicines, insulin technique hypoglycaemia management, nutrition and diet management, sick days management, home blood glucose monitoring if needed and exercise and physical activity.

However, the most important factors of dietary care include the affordability, availability of resources, nature of work and



People of 35 years of age and those younger than 40 years with risk factors should be screened for diabetes

timings.

Sumaira said it is essential to plan individualised diets based on needs and requirements.

Key things to keep in mind, she said are, “Choosing wisely healthy main carbohydrates on your plate, the cereals and grains which are not only the major energy source of the meal, but also provides huge impact on blood glucose levels.”

WHAT TO EAT

“Eat more variety of non-starchy vegetables and in abundance, take colourful fruits in portion control and give priority to full fruit over juice or shakes and most importantly follow the serving size,” Sumaira said.

Not just carbohydrates, one has to be conscious about the type of protein. “Add lean protein in the diet to aid muscle building and boost immune system. Avoid processed meats as it can cause hypertension and fatty liver. Avoid or cut down on added sugar. Use salt in moderation, choose low sodium food products. Choose healthier fats and oils in portion control,” she said.

Often diabetic patients do come across specialised food, but this is what the clinical dietician has to say: “Don’t get overwhelmed by the so called diabetic foods or ‘no added sugar’ labels as this does not mean it will not impact blood sugar levels. They do increase blood glucose levels because of the other ingredients.”

“Opt for simple and time saving meals. Be smart in choosing the mid snacks like nuts, fruits and dairy products like low fat milk, laban in order to get a boost of nutrients,” she advised.

New development projects underway in North Batinah

SUHAR: North Al Batinah Governorate targets to invest RO 14 million over the next three years in the so-called ‘humanising cities’ projects, urban expansion of the wilayats of the governorate as well as the development of the waterfronts, public parks and tourism infrastructure, among others.

This was stated by Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North Governorate. He added that the governorate is presently monitoring existing investment opportunities and providing opportunities for future investment in the industrial, logistics, real estate development, and tourism and entertainment sectors.

The governorate is working, through its ambitious development strategy that is consistent with the Oman Vision 2040, to place the governorate as a destination for economic prosperity and sustainable development through effective partnership with the relevant parties both within and outside the governorate. The strategy aims to achieve the highest rates of economic growth and balanced and sustainable development in line with the approach of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik who accords a great attention to developing the governorates and consolidating the principle of decentralisation.



The governorate is working, through its ambitious development strategy that is consistent with the Oman Vision 2040



The governor of North Al Batinah added that the governorate’s urbanisation strategy indicated that it will be one of the main centres for international trade. The governorate is also expected to play a major role in creating and providing value-added economic activities taking advantage of the plentiful natural resources with the

logistics economy being the basis of the development process in the governorate.

The city of Suhar will play a pivotal role in enhancing trade exchange with neighbouring countries and expanding access to global markets. The city is expected to grow so that the population centres will be integrated into



the current urban areas of both Suhar and Liwa creating Greater Suhar. On the other hand, an additional economic tributary will be available through the expected growth in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq in terms of food and agricultural industry, the governor said.

The wilayats of North Al Batinah Governorate are witnessing

the implementation of several development and service projects.

The city centre redevelopment and rehabilitation project and the coastal tourism development project is currently under implementation in the Wilayat of Shinas.

The Al Tayeb City project is being implemented in the Wilayat

of Liwa. It involves the design and construction of a longitudinal park extending 5 kilometres along the northern edge of the city.

In the Wilayat of Suhar, an environmental development project will be implemented in Ain Sahban. Other projects include development of Wadi Haibi Market, construction of school bus station, establishment of the office of wali of Suhar, developing the Castle Square, a consultancy study for developing the waterfront in the coastal area between Majz Al Kubra and Al Owainat, the governor said.

In the Wilayat of Saham, Saham Public Park will be renovated by adding more recreational activities to cater to the needs of all society segments and attract new investments, the governor said.

In the Wilayat of Al Khabourah, development and beautification works are underway at the wilayat’s entrance as well as the construction of a sustainable path stretching from the Al Khabourah roundabout to Al Khabourah Club with a length of 3.8 km, a project to develop the area between Qasabiyat Al Zaab and Qasabiyat Al Hawasna. The Wilayat of Al Suwaiq is seeing the development of the old souq and the development of the wilayat’s centre including renovation of Al Suwaiq Fort and the surrounding area, the governor concluded.

— ONA



Russia launches ‘record’ 75 drones on Ukraine

KYIV: Ukraine said on Saturday it had downed 74 out of 75 Russian attack drones overnight, in what Kyiv said was the biggest drone attack since the start of the war.

The Ukrainian army said Russia had launched a “record number” of drones, the majority of which were downed over the capital, Kyiv, causing power cuts in the centre of the city as temperatures dipped below freezing.

The drone attack came as Ukraine marked Holodomor Remembrance Day, commemorating the 1930s starvation of millions in Ukraine under Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.

“The enemy launched a record number of attack drones at Ukraine! The main direction of the attack is Kyiv,” the commander of Ukraine’s air force, General Mykola Oleschuk, said.

The air force said it had downed “74 out of 75” Shahed drones.

Kyiv authorities said five people were wounded in the capital, where the air raid lasted six hours.

Falling drone debris had sparked fires and damaged buildings across

the city, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said.

Kyiv residents were seen clearing smashed windows and other damage in the city’s Dniprovsky district, with ambulances parked nearby.

One of the buildings that was damaged housed a nursery and another had part of its top floor destroyed.

Local resident Viktor Vasylenko said he had soothed his young daughter, who experienced “panic and nausea” during the long night-time attacks as they sheltered in a corridor.

The 38-year-old said his family always has “everything prepared” in case of such attacks but it was the first time one had hit so close.

Latvia’s president, Edgars Rinkevics, on a visit to Kyiv during the attack, posted a photo of himself on social media inside a dark bomb shelter.

Dozens of buildings had their power cut off after the attacks but Ukraine’s energy ministry said electricity was later restored.

Kyiv’s army said that while the

One of the buildings that was damaged housed a nursery and another had part of its top floor destroyed

“main target” of the attack was Kyiv, air defence had also been called into action across southern Ukraine and a guided missile had been destroyed over the central Dnipropetrovsk region. There were power cuts across the region, authorities said.

Kyiv has warned of and prepared for a renewed Russian campaign targeting its energy grid as winter descends, fearing a repeat of events last year, when thousands were left without heat or light in freezing temperatures.

More than 21 months into Moscow’s offensive, fighting is most intense in the east of Ukraine and is now centred around the city of Avdiivka, which is nearly encircled by Russian forces.

— AFP



Ukrainian police and military experts collect fragments of downed Russian drone around a crater in a yard amid residential buildings in Kyiv. — AFP

Japan, China foreign ministers agree plan to hold security talks



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida meets Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the APEC leaders’ summit in Bangkok, November 17. — Reuters file photo.

TOKYO: Japan and China are hoping to hold security talks “in the near future”, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa said on Saturday after meeting with China’s top diplomat Wang Yi in South Korea.

The talks between Kamikawa and Wang marked the first time the two senior diplomats had met since Kamikawa became Japan’s foreign minister in September and followed the first face-to-face talks in a year by their countries’ leaders earlier this month.

“We confirmed that we are seeking further close communication on a variety of issues... and we are hoping

to hold security talks in the near future,” Kamikawa told reporters.

An account of the meeting released by China’s Foreign Ministry said Wang had emphasised the need for both sides to make clear they “do not pose a threat to one another”, while respecting “each other’s legitimate concerns”.

Kamikawa said Japan was seeking a lifting of a Chinese ban on all Japanese seafood-related exports in the wake of the waste water release from the crippled Fukushima nuclear power plant.

The Chinese ministry said it opposes “Japan’s irresponsible practices” and that there was a need

to establish a “long-term monitoring mechanism for all stakeholders.”

Japan and China will also seek high level talks on the economy, Kamikawa said, adding that no date had been set.

China’s President Xi Jinping and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida met on the sidelines of an international conference in the United States on Nov. 17, where they agreed to pursue mutually beneficial relations.

They appeared to emphasise shared economic interests amid a series of diplomatic disputes that have plagued relations between the two countries, including the release of waste water from Fukushima into the Pacific and the detainment of a Japanese national in China.

Kamikawa said she communicated Japan’s stance on these issues, but also emphasised that Japan and China will be in close communication on the matters that divide them.

“We also discussed issues that the countries must work together on... and we were able to have a meaningful exchange of views on climate change, international insurance, development finance, as well as the North Korea situation,” she said, without elaborating.

Kamikawa and Wang will attend trilateral talks with their South Korean counterpart Park Jin on Sunday.

— Reuters

Heavy Irish police presence prevents repeat of rioting

DUBLIN: Irish police were out in force in Dublin to prevent a repeat of rioting blamed on far-right agitators that erupted after a knife attack outside a school that injured three children.

Officers made sporadic arrests after darkness fell as youths began to congregate on O’Connell Street, one of the city’s most famous through fares that was the scene of violence, vehicle fires and looting the previous night.

But the situation was generally stable, with the country’s police force – known as Garda Siochana – posting on social media that “Dublin city centre is open for normal business”.

“We have an enhanced policing plan in place this evening,” it said, adding that people were welcome there over the coming weekend.

Water cannons borrowed



Ireland’s Garda police officers stand on duty outside the General Police Office (GPO) on O’Connell Street in Dublin. — AFP

from Northern Irish police were on standby, however, should the situation deteriorate.

The relative calm was in stark contrast to 24 hours earlier, in what Prime minister Leo Varadkar called the worst violence in decades which

had brought “shame” on Ireland.

Police blamed a “complete lunatic faction driven by far-right ideology”.

The unrest came after three children were wounded in a stabbing near the centre of the Irish capital. A five-year-old girl was left in a critical condition in hospital.

The subsequent violence – which resulted in dozens of arrests – started when agitators broke through a police cordon around the scene of the attack.

Hundreds of rioters then set buses and trams alight and looted shops.

Police Commissioner Drew Harris told a press conference that several of the 400 responding officers were injured, one of them seriously, when projectiles were thrown at them.

“These are scenes that we have not seen in decades,” Harris said.

— AFP

British troops patrol Kosovo-Serbia border as tensions remain high

JARINJE: British troops are patrolling the Kosovo-Serbia border as part of a Nato peacekeeping presence being bolstered amid concern that the former wartime foes could return to open conflict following a series of violent incidents in recent months.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization sent hundreds of additional forces to Kosovo from Britain and Romania after a battle between the authorities and armed Serbs holed up in a monastery turned a quiet village in northern Kosovo into a war zone on Sept. 24.

One police officer and three gunmen were killed in the village of Banjska in what was seen as the worst violence since Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008.

Kosovo accused Serbia of providing financial and practical support for the gunmen, which Belgrade denies.

Nato has sent 1,000 extra troops to the region, bringing its presence there to 4,500 peacekeepers from 27 countries.

British soldiers are now being deployed in 18-hour shifts in freezing conditions to make sure no weapons or armed groups enter Kosovo.

“Currently we are here on a routine patrol, which consists of understanding patterns of life, gaining intelligence on any illegal or suspicious activity that then gets fed back to KFOR (Nato mission) and higher,” Lieutenant Joss Gaddie from the British Army said at the border with Serbia.

During a visit on Monday to the western Balkans, Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the organisation is reviewing whether a more permanent increase of forces was needed “to ensure that this doesn’t spiral out of control and creates a new violent conflict in Kosovo or in the wider region.”

Around five per cent of the population in Kosovo are ethnic Serbs, of which half live in the north and refuse to recognise Kosovo independence and see Belgrade as their capital. They have often clashed with



British troops part of the Nato reinforcements patrol at the Kosovo-Serbia border in Jarinje, Kosovo. — Reuters

Kosovo police and international peacekeepers.

For more than two decades many ethnic Serbs have refused to register vehicles with Kosovo car plates, using their own system instead which is seen as illegal by Pristina.

Prime Minister Albin Kurti’s government has set a December 1 deadline for around 10,000 motorists to register their cars with Kosovo numbers or face heavy penalties. A similar request sparked violence last year.

— Reuters



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More Palestinian prison

BIDEN SAYS HOSTAGES RELEASE 'ONLY A START'



US President Joe Biden delivers remarks following a hostages-prisoners swap deal, during a press conference in Nantucket, Massachusetts, US. – Reuters

NANTUCKET: US President Joe Biden said Friday's release of a first group of hostages taken was just a "start" and that there were "real" chances to extend a temporary truce in Gaza.

Speaking to reporters in Nantucket, Massachusetts, where he was spending the Thanksgiving holiday with his family, Biden also said it was time to "renew" work on creating a two-state solution to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

A total of 24 hostages — 13 Israelis, 10 Thais and a Filipino — were turned over on Friday to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Gaza, while Israel freed 39 women and minors held in its prisons, the Qatari foreign ministry said.

Biden, who led US efforts to secure the pause in the brutal fighting controlling Gaza, said "I think the chances are real" for extending the truce.

He welcomed the way the start of the process had gone as the four-day truce to facilitate the hostage and prisoner releases held.

"This morning I've been engaged with my team as we began the first couple days of implementing this deal. It's only a start, but so far it's gone well," he said.

Asked about the American women and children hostages who could be released as part of the deal, Biden said he did not know when they would be set free but "we expect it to occur."

— AFP

GAZA: Palestinian fighters were set to release a second group of hostages on Saturday in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, officials said, as a truce largely held in the devastated Gaza Strip after seven weeks of war that killed thousands of people.

Israeli prison authorities said 42 Palestinian inmates — both male and female — would be freed under the terms of the agreement, which mandates exchanges at a ratio of three to one.

An Israeli official source said 14 hostages would be handed over. The transfers follow an initial exchange on Friday, the first day of a four-day truce that largely silenced the guns on both sides.

The second day of the truce appeared to be holding. Only a small plume of grey smoke rose over northern Gaza, the focus of Israel's air and ground offensive.

On Friday 24 hostages were released from Gaza, according to Qatar and an official Israeli list. They included 13 Israelis — all of whom were women and children, including some dual citizens. Ten Thais and one Filipino were also unexpectedly freed.

"I couldn't believe my eyes," said Kittiya Thuengsaeng in Thailand, who thought her 28-year-old boyfriend had been killed. Then she saw a photograph of Wichai Kalapt after his release.

"I had a chat with him in the morning. He was still smiling. He told me he was safe," she said.

Palestinian fighters snatched around 240 captives when they broke through Gaza's militarised border with Israel on October 7.

In response, Israel launched an air, artillery and naval bombardment alongside a ground offensive, killing nearly 15,000 people, according to the government in Gaza.

A two-minute video showed masked people handing hostages over to the Red Cross.

Israel in turn freed 39 Palestinian women and children from its prisons.

It is expected to free a total of 50 hostages



I spent the end of my childhood and my adolescence in prison, far from my parents and their hugs

MARAH BAKIR

Palestinian freed prisoner

from Gaza during the truce in exchange for 150 Palestinian prisoners, under an agreement struck after talks involving Israel, Palestinian groups, Qatar, Egypt and the United States.

Most of the 39 prisoners freed by Israel on Friday were released in the West Bank, while 11 were taken to annexed east Jerusalem, according to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group.

"I spent the end of my childhood and my adolescence in prison, far from my parents and their hugs," freed prisoner Marah Bakir, 24, said after returning to her home in annexed east Jerusalem.

Earlier in the evening, Israeli authorities fired tear gas to disperse crowds as the prisoners were released. The Palestinian Red Crescent said three people were shot and wounded by Israeli security forces. In Israel, authorities asked the media to let the newly-freed hostages reunite with loved ones in privacy.

The pause in fighting in Gaza opened the way to more desperately needed aid.

Trucks carrying supplies, including fuel, food and medicine, began moving into Gaza through the Rafah crossing from Egypt shortly after the truce began. Israel had placed Gaza under total siege, leaving Gazans struggling to survive with shortages of water and other essentials. — AFP



Asil al Titi, a 23-year-old woman from the occupied West Bank Balata refugee camp, is greeted by friends and family members, shortly after she was released from an Israeli jail.



Palestinians walk amid the rubble of destroyed buildings in Gaza City on the northern Gaza strip. – AFP

PALESTINIANS USE TRUCE TO PICK THROUGH

GAZA: After seven weeks of bombardment stopped in Gaza for a truce, Palestinians used the calm on Saturday to return to the ruins of their homes, smashed by Israeli air strikes that killed thousands.

More than 24 hours into the four-day pause in fighting, thousands of Gaza residents are making a difficult journey from communal shelters and makeshift encampments to discover what has become of their homes.

Najjar, a 58-year-old mother of five from Khan Younis in the south of the enclave, said Israel's military had also levelled her house in two previous conflicts in 2008 and 2014.

For many of the 2.3 million people who live in the tiny Gaza Strip, the pause in the near-constant air and artillery strikes has offered a first chance to safely move around, take stock of the devastation, and seek access to aid imports.

At outdoor markets and aid depots, thousands of people stood queuing for some of the aid that began flowing into Gaza in larger quantities as part of the truce.

Israel's offensive has been the bloodiest and most destructive one ever visited on the 40km-long Gaza enclave.

Palestinian health officials in the territory say the bombardment has killed more than 15,000



A picture shows destroyed buildings in Gaza City on the northern Gaza strip following weeks of Israeli bombardment. – AFP



ers, hostages to be freed



This image shows an International Red Cross vehicle reportedly carrying released hostages crosses the Rafah border point in the Gaza Strip towards Egypt. – AFP



Palestinians leaving the north walk through the Salaheddine road in the Zeitoun district on the southern outskirts of Gaza City. – AFP

RUBBLE OF HOMES

The bombardment has killed more than 15,000 people, 40% of them children. They have said thousands more bodies may remain under the rubble, still unrecorded in official death tolls

people, 40% of them children, and levelled swathes of residential districts. They have said thousands more bodies may remain under the rubble, still unrecorded in official death tolls. Israel's military last month told all civilians to leave the north of the strip, where the fighting was heaviest, but it continued to bombard the south where hundreds of thousands fled. It has said civilians should not return to the north during the truce and many of those who fled south are now seeking information from those who stayed behind. An accompanying blockade has meanwhile added to a humanitarian crisis with little

electricity for hospitals, fresh water, fuel for ambulances or food and medicines. At a UN agency centre in Khan Younis, people waited for cooking gas. Supplies had begun running short weeks ago and many people were cooking food over open fires fuelled by scavenged wood salvaged from bomb sites. Mohammed Ghandour had been waiting five hours to fill his cylindrical metal canister, after getting up at dawn in the school where he and his family shelter and making the long trip to the depot, but was still too late. "I'm now going home without gas," he said.

— Reuters

ISRAELI-MANAGED VESSEL HIT BY SUSPECTED DRONE ATTACK

RIYADH: A container ship managed by an Israeli-controlled company was hit by a suspected drone in the Indian Ocean, causing minor damage to the vessel but no injuries, a US defence official said on Saturday. The Malta-flagged CMA CGM SYML, recently renamed Mayet, was struck on Friday by an unmanned aerial vehicle, which appeared to be a military drone, in the northeast portion of the Indian Ocean, the official said, asking not to be named. The incident comes amid heightened maritime security tensions due to the Middle East war and follows the seizure of an Israeli-linked cargo ship by Yemeni groups in the southern Red Sea earlier last week. Singapore-based Eastern Pacific Shipping (EPS), which had rented Mayet, said it was aware a container ship was targeted in a possible security incident on Friday. "The vessel in question is currently sailing as planned. All crew are safe and well," EPS said in a statement. – Reuters



Palestinians gather outside one of the departments of the Al Shifa Hospital Complex in Gaza City in the northern Gaza Strip. – AFP file photo

WHO VOICES CONCERN OVER FATE OF AL SHIFA HOSPITAL CHIEF

GENEVA: The World Health Organization voiced concern about the fate of the head of Gaza City's Al Shifa Hospital, whom Israeli forces detained. The WHO said in a statement that the chief of the biggest hospital in the besieged Palestinian territory had been arrested on Wednesday along with five other health workers, while they were taking part in a UN mission to evacuate patients. "Three medical personnel from the Palestine Red Crescent Society and three from the Ministry of Health were detained," the WHO said. Since then, two of the six have reportedly been released, but "we do not have information about the well-being of the four remaining health staff, including the director of Al Shifa Hospital," the statement added. The UN agency called for "their legal and human rights to be fully observed during their detention". A spokesperson for the Israeli army said on Saturday that hospital director Mohammad Abu Salmiya was being questioned. "We are currently moving forward with... questioning him over the fact that he was the head of a hospital that was really sitting on top of an entire network," Doron Spielman said. "How could he not know what's happening? We have hostages that were on, you know, CCTV in his hospital." Abu Salmiya has been frequently quoted by international media about the conditions inside Al Shifa, a major focus of the Israeli ground offensive following attacks on October 7. The Israeli army, which raided the hospital last week, has alleged that Palestinians used a tunnel complex beneath the facility in Gaza City to stage attacks. – AFP

ISRAEL SUMMONS SPAIN, BELGIUM ENVOYS OVER GAZA

TEL AVIV: The Israeli foreign ministry summoned the ambassadors of Spain and Belgium for a "harsh rebuke" over comments by the two countries' leaders about the Israeli offensive in Gaza. Spain's foreign ministry swiftly riposted by calling in the Israeli ambassador to explain her government's "false and unacceptable" allegations against the Spanish prime minister. Visiting the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt on Friday, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said the Israeli "operation needs to respect international humanitarian law" and denounced the destruction in the Gaza Strip as "unacceptable". Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez echoed his views, saying the "indiscriminate killings of innocent civilians" in the Palestinian territory was "completely unacceptable". Both leaders called for a permanent ceasefire in the war-battered territory. Foreign Minister Eli Cohen "gave the order to summon the ambassadors of these countries for a harsh rebuke", his office said in a statement, accusing the two leaders of supporting "terrorism". In a separate statement, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he "strongly" condemned the comments by the European leaders. – AFP



How can we age well?



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

As an old-age psychiatrist working with people aged sixty and above, I often feel moved with the range of people coming to my clinic listening to their early life experiences and how it shaped their current state of health.

My work at the university hospital allows me to meet people from different parts of the country with different educational backgrounds and early childhood experiences, some have aged better than others, this made me wonder what makes certain people experience better old age than others? And how I can learn from my patients to work on my own aging, when the time comes?

The book “Aging Well” by the American psychologist, Dr George Vaillant reports on the analysis of three longevity studies spanning, in some cases, almost eighty years that followed Americans from their childhood through old age and death.

The researchers interviewed people who participated in the study for a long period of time

in order to find common ties that connect those who have managed to live long, healthy and happy lives. When people reach their 70s and 80s, what were the behaviours and actions they took that resulted in a positive outcome compared to those who had negative outcomes in life?

The author describes stories of participants from different backgrounds, and how their lives changed and evolved as they grew older.

We meet people whose lives were largely happy, those whose lives ended in sadness, and many whose lives started out bleak and ended in happy contentment. At the end of the book, the author suggests a few tips that can help us achieve healthy aging.

The first tip is to focus on cultivating your most loving and supportive relationships as they are more likely to bring you happiness and purpose for your whole life. It is natural for some friends to fall out of your life, don't let that stop you from developing new friendships. Avoid drinking alcohol and smoking as they are the most

INVEST IN SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND REMEMBER THAT LONELINESS IS BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH WITH STUDIES SUGGESTING IT IS AS BAD AS SMOKING AND DRINKING ALCOHOL.

associated with poor life outcomes. Learn to give back to your community, particularly by passing on your experience and wisdom to the next generation which will make you feel good and help others learn from your long-life experience. Make space in your life for playing and physical activities, as they have a positive impact on your mental and psychological well-being.

Invest in social activities and remember that loneliness is bad for your health with studies suggesting it is as bad as smoking and drinking alcohol. The younger you start looking after your body the better is the long-term outcome.

Depression is a common mental illness and the behaviours that result from it such as smoking, drinking alcohol and avoiding physical activity are the main reasons behind its negative impact on your health. Finally, I recommend reading this book and incorporating the tips in your personal life even though it was conducted many years ago and in different social situations since the values discussed are pretty much universal.

Thai authors poised for breakthrough, Hollywood boost

ROSE TROUP BUCHANAN

With a spate of critically lauded novels — one of them picked up by Netflix — a new wave of young Thai authors looks poised to break through on the world stage.

Thailand boasts a rich literary tradition, with the 1920s seen as a golden age when writers tackled entrenched social issues, but while modern Thai authors have kept up that legacy, they have struggled to make a splash abroad.

That could be about to change.

Pim Wangtechawat's debut novel “The Moon Represents My Heart”, released in June, has catapulted her into the small but growing group of Thai authors published internationally — catching the eye of Hollywood star Gemma Chan and Netflix in the process.

And earlier this year, “Welcome Me to the Kingdom” by Mai Nardone was recognised as a New York Times editor's choice, while Pitchaya Sudbanthad's swirling 2019 novel “Bangkok Wakes to Rain” has won rave reviews.

The English-language sections of Bangkok bookshops sometimes feel dominated by sleazy crime thrillers playing on the Thai capital's reputation for seediness and vice.

Keen to escape those stereotypes, Pim centred her novel on a time-travelling Chinese family in London and Hong Kong.

“Crazy Rich Asians” star Chan hailed it as a “beautiful exploration of family, love and loss across the generations”, but writing it was a nerve-wracking experience for Pim.

“I was very scared at one point because I was like, ‘Oh, am I Chinese enough to write this?’” she said.

Growing up in Bangkok, Pim — who has the Elvish word for “hope” and Aslan from C.S. Lewis's Narnia books tattooed on her arms — started off reading European works translated into Thai, before later reading them in the original.

Part of the reason for the lack of internationally respected Thai authors, she said, was the failure of Thai schools to promote a homegrown “literature culture, writing-reading culture, the way they do in the UK for example”.

While authors like Pim — who writes in English — have been published abroad with success, translated Thai novels remain vanishingly few and far between.

But one author bucking that trend is Uthis Haemamool, whose latest book “The Fabulist” examines the idea of national identity. — **AFP**



David Brooks

THE PEOPLE IN AI SEEM TO BE EXPERIENCING RADICALLY DIFFERENT BRAIN STATES ALL AT ONCE. I'VE FOUND IT INCREDIBLY HARD TO WRITE ABOUT AI BECAUSE IT IS LITERALLY UNKNOWNABLE WHETHER THIS TECHNOLOGY IS LEADING US TO HEAVEN OR HELL, AND SO MY ATTITUDE ABOUT IT SHIFTS WITH MY MOOD.

One of the nice things about OpenAI is that it was built on distrust. It began as a nonprofit research lab because its founders didn't think artificial intelligence should be pioneered by commercial firms, which are driven overwhelmingly by the profit motive.

As it evolved, OpenAI turned into what you might call a fruitful contradiction: a for-profit company overseen by a nonprofit board with a corporate culture somewhere in between.

Many of the people at the company seem simultaneously motivated by the scientist's desire to discover, the capitalist's desire to ship product and the do-gooder's desire to do this all safely.

The events of the past week — Sam Altman's firing, all the drama, his rehiring — revolve around one central question: Is this fruitful contradiction sustainable? Can one organisation, or one person, maintain the brain of a scientist, the drive of a capitalist and the cautious heart of a regulatory agency? Or, as Charlie Warzel wrote in The Atlantic, will the money always win out? It's important to remember that AI is quite different from other parts of the tech world. It is (or at least was) more academic. AI is a field that had a research lineage stretching back centuries.

Even today, many of the giants of the field are primarily researchers, not entrepreneurs — people like Yann LeCun and Geoffrey Hinton, who won the Turing Award (the Nobel Prize of computing) together in 2018 and now disagree about where AI is taking us.

It's only in the last several years that academic researchers have been leaving the university aeries and flocking to industry.

Researchers at places like Alphabet, the parent company of Google; Microsoft; OpenAI; and Meta, which owns Facebook, still communicate with one another by publishing research papers, the way professors do.

But the field also has the intensity and the audacity of the hottest of all startup sectors. While talking with AI researchers over the past year or so, I have often felt I was on one of those airport moving walkways going

3 mph, and they were on walkways going 4,000 mph. The researchers kept telling me that this phase of AI's history is so exhilarating precisely because nobody can predict what will happen next. “The point of being an AI researcher is you should understand what's going on. We're constantly being surprised,” Stanford doctoral candidate Rishi Bommasani said.

The people in AI seem to be experiencing radically different brain states all at once. I've found it incredibly hard to write about AI because it is literally unknowable whether this technology is leading us to heaven or hell, and so my attitude about it shifts with my mood.

When I visited the OpenAI headquarters in May, I found the culture quite impressive. Many of the people I interviewed had arrived when OpenAI was a nonprofit research lab, before the ChatGPT hullabaloo — when most of us had never heard of the company. “My parents didn't really know what OpenAI did,” said Joanne Jang, a product manager, “and they were like, ‘You're leaving Google?’”

Mark Chen, a researcher who was involved in creating the visual tool DALL-E 2, had a similar experience. “Before ChatGPT, my mom would call me, like, every week, and she'd be like, ‘Hey, you know you can stop like bumming around and go work at Google or something.’” These people are not primarily driven by the money.

Even after GPT made headlines, being at OpenAI was like being in the eye of a hurricane. “It just feels a lot calmer than the rest of the world,” Jang said. “From, like, the early days, it did feel more like a research lab, because mainly we were only hiring for researchers,” said Elena Chatziathanasiadou, a recruiter. “And then, as we grew, it started becoming apparent to everyone that progress would come from both engineering and research.”

I didn't meet any tech bros there, or even people who had the kind of “we are changing the world” bravado I would probably have if I were pioneering this technology. Diane Yoon, whose job title is vice president of people, said, “The word I would use for this workforce is earnest ... earnestness.” Usually, when I visit a tech company, as a journalist, I get to

meet very few executives, and those I do interview are remorselessly on message. OpenAI just put out a sign-up sheet and had people come to talk to me.

As impressive as they all were, I remember telling myself, “This isn't going to last.” I thought there was too much money floating around. These people may be earnest researchers, but whether they know it or not, they are still in a race to put out products, generate revenue and be first.

It was also clear that the folks were torn over safety. On the one hand, safety was on everybody's mind. For example, I asked Marc Chen about his emotions the day DALL-E 2 was released. “A lot of it was just this feeling of apprehension. Like, did we get the safety?” On the other hand, everybody I spoke to was dedicated to OpenAI's core mission — to create a technology capable of artificial general intelligence, capable of matching or surpassing human intelligence across a broad range of tasks.

AI is a field that has brilliant people painting wildly diverging but also persuasive portraits of where this is going. Venture capital investor Marc Andreessen emphasises that it is going to change the world vastly for the better. Cognitive scientist Gary Marcus depicts an equally persuasive scenario about how all this could go wrong.

Nobody really knows who is right, but the researchers just keep plowing ahead. Their behaviour reminds me of something Alan Turing wrote in 1950: “We can only see a short distance ahead, but we can see plenty there that needs to be done.” I had hoped that OpenAI could navigate the tensions, though even then, there were worries. As Brad Lightcap, OpenAI's chief operating officer, said, “The big thing is, is really just maintaining the culture and the mission orientation as we grow. The thing that actually keeps me up, if you're asking honestly, is, how do you maintain that focus at scale?” Those words were prescient. Organisational culture is not easily built but is easy to destroy. The literal safety of the world is wrapped up in the question: Will a newly unleashed Altman preserve the fruitful contradiction, or will he succumb to the pressures of go-go-go?

— **The New York Times**

Democracies disappoint

You just couldn't make it up, could you? The so-called shenanigans by the so-called super-powers at the moment are so hard to believe, you would think they are the plotlines of a damp squib Hollywood satire. They are laughable! Which, of course, makes the concept of democracy simply ridiculous.

The entire basis of democracy is that we elect our best representatives, those who would most effectively represent us, and make the decisions we feel would be the best for our society, to do the best for all of us, and yet... here we are. Once again we are mired, not even in the politics, but the incompetence of our elected, so-called, representatives. We don't want this rubbish. We want people with respect for themselves and others. We want role models, people we can be proud of. We want a touch of class, and to be honest... if it cost a few dollars more to get some class... I, and millions of others would be a whole lot happier.

How fortunate is Oman? You have a hierarchy that, through its culture, traditions, and religion, is focused upon the needs of its people. Every moment of their lives is dedicated to their people.

Political scientist Urmila Sharma has written that key elements of this form of leadership are continuity, the fact that a royal family prepares each generation for leadership, their awareness of the "concentration of power and wealth, and has established streams of patronage.

They will always be more diplomatically competent, and have a hereditary level of dignity, while the population always have greater regard and genuine affection for royal families.

There are established positive perspectives in hierarchical cultures of authority that are reassuring, that become silent heralds and perpetual reminders of right and wrong, respect and discretion.

Research by the Edelman Trust indicates less than 20 per cent of us trust our leaders. Yet we have voted



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ONCE AGAIN WE
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WE DON'T WANT
THIS RUBBISH

them into power. What does that say about us?

Well, we do have an obsession with change don't we? Most of us won't gamble on a horse race, or a football match, yet we are prepared to gamble on someone who can, in a few months, change our lives forever.

We don't deserve the privilege of voting! Theo Hesburgh once said "The very essence of leadership is to have vision, because you can't blow an uncertain trumpet"

So, why do the democratic alternatives keep falling on their faces?

Political strategist Mathew Taylor pondered whether the West can continue along the path of "weak and venal leadership," and when you look at the recent and current flops, they could probably only be characters in a pantomime.

Now there's a thought... so without any names, you could probably put together a decent satirical panto. Couldn't you?

You could have as the lead 'character', a loud-mouthed, false tanned, orange haired, not-as-much-of-a-millionaire-as-he-thinks-he-is; the villain-of-the-piece could be either the war-monger, eager to unveil his weapons of mass deception, or the arctic crime boss with a Napoleon complex who has 'gone legit' and managed to start a war he can't win; the bunga-buffoon could be that party going little pizza guy; the guy in the middle, the ultra-pensioner who can't find his way off the stage, would be a tragic comedy turn; then there's the 'big fish' from up North who has managed to 'lose' a million dollars; throw in an Asian footwear collector and her husband, a Latino who made his wife cry, a Gallic ex-president who got bribed, and got caught; another president who gave his daughter the national airline as a birthday gift; a cricketing superstar; a tricky watergater; a president who said he never... um, you know... and, and a best-selling author, oh my goodness... how would we fit them all on the stage, and how many have you guessed?

Maybe we in the West should return to the monarchy for leadership?

SKY CIRCUS



An aerobatic flying team performs during the third practice session for the Abu Dhabi Formula One Grand Prix at the Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi on Saturday. – AFP

The two-state, two-economy solution

For some people, the bloody war in Gaza may have shattered the 35-year-old consensus that the only feasible solution to the region's troubles is to have two states, Israel and Palestine, living peaceably side by side. Yet others suggest that the horrors we have witnessed since October 7 could augur the revival of that very goal.

In recent statements, American, Palestinian, and Arab officials have all stressed that a two-state solution must emerge phoenix-like from the ashes of this war. Reasonable people everywhere can only hope that this might still provide the framework for a definitive and mutually agreed end to a century-old struggle.

The timing of this renewed interest is ironic. November is when Palestinians commemorate the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) 1988 "Declaration of Independence," which was adopted from exile in Algeria at the height of the first intifadha. All Palestinian factions — including the most radical of the period — accepted the partition of Palestine and Israel's de facto existence within its pre-1967 borders.

In making that breakthrough declaration, the PLO officially identified only one major condition for peace: the 22 per cent of Palestine comprising the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip must be liberated of all Israeli settlers. Otherwise, the territory



Raja Khalidi

The author Director-General of the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS).

THE
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could never be viable as the space for a sovereign, independent state with its own natural resources and recognisable borders.

Immediately following the Algiers declaration, Palestinian economists started grappling with the economic implications of a two-state configuration. In 1990, a comprehensive PLO-led study concluded that a contiguous Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital, could indeed be economically viable. But, given the weak resource base, the miniscule land area, and the expected challenges of absorbing Palestinian refugees and returnees, viability depended, to begin with, on Israel's military withdrawal and evacuation and the dismantlement of settlements. Without such a retreat by Israel, economic development could not be assured, because no investor would have confidence in Palestinian sovereignty.

The 1993 Oslo Accords, which the PLO accepted, fell far short of meeting this condition. Instead, they provided largely civil autonomy to the Palestinian Authority (PA) amid continued Israeli settlement, which forced economic planning into the hitherto unknown domain of "sub-sovereign state-building." Over the subsequent five years, interim negotiations were

supposed to reach a "permanent status" agreement on all contentious issues; and such an outcome was almost achieved at Camp David in 2000.

But those negotiations ultimately failed, leading to the 2000-05 outbreak of the second Palestinian intifadha, which quickly turned violent, and an overwhelming Israeli military response. A two-state solution came to seem even more distant, and the PA's already limited jurisdiction was further reduced. The Fatah-Hamas (West Bank-Gaza) division since 2006 created not only political disunity, but also greater economic distortions and a range of dependencies on the pre-eminent Israeli economy, which was experiencing a long boom.

For the past 20 years, Palestinian economists (including me) have devoted much time and energy planning for a Palestinian "national economy" within the two-state configuration. Yet in arguing that a coherent, independent, productive Palestinian economy could still be built even under occupation or siege, we implicitly abandoned the earlier PLO maxim that there can be no development without sovereignty.

Now, the economic legacy of Oslo is clear. Israel dominates — and can easily manipulate — the Palestinian macroeconomy, from

currency and fiscal revenues, trade channels, and labour markets to energy, natural-resource access, and all the other attributes of economic viability.

So it is no longer credible to argue that an independent Palestinian state could arise amid the archipelago of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the eco-demographic strangulation of East Jerusalem, and now the destruction of Gaza and the humanitarian catastrophe to which its 2.2 million non-combatants are being subjected.

Even the most starry-eyed economist would be humbled by the scale and complexity of the reconstruction effort that this war has necessitated. Making matters worse, an indirect outcome of the war is that the Palestinian economy in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is also collapsing.

Well before October 7, Palestinian economic development had become a chimera, especially with the rise of an Israeli government fully committed to the agenda of religious nationalists and messianic settlers. They have pushed the West Bank's three million Palestinians to the brink since the war began, explicitly calling for their forceful subjugation or displacement.

As The Elders (an independent

group of global leaders) argued in a recent open letter, the international community must move quickly if it hopes to turn today's catastrophe into a last-gasp opportunity to achieve — or to impose, if need be — a two-state outcome. Of course, many of the Israelis currently in power consider such an idea radioactive. But since the extremism within the current Israeli coalition cannot be ignored, it will need to be contained, especially by peace-loving Israelis and their US allies.

Even at this dark hour, there may still be a chance to forge a "real" two-state deal, because we already know what it must include. The original PLO prerequisites for economic viability are as valid today as they were 35 years ago, because they represent the only material basis for a viable and permanent political solution.

For decades now Palestinian economists and planners have been preparing the economic foundations of a sovereign state of Palestine. We have continued pursuing this goal despite seeing its prospects recede before our eyes. Having peered into the bottomless pit of this war, are there still enough Israelis and Palestinians with the courage and political foresight to opt for peace instead of more violence?

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Liverpool grab 1-1 draw with Man City to end the Reds’ winning streak

MANCHESTER: An 80th-minute goal from Trent Alexander-Arnold secured Liverpool a breathless 1-1 draw with leaders Manchester City on Saturday, keeping Juergen Klopp’s team just a point adrift of the top spot in the tight Premier League title race.

“This is a really tough place to come and it is a not a coincidence they have won I don’t know how many in a row at home. They are a super team,” Klopp told the BBC. “It is a good point and I am absolutely fine with it.”

The draw ended a remarkable 23-game winning stretch at Etihad Stadium across all competitions for Pep Guardiola’s City, who top the table on 29 points after 13 games, and spoiled a record-breaking day for Erling Haaland.

“We haven’t had too many good results here in general. It’s a point gained,” Alexander-Arnold told Sky Sports. “It wasn’t an amazing performance from us at all, but we take the point. There were positives - we had chances to win the game.”

The 23-year-old Haaland, who tops the league with 14 goals, became the fastest player to score 50 Premier League goals when he slotted in a left-footed shot after a poor clearance from keeper Allison Becker. He took 48 games to reach the 50 mark, smashing

Andy Cole’s record of 65.

The marquee match kicked off the return of the Premier League from the international break, and it did not disappoint, with Alexander-Arnold silencing Etihad’s sea of sky blue supporters in the 80th minute when Mohamed Salah teed him up on the edge of the box for a blistering low shot into the corner.

“The second half was much better than the first half,” Liverpool defender Virgil van Dijk told the BBC.

“Obviously we knew we would suffer at times and that is something you have to expect. You have to fight as a team.

“To come away with a point here is obviously not bad. We wanted to win but we didn’t lose, which sounds a bit cliché.”

Haaland’s goal was his first against Liverpool in a City shirt and came despite doubts about the prolific striker’s fitness on Saturday as he withdrew from the Norway squad for their Euro 2024 qualifier against Scotland after picking up an ankle injury in a Nov. 16 friendly against the Faroe Islands. City, who were missing Jack Grealish due to illness, had a second-half goal by Ruben Dias disallowed after VAR ruled Manuel Akanji had interfered with the keeper. — **Reuters**



Erling Braut Haaland with Trent Alexander-Arnold.

– Reuters



Julian Alvarez and Alexis Mac Allister.

– Reuters



Erling Braut Haaland in action with Wataru Endo.

Oman in final of Arab School Football Championship



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 25

Oman’s junior stars made valiant efforts to set up a title-clash with Lebanon in the final of the Arab School Football Championship in Cairo, Egypt on Sunday. The final will begin at 8 pm (Oman time).

In a thrilling semifinal encounter against the hosts Egypt, Oman sealed the final spot with a brilliant goal from Hassan al Qasbi in the second half of the game.

Oman, coached by national head coach Anwar al Habsi, will aim to lift the first Arab title after showing an outstanding show in the tournament. The national junior stars completed their warm-up sessions for the final clash after a final warm-up gathering on Saturday at the venue of the match.

Abdullah al Foori, Head of Oman delegation, congratulated the players for their top display in the previous games. “Oman took part in this Arab Championship in the football event and we are very proud of our junior stars’ performance as they reached the final. I am sure our players will deliver their best in the concluding match to earn the desired result and we wish good luck for them,” he said.

Al Foori thanked all the players’

parents who accompanied them during this journey to Cairo. “A special thanks to the parents for their cooperation and continuous support,” he concluded.

Earlier in the group stage, the Oman team had secured a slot in the semifinals after they were positioned as runners-up in Group B with four points. Lebanon topped the group with four points too but with better goal difference.

The Oman team commenced their campaign in the tournament with a 2-1 win over Morocco and then they ended their second match against Lebanon on a 1-1 draw. In the semifinals on Friday, Oman beat Egypt while Lebanon prevailed over Libya 4-3 in penalties after 1-1 draw at full time.

Following the Arab tournament, the Oman players will compete in the Under-15 West Asian Football Championship which will be hosted in Salalah from December 11 to 20 under the umbrella of the WAFF in coordination with the Oman Football Association (OFA).

The hosts Sultanate of Oman, champions in 1998, will compete against Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon in Group A while defending champions Jordan were drawn with UAE, Saudi Arabia and Syria in an exciting Group B.



George Russell sits in his car during the third practice session for the Abu Dhabi Formula One Grand Prix. – AFP

Russell fastest as Mercedes top final practice of F1 season

ABU DHABI: George Russell went fastest for Mercedes in final practice for Formula One's season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Saturday while triple champion Max Verstappen complained about the handling of his Red Bull.

Sunday is Mercedes' last hope of avoiding a first winless year since 2011 and the former champions are in a tight battle with Ferrari for second overall, with the Italians only four points behind.

Russell, who was also fastest in Friday's first practice and remains his team's most recent winner with victory in Brazil a year ago, lapped the Yas Marina circuit with a best time of one minute 24.418 seconds.

McLaren's Lando Norris was second fastest, 0.095 slower, with Australian rookie team mate Oscar Piastri third and Williams' Alex Albon fourth.

Verstappen was sixth and 0.735 off Russell's pace in a car he said was sliding a lot.

"The car is again bottoming, jumping," the Dutch driver said over the team radio. "I don't know what is going on."



George Russell in action during practice. – Reuters

On Friday he had compared the car to a kangaroo, raising hopes that he may not have it all his own way in the finale.

Verstappen is chasing a record-extending 19th win of the campaign with Red Bull hoping to close out the year with 21 wins in 22 races.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, fastest in Friday's crash-interrupted second session, was fifth fastest with team mate Carlos Sainz last after crashing heavily on Friday and doing most of the final session on medium tyres.

Russell's seven times world champion team mate Lewis Hamilton was 12th fastest, with Red Bull's Sergio Perez 11th.

McLaren are also in a tight battle with Aston Martin for fourth overall, only 11 points separating the two with millions in prize money at stake.

"We're definitely competitive," McLaren boss Zak Brown told Sky Sports television.

"Mercedes looks really good. Russell I think has more to come. You don't know what Red Bull was doing, I find it hard to believe they won't be right up there when it counts." — **Reuters**

Nuggets eliminated, Celtics in trouble in NBA in-season tournament

LOS ANGELES: The Orlando Magic dealt the Boston Celtics' NBA in-season tournament hopes a blow on Friday as the Houston Rockets knocked reigning champions Denver out of the new competition.

Houston's Jalen Green scored 25 points and Alperen Sengun added 21 points and 15 rebounds for the Rockets, who withstood another monster game from Denver's two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola Jokic to win 105-86.

Jokic scored a season-high 38 points to go with 19 rebounds and eight assists for Denver. But the reeling Nuggets, still feeling the absence of injured Jamal Murray, shot just 34 percent from the floor and slumped to their fifth defeat in seven games.

Aaron Gordon embodied Denver's offensive woes, going 0-for-12 from the field and putting up just two points.

The Nuggets were eliminated in a group that saw the New Orleans Pelicans solidify their hold on the top spot with a 116-106 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers.

Nuggets coach Michael Malone was more concerned with getting his team back on track after a 1-4 road trip.

"We need to get a win," Malone said. "We got off to a 9-2 start, everything was great, now... we can't win a game on the road. We're kind of getting away from who we are at our core in terms of defense and toughness."

The Magic, who beat the Nuggets two days ago, bullied the league-leading Celtics in the second half on the way to a 113-96 victory that pushed Orlando's winning streak to six games.

Moritz Wagner scored 27 points off the bench to lead the Magic and Paolo Banchero added 23 with seven rebounds.

Jayson Tatum led the Celtics with 26 points and Jaylen Brown chipped in 18 — 12 of them in the first quarter.

Brown connected on just two of 17 shots in the last three quarters as the Magic clamped down defensively to hand the Celtics their biggest defeat of the season. "That's what we take pride in," Banchero said of the Magic's defensive effort. "That's our calling card."

The Celtics led by 12 early in the third quarter when Orlando unleashed a 17-0 scoring run. Orlando opened the fourth on a 10-0 run — capped by Moritz Wagner's running layup — and rolled from there. The result saw the Magic conclude group play in



Orlando Magic forward Paolo Banchero (5) reacts to a call while playing against the Boston Celtics. – USA TODAY Sports

the new tournament at 3-1.

The Celtics, who could have secured their berth in the knockout stage, fell to 2-1, level with the Brooklyn Nets and each with a game remaining when group play concludes on Tuesday.

The six group winners and two wild card teams advance to the quarter-finals of the tournament

that concludes with semi-finals and the final in Las Vegas in December. The Minnesota Timberwolves also let a chance to reach the quarters with a victory escape, falling 124-111 to the Sacramento Kings.

De'Aaron Fox scored 36 points and handed out 12 assists for the Kings, who improved to

3-0 in group play. They lead the Timberwolves, with Golden State still alive after a 118-112 victory over the San Antonio Spurs.

Stephen Curry poured in seven three-pointers on the way to 35 points for the Warriors, who handed star rookie Victor Wembanyama and the Spurs an 11th straight defeat. — **AFP**

All-rounder Imad Wasim retires after World Cup snub

KARACHI: Pakistan's white-ball all-rounder Imad Wasim announced his retirement from international cricket on Friday, after a snub in the 50-over World Cup.

The Wales-born 34-year-old was replaced by Mohammad Nawaz for the World Cup in India, from which Pakistan crashed out in the first round.

"In recent days I have been doing a lot of thinking about my international career and I have come to the conclusion that now is the right time for me to announce my retirement from international cricket," Imad wrote on X.

A left-handed middle-order batsman and a quality left-arm spinner, Imad played 55 one-day internationals and 66 Twenty20 internationals for Pakistan.

He scored 986 runs in ODIs and 486 in T20Is. His tally of wickets was 44 in ODIs and 65 in the shorter format.

He was remembered for a match-winning knock of 49 not out in Pakistan's hard-fought win against Afghanistan in Leeds during the 2019 World Cup.

But he has since lost his place in the side.

His last international match was a T20I against New Zealand this year, and he fell

out with skipper Babar Azam.

Imad said it was an honour to play for Pakistan.

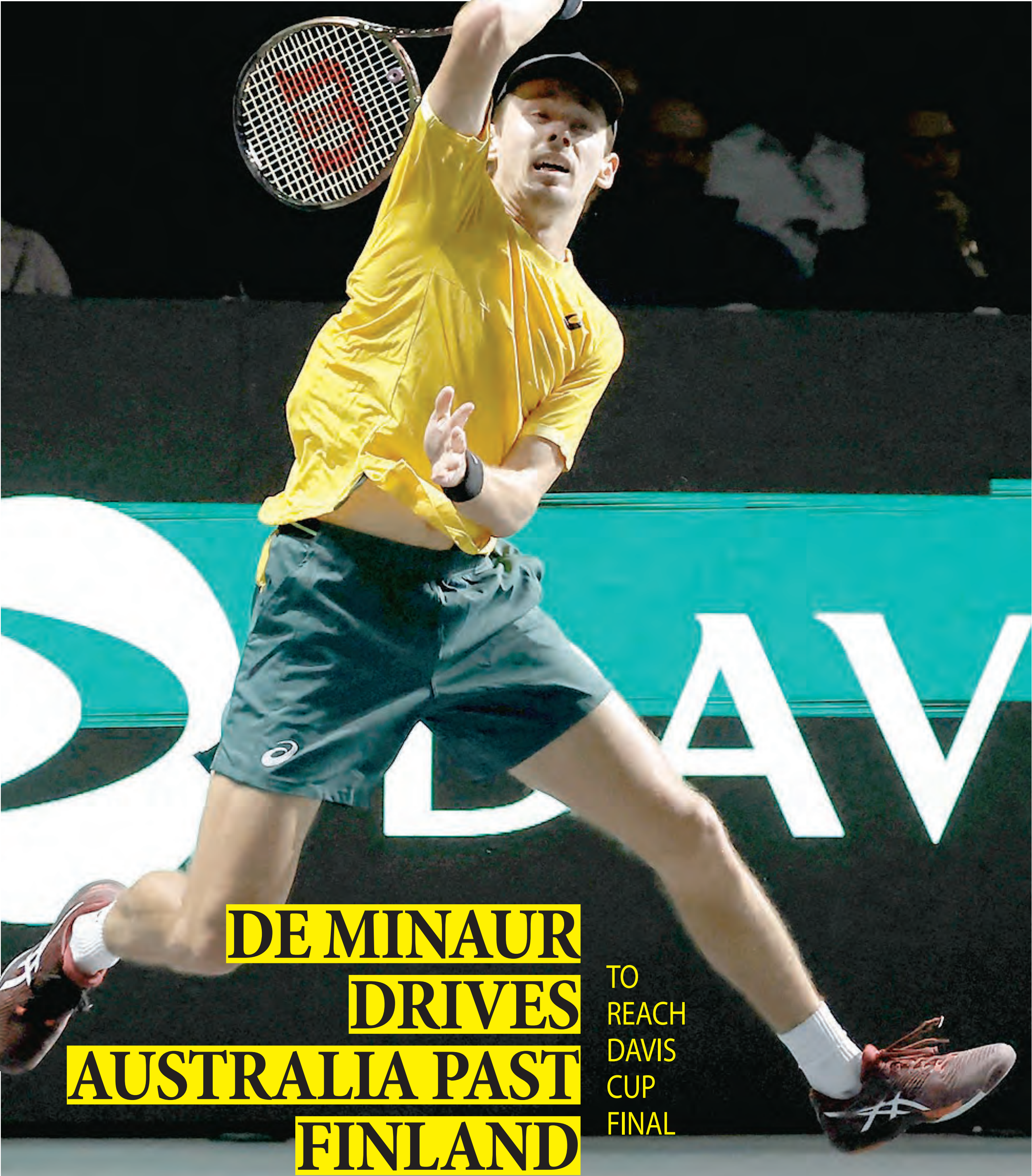
"I would like to thank the PCB for all for their support over the years - it has truly been an honour to represent Pakistan," Imad added in his statement, referring to the Pakistan Cricket Board.

"Each of my 121 appearances across the ODI and T20I formats was a dream come true. It's an exciting time for Pakistan cricket going forwards."

As a globe-trotting T20 league player, Imad is likely to focus on various non-international matches. — **AFP**



Pakistan's Imad Wasim (R) celebrates with teammate Mohammad Rizwan (C) during final Twenty20 international cricket match. — AFP



DE MINAUR
DRIVES
AUSTRALIA PAST
FINLAND

TO
REACH
DAVIS
CUP
FINAL

MÁLAGA: Alex de Minaur smoothly guided Australia into a second successive Davis Cup final with an assured 2-0 win over Finland on Friday in Malaga.

The world number 12 wore down Emil Ruusuvuori in a 6-4, 6-3 straight sets triumph, after Alexei Popyrin beat Otto Virtanen 7-6 (7/5), 6-2 in the first singles rubber.

Australia, who last won the competition in 2003, will face Novak Djokovic's Serbia or Jannik Sinner's Italy in Sunday's final.

"For us this cup is a priority, we do everything we can to represent Australia, with pride and passion," said De Minaur.

"It's not too bad to reach another final."

Australia captain Lleyton Hewitt said reaching the final means "a hell of a lot" to him.

"Our boys dug really deep ... we're a tight-knit unit and we've given ourselves

another opportunity on Sunday," he added.

De Minaur produced a remarkable comeback against the Czech Republic in a roller coaster classic to help his country reach the semifinals but had a gentler ride this time at the Martin Carpena arena.

Although he and Hewitt have been highly critical of the revamped Davis Cup format, the 24-year-old expertly steered his team into their 49th final.

The 28-time champions, behind only the United States, ended Finland's fairy tale run with little fuss, and the captains agreed not to play the deciding doubles.

Nordic fans outnumbered those in green and gold, just as they did for their superb last eight victory over reigning champions Canada on Tuesday, but this time left disappointed.

Finland's number one, Ruusuvuori, 69th in the world, missed the Canada

win with a shoulder problem and he had heavy lifting to do after Virtanen's defeat.

Ruusuvuori exchanged breaks with De Minaur, with the Australian finally converting his sixth break point in the third game to get back on serve and never looked back.

FINDING RHYTHM

De Minaur broke a second time when the Finn hit a backhand into the net and consolidated to move 4-2 ahead as he hit his stride. Ruusuvuori conceded a third break by slapping a forehand into the net and despite breaking back with a lovely drop shot, De Minaur served out to wrap up the set.

At the start of the second he saved a break point against an aggressive Ruusuvuori and then broke himself for a 2-1 lead, which he protected.

De Minaur clinched victory with a

superb backhand winner, hit on the rise.

Hewitt, who played in Australia's last Davis Cup win 20 years ago, knows the final will be tough, whether it is against world number one Djokovic's Serbia, or number four ranked Sinner and Italy.

"It's tough either way," said Australia's captain.

"Obviously the number ones are both absolute quality players -- they are as good as anyone going around at the moment."

Popyrin, 40th in the world, had paved the way for De Minaur by showing his quality in the second set to defeat his 171st ranked opponent.

"Alexei stood up when he needed to today," added Hewitt.

After a tight first set decided by tie-break, the Finn double-faulted to hand his opponent a break for 4-2, and then went wide as the Australian broke again

to seal the win.

"It's nerves that I have never experienced before in my life, the nerves playing the first tie, the first rubber of a Davis Cup, winning my first live rubber of a Davis Cup (tie)," Popyrin said.

"I just had to keep my head steady and just really focus on my serve and try to capitalise on opportunities when they came," Finland captain Jarkko Nieminen was disappointed not to make further history by taking the team to the final but said the experience was "amazing".

"(I feel) empty when you realise that this trip for this year is over, (the) amazing trip that we have had," said Finland captain Jarkko Nieminen.

"(I) appreciated the effort of the team, players, the crowd."

Serbia face Italy on Saturday in the second semi, ahead of Sunday's final.

— AFP



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New contracts to ensure higher earnings on Oman’s LNG exports

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, NOV 25

Oman’s LNG export market is poised for a notable transformation, as outlined by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufo, Minister of Energy and Minerals, in an interview with Oman TV last week. The imminent expiry of a 25-year LNG supply contract with South Korea has paved the way for a series of strategic changes that will redefine Oman’s position in the global LNG market.

Under the newly negotiated contracts, Oman anticipates a substantial increase in gas income, ranging from 30 to 40 per cent compared to the previous agreement, said Al Aufo. This significant boost in revenue is expected to fuel Oman’s economic growth and development. Additionally, the duration of new contracts will range from 5 to 10 years, providing greater flexibility and adaptability to evolving market conditions, he noted.

Significantly, Oman’s timely entry into the market at the peak of gas demand has been met with an overwhelming response. The country’s initial offer of 10.5 million tonnes per annum of LNG for sale was met with orders in the range of 70 million tonnes, underscoring the strong demand for Omani gas in the global market.

Recognising this favourable market position, the new contracts have been carefully crafted to maximise the government’s share



Oman LNG’s complex at Qalhat.

of profits from LNG sales, ensuring a sustainable stream of revenue for the nation, the Minister explained.

Furthermore, to ensure stability and predictability for both Oman and its LNG buyers, the pricing mechanism for the new contracts will be based on a combination of oil prices and market prices. Eighty per cent of gas prices will be linked to oil prices, while the remaining 20 per cent will be linked to prevailing market rates.

This balanced approach will provide a stable pricing environment while ensuring

that Oman benefits from price fluctuations in the global energy market, Al Aufo stated.

Currently, Oman exports approximately 30 per cent of its gas production, with the remaining 70 per cent utilised domestically.

However, this balance is expected to shift as the country transitions towards renewable energy sources. Over time, domestic gas consumption will gradually decrease, allowing Oman to further expand its gas export capabilities and capitalise on the growing global demand for

clean energy sources, he said.

The upcoming transformation of Oman’s gas sector is set to propel the country towards a brighter economic future. Increased LNG income, flexible contract durations, and a focus on maximising government profits will all contribute to Oman’s economic growth and stability. As the world transitions towards a cleaner energy future, Oman is well-positioned to leverage its abundant gas reserves and establish itself as a leading player in the global energy market.

Construction set to begin on RO 37m bio-products project

MUSCAT: Omani Bio-Products Company is preparing to launch work on its animal feed and aquatic seafood project at Khazaen Economic City with an investment of around RO 37 million planned in three phases.

A tender for the construction of the plant, issued in June this year, has attracted bids from nine local companies. An award for the construction contract will be announced before the end of this year. Equipment for the plant has already been arriving, the project’s promoters said.

Conceived in line with Oman’s food security goals, the project aims to benefit from agricultural and biological by-products, transform them into specialised value-added products, and recycle date by-products, which include date kernels, pulp, and palm fronds.

Omani Bio-Products Company will produce about 100,000 tonnes annually of alternative grass feed made from agricultural residues enriched with dates, and about 300,000 tonnes annually of marine life feed such as shrimp and fish farmed in cages.

The project will use locally available raw materials to cover the needs of newly established food

security projects in the field of red meat, dairy products, aquaculture and marine agriculture, in addition to serving the export market.

According to Haitham bin Shakhboub al Saadi, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Bio-Products Company, the project contribute to achieving the goals of the “Oman Vision 2040” Vision by employing the concepts of the circular and bio-economy and taking advantage of the raw materials available in the local environment and using them to produce a group of products, such as animal feed, aquatic seafood and their raw materials in an economical, sustainable and environmentally friendly manner.

Omani Bio-Products Company was established in partnership between the Nakheel Oman Development Company and the Omani Mills Group, which are affiliated with the Oman Food Investment Holding Company group. It is a model of joint work between companies owned by the Oman Investment Authority, as it works in strategic partnership with the Omani Environmental Services Holding Company “Be’ah” and with the support of Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources. — ONA



Omani Bio-Products plans a RO 37 million animal feed and seafood project in three phases at Khazaen Economic City.

Oman participates in GCC-Egyptian Business Forum

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, NOV 25

The Sultanate of Oman took part in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-Egyptian Business Forum held in Egypt under the auspices of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

The forum, organised by the Federation of Gulf countries chambers of commerce, Union of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce, and with support from the General Secretariat of the GCC and the Egyptian Ministry of Trade and Industry, welcomed a delegation from Oman. Led by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, and current chair of the Trade and Industry Cooperation Committee of the GCC, the Omani delegation included representatives from the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Various sessions at the forum

delted into the collaboration between GCC countries and Egypt, exploring avenues to enhance economic and investment exchanges. The forum aimed to strengthen economic and trade cooperation, boost investment opportunities, and implement decisions by leaders to review investment prospects and realise strategic plans.

Addressing the forum, Qais al Yousef emphasised Oman’s interest in expanding economic development opportunities with Egypt. He referenced the Oman-Egypt Business Forum held in May of the preceding year during the visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to engage with President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and business leaders.

Qais al Yousef emphasised the positive economic performance in Gulf economies for 2023, according to global financial reports, with projections indicating that the Gulf countries would achieve the



Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion.

highest global growth rate for 2022/2023.

He proposed recommendations to enhance economic, trade, and investment cooperation between

GCC countries and Egypt. These recommendations include holding annual meetings, establishing a secretariat to follow up on forum recommendations, exploring

technical solutions for trade and investment, creating a platform for tenders and investment opportunities, studying industrial integration, and emphasising pharmaceuticals and research and development.

Over two days, the forum covered investment opportunities in real estate, agriculture, tourism, and food industries, as well as industrial integration in electricity, water, and renewable energy. Discussions also touched on Gulf-Egyptian cooperation in healthcare, pharmaceuticals, information technology, digital communications, training, and the exchange of technological and educational experiences.

The economic relationship between GCC countries and Egypt saw trade surpassing \$35 billion in 2022, with continuous growth reaching 31 per cent in the same year.

On the sidelines of the GCC-Egyptian Business Forum, Qais

al Yousef engaged with Egyptian dignitaries, including the Minister of Commerce and Industry, the President of the Investment Authority and Free Zones in Egypt, and the Chairman of the Egyptian Export Development Bank. Meetings also involved discussions with various Egyptian companies and investors interested in the Sultanate of Oman.

The First GCC-Egyptian Business Forum is expected to enhance investments and partnerships between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the GCC countries. Its aim is to open new horizons for investors, fostering economic alliances and foundations for investment, and forming promising Gulf-Egyptian alliances and partnerships in sectors of mutual interest. This includes a focus on economic diversification sectors in the Sultanate of Oman, such as industry, tourism, food security, logistics, and mining.

Oxy Oman Awarded in Omani Youth Day Celebrations

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 25

During the recent Omani Youth Day celebrations organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Oxy Oman was recognised for its continued contributions to youth programmes in the Sultanate of Oman.

The celebration was held at Al Mouj Muscat, under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports, and Youth, and the attendance of Basil bin Ahmed bin Amer al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth. Steven Lauver, President and General Manager of Oxy Oman, attended the event along with senior executives at the company.

Oxy Oman has sponsored a variety of high-impact youth-centred initiatives in Oman, including its strategic sponsorship of the Oman Youth Center. The Youth Center is an initiative by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth aimed at developing integrated centres for Omani youth, with plans to expand to all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. Over the last year, the Youth Center conducted virtual workshops to reach more than 20,000 youth beneficiaries, including young Omani entrepreneurs, throughout Oman.

“We’re excited to celebrate



Steven Lauver receiving the award.

Omani Youth Day and humbled to receive this award as recognition for our years of support for youth development, from sports & wellbeing, to youth entrepreneurship as well as cultural and arts appreciation. As a company, Oxy Oman believes it is important for the Sultanate of Oman to enhance the well-being and development of Omani youth programmes. Through our Corporate Social

Responsibility programme, we remain committed to supporting initiatives that promote youth development throughout Oman,” said Mr. Lauver.

Oxy Oman has also notably sponsored projects such as the. NXT Development Programme to support youth entrepreneurship, the Oxy Sports Days programme for school students, and the Awtad 3D printing programme for schools across the Sultanate of

Oman.

This sponsorship falls under Oxy Oman’s umbrella of strategic partnerships and continuous collaboration with key stakeholders, and is part of Oxy Oman’s endeavour and long-term commitment to support programmes that enhance economic growth and sustainable development and that yield positive impacts in the neighboring communities.

bp launches a global procurement hub to promote Omani talents in supply chain management

MUSCAT: bp Oman, in collaboration with Worley, have announced the launch of its centralised global procurement hub in Oman to support bp’s global procurement operations for the eastern hemisphere, marking Oman as a strategic supply chain management development hub in the region, while also developing Omanis in the industry.

Covering various sites in the eastern hemisphere such as Gelsenkirchen and Lingen in Germany, Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Castellon in Spain, Mauritania & Senegal in West Africa and Khazzan and Ghazeer projects in Oman, the new model will help standardising the processes, tools and categorisations, resulting in reduced lead time and saved operational costs.

Yousuf al Ojaili, bp Oman President said, “aligning our procurement activities will enable us to develop and promote our



bp Oman collaborates with Worley on the launch of its centralised global procurement hub.

national capabilities in the global supply chain management. Such a great accomplishment in collaboration with Worley will also help placing Oman on the

map as a central hub and offer a great value for the organisation by delivering a sustainable and agile business continuity.”“As Worley supports bp in the transition to a

global procurement model for the site projects we deliver, this great achievement should help us expand our commercial and procurement team by hiring and training Omanis in the field of global supply chain management.

It is a win-win achievement that should help us explore additional windows of growth as well as unlocking new sources of in-country value for both organisations,” Patrick Tranter, Vice President, Oman Operations, Worley commented.

The inaugural ceremony was held in Muscat and attended by several industry stakeholders. bp and Worley aim to develop a more sustainable supply chain by working with key suppliers to embed sustainable practices and increasing the purchase circularity.

The project shall also play a key role in increasing Omanisation and promoting local manufacturers to compete in the global market.

Ouic clinches coveted ‘Insurance Company of the Year’ Award

MUSCAT: Oman United Insurance Company SAOG (OUIC) was honoured with the prestigious ‘Insurance Company of The Year’ Award during the inaugural OER Corporate Excellence Awards 2023 held on 8th Nov 2023 at Sheraton Oman Hotel. These awards were given to selected companies listed, privately held, or government-owned, alongside industry leaders and innovative corporate initiatives that have made significant contributions to the economic and social progress of the Sultanate of Oman.

The ceremony brought together luminaries from across the business landscape in the Sultanate of Oman and was hosted by Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Mashani. Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, the Governor of Muscat, presided over the event as the Chief Guest, while His Highness Sayyid Firas bin Fatek al Said was the Guest of Honour.

Accepting the esteemed accolade on behalf of the company, Sayyid Nasser bin Salim al Busaidy, Chief Management Executive of OUIC, stated, “It is truly gratifying to receive this distinguished award, a

privilege I share on behalf of every member of our executive management and staff at OUIC. While I commend each team member for their contribution, I extend heartfelt thanks to our customer base, many of whom have stood by us for decades. Their unwavering trust and confidence inspire us to excel continually.” This award marks yet another milestone in the company’s history of being recognised for its leadership role in Oman’s insurance sector. Renowned for its customer-centric ethos, OUIC stands as one of Oman’s oldest local insurers, with an extensive array of diversified product offerings that span Motor, Travel, Life, Health, Home, Domestic Workers, Workmen Compensation, Property, Project, Liability, Professional Indemnity, Cyber and Personal insurance, among other domains.

With a rich 38-year legacy, OUIC has earned acclaim for its robust financial strength and consistent performance, maintaining a formidable presence across Oman through an extensive network of branches and agencies.



OUIC honoured with the prestigious award.

Take the unbeaten path confidently with the Toyota Hilux

MUSCAT: The Toyota Hilux is a dependable workhorse and an impressive travel partner for unbeaten journeys and remarkable experiences.

The exciting and capable Hilux Adventure is equipped with a powerful 4.0 Litre V6 Engine with 235 HP & 38.3 Kg-m Torque. It has an Auto Disconnect Differential to keep the tempo going. The 4.0 Litre V6 Toyota Hilux Adventure is a truly exciting mean machine that’s been developed by Toyota to get your pulse racing. Similarly the Hilux 4X4 is equipped with a 2.7 Litre Petrol Engine that is available in 5-speed Manual Transmission and 6 Speed Automatic Transmission, outputting 164 HP.

The Hilux is not only a tough vehicle but also an advanced pick-

up with stylish cues. The Hilux sports a thick, chunky Front Bumper sculpted like an SUV, Front Fog lamps, Alloy Wheels, apart from Side Stripes that adorn the vehicle.

If you are looking for some of the finest moments on the road or off-road then the Hilux rises above expectations in all aspects. The Hilux really is two vehicles in one: a work truck through the week and a family vehicle on weekends, thanks to added comforts and safety features. Indeed the Hilux models are stunning in design and features. Their performance & safety parameters are amongst the best and the strong frame and suspension impart toughness for any demanding task.

The Hilux’s interior continues the



An image of the Toyota Hilux.

concept of “Tough and Emotional”, and reflects the same attention to detail as the exterior with

SUV vehicle styling, accents and ornamentations. The key features that keep you comfortable are the

Auto Air conditioner with rear vents, Multi-Information Display (MID), 8” Navigation and many

more. The Hilux comes equipped with a number of active and passive safety features like Anti-Lock Braking System (ABS), Electronic Brake-Force Distribution (EBD) and Brake Assist (BA), Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Hill Assist Control (HAC), Trailer Sway Control and SRS Airbags for the Driver and Front Passenger.

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.



A woman counts US dollar bills.

DOLLAR SLIPS ON BETS US RATES HAVE PEAKED

NEW YORK: The dollar slipped against a basket of currencies on Friday on news of steady US business activity in November, but private sector employment declined in line with expectations for a fourth-quarter economic slowdown.

Currencies traded in a relatively narrow range with US markets closing early the day after the US Thanksgiving holiday.

“It’s incredibly quiet, as you’d expect on the day after Thanksgiving, with liquidity still pretty thin, and volumes again on the light side,” said Michael Brown, market analyst at Trader X in London.

“I think what we’re seeing is a classic case of the market taking the ‘path of least resistance.” S&P Global said on Friday its flash US Composite PMI Output Index was unchanged at 50.7 this month as a modest rise in services sector activity offset a contraction in manufacturing. A reading above 50 indicates expansion in the private sector.

The lack of strong order growth resulted in businesses shedding workers, with the survey’s employment index dropping to 49.7 in the first contraction since June 2020 from 51.3 in October.

An easing labour market will aid the Fed’s fight against inflation. “Economic data have been producing a fair amount of evidence of a cyclical downturn in the US,” Jane Foley, senior FX strategist at Rabobank said in a note.

The dollar index, which measures the US currency with six peers, eased 0.4 % to 103.35, staying close to the 2-1/2 month low of 103.17 touched earlier this week. For the week, the index was down 0.5%, after slipping 1.9% last week.

The index is on course for its weakest monthly performance in a year on growing expectations the Federal Reserve is done with raising interest rates and could start cutting them next year.

Elsewhere, the Japanese yen was about flat against the dollar

at 149.45, after strengthening on news that Japan’s core consumer price growth picked up slightly in October. The data reinforced investors’ views that stubborn inflation may push the BoJ to roll back monetary stimulus before long. ING economists said they expect the BoJ to move away from its super-accommodative stance next year.

“We believe that the BoJ may scrap the yield curve programme as early as the first quarter of next (year), as Japanese government bonds appear to have stabilised,” they said.

The bank will “then begin its first rate hike in Q2 2024 if wage growth continues to accelerate next year.” The nationwide core consumer price index (CPI), which excludes volatile fresh food costs, rose 2.9% year on year in October, government data showed on Friday, against 3.0% expected by economists in a Reuters poll.

The euro was 0.39 % higher at \$ 1.0946 after data confirmed an initial estimate published in late

October that showed Germany’s economy shrank slightly in the third quarter from the previous three months.

German business morale improved for a third straight month in November, data showed.

The single currency is pausing after gaining ground on Thursday on a series of preliminary surveys showing recession in Germany may be shallower than expected, which offset a downbeat reading on French business activity.

Sterling rose 0.57% to its highest since early September after data on Thursday showed British companies returned to growth in November, fuelling hopes Britain will avoid a recession.

In cryptocurrency markets, bitcoin rose 1.14 % to \$ 37,728 , its highest since May 2022. A spate of filings for spot bitcoin and either exchange-traded funds (ETFs), including from traditional finance heavyweights, has revived the crypto market which last year was crushed by a series of meltdowns.

— Reuters

Stock markets suffers after Thanksgiving

LONDON: Global stock markets wavered on Friday in subdued trading with Wall Street only open for a half session due to the extended Thanksgiving holiday weekend.

European equities posted modest gains, with London edging into positive territory after having spent most of the day in the red in the face of the stronger pound and profit-taking.

“The usual adage is when the United States sneezes the world catches a cold — in the latest case, it appears when the US is on holiday, global markets hit the snooze button,” said AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould.

Wall Street was shut Thursday for the Thanksgiving holiday and will close early on Friday.

The Dow was up 0.3 per cent in late morning trading. The broader S&P 500 index was flat and tech-heavy Nasdaq shed 0.2 percent.

While trading is traditionally light, “the Friday after Thanksgiving also means it is Black Friday, which is why the business media are going to be paying a lot of attention to the retail industry,” said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O’Hare.

American shoppers flock to stores for bargains during the annual pre-Christmas “Black Friday” sales event, followed by the newer “Cyber Monday”.

Asian traders hoped for fresh moves to help China’s troubled property sector after officials called on banks to provide support.

Equities have rallied in recent weeks on optimism the Federal Reserve will not hike interest rates again this cycle with inflation slowing and the economy showing signs of easing without falling into recession.

And while minutes from the bank’s most recent policy meeting echoed warnings from decision-makers that borrowing costs will likely stay elevated for some time, there is hope that they will cut in 2024.

Hong Kong led the losses in Asia trading, having risen over the week, while Shanghai, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei, Jakarta and Bangkok were also down.

Tokyo jumped as dealers caught up with Thursday’s Asian advance, while the yen rose against the dollar as Japanese inflation jumped again, adding to bets the central bank will shift from its ultra-loose monetary policy.

Oil prices diverged on Friday after a two-day fall that came in the wake of Opec’s decision to put back a crucial meeting by four days owing to a row over output quotas. — AFP



Stock market image for representation purposes.

China offers visa-free entry for citizens of France, Germany, Italy

BEIJING: China will temporarily exempt citizens of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia from needing visas to visit the world’s second-largest economy in a bid to give a boost to post-pandemic tourism.

From December 1 to November 30 next year, citizens of those countries entering China for business, tourism, visiting relatives and friends, or transiting for no more than 15 days, will not need a visa, a foreign ministry spokesperson said on Friday.

China has been taking steps in recent months — including restoring international flight routes — to revive its tourism sector following three years of strict Covid-19 measures that largely shut its borders to the outside world.

The government is also looking to re-establish its image around the world after clashing with many Western countries on various issues including Covid, human rights, Taiwan and trade.

A recent Pew Research Center survey in 24 countries revealed

that views of China were broadly negative, with 67% of adults expressing unfavourable views.

More than half of the respondents said China interfered in the affairs of other countries and did not take into account the interests of others.

“This decision will facilitate travel to China for many German citizens to an unprecedented extent,” Germany’s Ambassador to China, Patricia Flor, said on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

“We hope that the Chinese government will implement the measures announced today for all EU member states,” she said.

Visa-free travel to Germany for Chinese nationals would only be possible if all members of the European Schengen Agreement approved, she said.

The head of foreign trade at the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce (DIHK) hailed the announcement of a temporary visa exemption as “an important signal that can boost both tourism and economic exchange”.



People visiting the Great Wall of China.

“Above all, the regulation facilitates the maintenance of German machines, the assurance

of quality ‘Made in Germany’, entrepreneurial exchange and the cultivation of interpersonal

contacts,” Volker Treier said in an interview with Reuters.

French Foreign Minister

Catherine Colonna, who is in Beijing, wrote on X: “An excellent new announcement on the occasion of my visit from my counterpart Wang Yi!” This month, China expanded its visa-free transit policy to 54 countries to include citizens of Norway.

In August, China scrapped all Covid test requirements for inbound travellers. It resumed 15-day visa-free entry for citizens of Singapore and Brunei in July.

International flights in and out the country, while recovering more slowly than services on the domestic network, have been picking up.

China’s aviation authority said in October that 16,680 weekly flights were expected from November through March, with passenger flights expected to reach 71% of the total four years ago.

The European Chamber of Commerce in China also said the move would help boost business confidence. “It is a positive that the authorities are taking steps to facilitate people-to-people exchanges,” it added. — Reuters

2023 a rollercoaster year for Web3 gaming



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As 2023 draws to a close, I will write on the pages of the Oman Observer some columns to summarise what happened in 2023 in specific industries, as well as anticipating what lies ahead in 20204. Today I want to talk about the gaming industry. With ups and downs throughout the year, buzzing with blockchain innovations, the gaming industry is now at a pivotal crossroads. A striking report from Game7, a blockchain gaming accelerator, reveals a sharp decline in new Web3 game launches. This year saw just 223 new games, a significant drop from the 640 in 2022 and even further from 811 in 2021. So, what's behind this dramatic slowdown in the

Web3 gaming space? The optimistic perspective, as suggested by Immutable co-founder Robbie Ferguson, is that excellence takes time. He emphasises the influx of investment into Web3 games, totalling around \$15 billion over three years. This investment is expected to yield major hits, but patience is crucial. Immutable itself now boasts over 200 games on its platform, with big names like Shardbound Blade Of God, Arkbound, and Galactico Manager 24 receiving substantial funding. John Stefanidis of Balthazar Gaming DAO echoes this sentiment, noting the growing appetite for Web3 gaming despite the current bear market in cryptocurrencies. However, the focus is shifting. Gabby Dizon from Yield Guild Games

predicts that successful Web3 games in 2024 will pivot from play-to-earn models to free-to-play, aiming to attract a broader player base. An intriguing aspect of this transformation is the global distribution of Web3 game developers. While the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region leads with 40% of the development teams, demonstrating its growing tech and digital innovation prowess, other regions contribute significantly too. North America accounts for 30%, and the Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) region holds 28%. Latin America, with a smaller but vital 2%, adds to the global diversity of Web3 gaming. The United States stands out as the largest individual market, hosting 28% of Web3 game development teams. South Korea comes second (12%), followed by the United Kingdom (6%), Singapore (6%), and Vietnam (4%). Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, France, and Canada each contribute 3%. The rest of the world collectively makes up the remaining 28%. Interestingly, there is an even spread of Web3 games across mobile, browser, and PC platforms. Specifically, 41% of these games are available on mobile, 40% on browsers, and 39% on PC. This spread indicates a versatile approach by developers to cater to diverse gaming preferences and hardware accessibility. Furthermore, the industry exhibits a predominant preference for single-platform games, with 81% of Web3 games being developed for a single

platform. In contrast, only 19% of the games are multi-platform, reflecting a focused approach by developers, possibly to optimise the gaming experience for specific platform capabilities. The engine market is largely dominated by Unity and Unreal Engine. Unity, with its user-friendly interface, claims 51% of the market, while Unreal Engine, renowned for its advanced graphics capabilities, covers 44%. While new game launches have slowed, the focus has shifted towards developing quality hits with sustainable models. The future looks promising, with big names and fresh concepts ready to redefine the gaming experience. As we step into 2024, the world eagerly awaits the next big thing in Web3 gaming.

Budget crisis shakes industry’s confidence in Germany

CHRISTOPH STEITZ AND
TOM KÄCKENHOFF

Germany’s intensifying budget crisis is hitting Europe’s top economy where it hurts most: its reputation as a reliable partner for industry, some of which now fears that Berlin may not stand by its pledges to fund green and other projects.

As well as tearing a 60 billion euro (\$65 billion) hole in the government’s 2024 spending plans, the constitutional court ruling raises wider questions about aid for big industrial projects that were supposed to be supported with public money.

These include plans by ArcelorMittal, the world’s second-largest steelmaker, to spend 2.5 billion euros to decarbonise its German steel mills, efforts that depend on now-uncertain government support.

“We are disappointed and, above all, concerned, as we still lack funding decisions and thus a perspective for our industrial production in Germany,” said Reiner Blaschek, who heads ArcelorMittal’s German division.

He called the government’s inability to come up with a quick fix for the budget impasse “grossly negligent”, highlighting the potential consequences for Germany, which is already struggling to keep its place as a prime industrial location.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz in a video message on Friday said the government was reworking the 2024 budget swiftly and that all necessary decisions would be taken this year.

ArcelorMittal’s German rival SHS Stahl-Holding-Saar has also not received a formal commitment from Berlin to support a 3.5 billion euro investment push to drastically cut CO2 emissions at its furnaces.

Chief Executive Stefan Rauber said a solution had to be found within days, not weeks, and that he needed a decision by the end of the year to make the programme happen.

AS WELL AS TEARING A 60 BILLION EURO (\$65 BILLION) HOLE IN THE GOVERNMENT’S 2024 SPENDING PLANS, THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT RULING RAISES WIDER QUESTIONS ABOUT AID FOR BIG INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS THAT WERE SUPPOSED TO BE SUPPORTED WITH PUBLIC MONEY. THESE INCLUDE PLANS BY ARCELORMITTAL, THE WORLD’S SECOND-LARGEST STEEL-MAKER, TO SPEND 2.5 BILLION EUROS TO DECARBONISE ITS GERMAN STEEL MILLS, EFFORTS THAT DEPEND ON NOW-UNCERTAIN GOVERNMENT SUPPORT



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

“What we’re seeing here is devastating for Germany as a business location globally. And the longer it goes the worse it will get,” he said. Besides the 6 billion euros of steel investments, other sectors potentially affected by the court ruling include 4 billion euros in the area of microelectronics and 20 billion euros for battery cell production, according to an economy ministry paper seen by Reuters. It also covers so-called climate protection agreements that are supposed to help industry protect itself against power price swings, the paper said. Those have previously been estimated at 68 billion euros. **‘NOT COMPETITIVE’** Germany has long been criticised for insufficient

investment in key economic infrastructure — the IMF this year repeated a call for Berlin to create more fiscal room for investing in the country’s future. Critics say its constitutionally enshrined debt brake, which puts very strict limits on how much new debt it can take on, is a somewhat arbitrary political tool that restricts the space for those investments. The court’s decision to block the repurposing of unused funds from the pandemic for green investment has cast doubt over the fate of other off-budget funding vehicles and a cloud over future spending plans in 2024 and beyond. The comments from industry reflect broad concern it will limit Germany’s ability to stand by its funding commitments to major expansion projects including some by Intel, Taiwan’s TSMC and Infineon. Making matters worse, the budget turmoil creates a fresh layer of problems when Germany is already fighting for investment with locations in Asia and the United States, and faces the risk of big industrial players moving sites abroad. The US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has provided companies with clear regulatory frameworks, including in the nascent field of hydrogen, which is key for Germany’s efforts to make its industry carbon neutral. “If there’s an impression ... that it is unsafe to walk this path with German companies ... then plant manufacturers will look to the IRA and other projects in the USA, simply

because investment security is there,” said Bernhard Osburg, CEO of Thyssenkrupp Steel Europe. While there are concerns over what the budget hole means for projects in the short-term, fears are growing that it could weaken Germany’s ability to co-sponsor the longer-term transformation of its industries. Some worry that plans to lower power prices for industry, a key effort to keep chemicals heavyweights such as BASF and Wacker Chemie competitive, could be derailed, too. “Important industries in Germany, such as chemicals or steel production, need economical energy prices,” Oliver Blume, CEO of Europe’s top carmaker Volkswagen, told Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. — **Reuters**

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MUSIC
Spanish singer-songwriter Enrique Iglesias performs during the Trilogy Tour at Frost Bank Center. — AFP



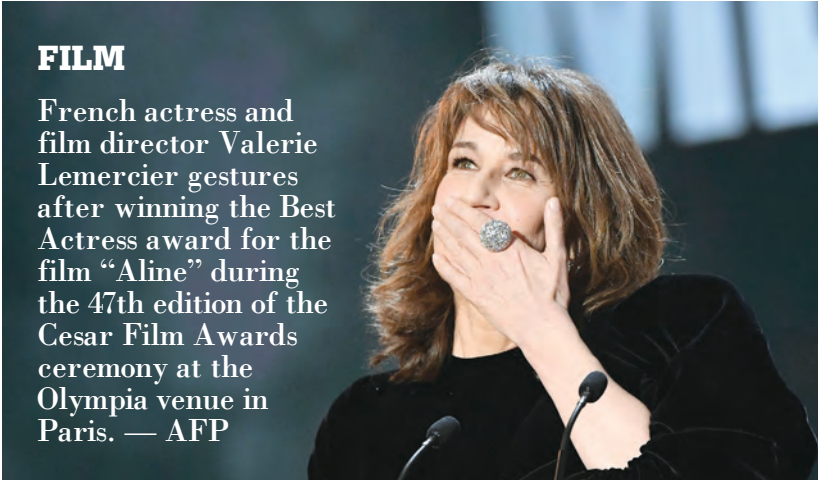
FASHION
A model presents a creation during the Central Saint Martins BA Fashion Design Womenswear course fashion show called "V&A's Fashion in Motion: Inspired by Gabrielle Chanel", in the Raphael Gallery, at the V&A museum, in central London. — AFP



HOLLYWOOD
US actor Eric Andre arrives for the premiere of "Trolls: Band Together" at the TCL Chinese Theater in Hollywood, California. — AFP



ART
Afghan artisans make wood carvings at an engraving workshop in Herat. — AFP



FILM
French actress and film director Valerie Lemercier gestures after winning the Best Actress award for the film "Aline" during the 47th edition of the Cesar Film Awards ceremony at the Olympia venue in Paris. — AFP

art & life

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Queenfish: Culinary delights at Muttrah fish market

The number of calories in Queenfish can vary depending on the size and preparation method. On average, a 100 gram serving of Queenfish contains around 129 calories...P20

Britain wins litter-picking World Cup with load of rubbish

Britain came out on top when 21 teams from around the world gathered in Tokyo this week to collect litter in the inaugural SpoGomi World Cup, an initiative aimed at raising awareness of environmental issues. The teams of three from countries as far afield as Australia and Brazil scoured the streets of Shibuya and Omotesando for 90 minutes over two sessions looking for waste and then sorting what they had found into

appropriate categories. Britain's team, "The North Will Rise Again", beat the host Japanese trio into second place by earning 9,046.1 points for collecting 57.27 kilograms (126.26 lbs) of rubbish. "A lot of the other teams maybe were more ecological, and less sport, and we're probably the opposite, but we've taken so much away about how much we need to clean up our oceans and reduce litter," team captain Sarah Parry said after collecting the trophy on Wednesday. "It's been a really good



Members of team UK sort out garbage which they collected during a trash picking competition known as "Spogomi World Cup" in Tokyo. — Reuters

experience." Japan's famously high standards of hygiene and cleanliness made finding rubbish challenging for

some of the competitors. "Sometimes it was really hard because there wasn't really that much trash," said Team USA

member Beatrice Hernandez. "But that's when we have to look a little bit deeper like in the bushes,

or just really focus on the cigarette butts on the floor." The name SpoGomi comes from the conflation of an abbreviation of "sport" with the Japanese word for trash, "gomi". Invented in 2008 to encourage people to pick up litter in public places, it has grown in popularity to the extent that some 230 contests have been held in Japan this year. Organisers the Nippon Foundation said the World Cup had been held to raise awareness of environmental issues, in particular that of plastic pollution in the oceans. "The first important thing is to make people who are not yet aware of the marine waste problem realise the situation of litter in the ocean," said Executive Director Mitsuyuki Unno. — Reuters

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AROUND THE WORLD



How many face products do I really need?

Q: I'M CONFUSED ABOUT HOW TO TAKE CARE OF THE SKIN ON MY FACE. WHAT ARE THE BASICS?

Browsing your drugstore's skin care aisle can be a puzzling experience — and that's before you start looking at social media. Doctors are frustrated, too. "Everyone's giving skin care advice, and people are inundated with information," said Ahmad Amin, an associate professor of dermatology at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. Dermatologists recommend keeping it simple and say that everyone's skin care routine should include a few essential steps: cleansing, moisturising and sun protection. We asked experts to walk us through the fundamentals.

WASH YOUR FACE

You probably know you should be washing your face, but you might not really know why, or the best way to do it. Cleansing your skin removes oil, dirt, dead skin cells, makeup and environmental pollutants, said Patricia Farris, a dermatologist in Metairie, Louisiana. This buildup can clog your pores and cause acne, and pollutants can prompt the production of free radicals, which contribute to skin aging, she explained. Most people should wash their face twice a day, but if you have dry or sensitive skin, once is usually enough, said Hope Mitchell, a dermatologist in Perrysburg, Ohio. More than that can strip the outermost layer of skin, leading to redness, itchiness, dryness and rashes, she said.

Choosing the right facial cleanser depends on your skin type. Farris said to use a hydrating cleanser if you have dry skin, a gel-based or foaming cleanser for oily skin or a gentle, fragrance-free product for sensitive skin. You don't need to spend a fortune. Drugstore brands such as Neutrogena, CeraVe and La Roche-Posay are effective, Farris said.

USE A MOISTURISER.

Daily moisturising keeps your skin from drying out and can reduce the appearance of fine lines, Farris said. "But you've got to tweak the moisturiser much like you tweak the cleanser," she added. Choose a lightweight, oil-free moisturiser if you have oily skin. If you have dry skin, use a creamier product labelled "hydrating" or "for dry skin." People with acne-prone skin should look for non-comedogenic moisturisers, which won't clog pores. Moisturising twice a day is recommended for most people, Mitchell said. You might need to moisturise more often during the winter, or whenever your skin is feeling especially dry. "If your skin feels tight, it's signaling that it needs moisture urgently," she said. You can generally use the same product in the morning and at night,



Farris said. But if your daytime moisturiser contains sunscreen, use a different one before bed. As with cleansers, there are plenty of effective, inexpensive moisturisers available, she said.

APPLY SUNSCREEN.

Sun protection should be part of everyone's routine, regardless of skin type or skin tone, Amin said. The sun's ultraviolet rays can increase the production of free radicals and damage collagen, accelerating the appearance of lines and wrinkles, he said. Too much sun exposure also increases melanin production, which can lead to sunspots on the skin, he added. And it heightens your risk for skin cancer, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. Look for broad-spectrum sunscreens that protect your skin from both UVA and UVB rays and are at least SPF 30, which is recommended by the AAD, he said. There are many effective sunscreen options. Amin recommended finding one that you like and that you will actually use every day. Moisturisers that contain sunscreen can be an option when you have limited sun exposure, Farris said. But many combination prod-

ucts are SPF 15, lower than the standard recommendation. So it's often better to use a separate sunscreen, especially if you're planning to be out in the sun for a while, she explained.

OTHER STEPS TO CONSIDER.

Besides a cleanser, a moisturiser and a sunscreen, which Farris calls "the basics," you can add a serum, an exfoliant, an eye cream or a toner. "It just depends on what you're trying to achieve," she said. These products often contain active ingredients such as antioxidants, retinol or acids that can offer extra UV protection and anti-aging benefits, and eye creams are formulated specifically for the sensitive skin around your eyes, she said. When using a combination of products, Farris said, apply serums and eye creams after cleansing but before moisturisers and sunscreens. She recommended that any time you add steps to your skin care routine, you should try one product at a time and use it for about three weeks before adding something else. "You don't want to just be layering and layering, because sometimes that can trigger irritation, exacerbate dryness and even cause true allergic reactions," Farris said. If you



notice such problems, stop using the product. If you've tried a few skin care products and aren't getting the results you want, talk to a dermatologist, Amin said. You'll get advice on which types of products and ingredients can improve your skin based on your individual needs and which ones are "more hype than actual real benefits," he said. — **NYT**

ART



British artist draws Hong Kong crowds with his 'graffiti spaghetti'

A HONG KONG transport hub was taken over Sunday by googly eyed aliens, extraterrestrial jellyfish and a cast of eccentric characters — all part of a live performance by British artist Sam Cox, better known as Mr Doodle. The 29-year-old calls his style "graffiti spaghetti" — a series of interlocking patterns, whimsical characters and surreal narratives that often chronicle the adventures of Mr Doodle in "Doodle Land". His show in Hong Kong attracted hundreds of fans and curious onlookers, his canvas a two-metre-wide silver spaceship for him "to fly back home" installed at an MTR station in Central district. "I really enjoy the live performances in front of people, because I love to be able to hear people get inside the process," Cox said in an interview on Thursday. "I don't always know where it is going, and everyone is just there together and enjoying the process." Cox — who cites the late American pop artist Keith Haring as an influence — gamely adopts his alter ego, dressing in a doodled suit during his public events, which on Sunday included a crowd of children. "(My daughters)... were so excited when they knew Mr Doodle was coming," Mimi Tjen said, as her husband alternated between hoisting their nine- and 11-year-old daughters on his shoulders to get a better view. As many children's first drawings are often doodles, "they understand that language," said Cox. At Sunday's event, 10 children joined him to scrawl their own creations on his spaceship — some imitating the Mr Doodle style, while others opted for mountains and stars.

RELAXATION AND JOY

"I like to create artwork that doesn't take itself too seriously... a lot of people expect art and artists to act a certain way," Cox told AFP. "I try to listen to myself and think about what's the most ultimate version of myself I can be." His pieces carry price tags ranging from \$10,000 to \$500,000, according to Pearl Lam, Cox's global representation. Lam said she typically signs more traditional creators who tend to prefer their exhibition spaces austere. But for "Mr Doodle in Space" — a solo exhibition launched on Thursday — her staff wallpapered her gallery in Cox's signature imagery, enveloping his canvases with an eye-popping pandemonium of scribbles. Lam said Cox's social media following and full embodiment of the character is bringing a younger generation to art. "In this modern commercial world, you need some relaxation and joy... that's what Mr Doodle gives." — **AFP**



MUTTRAH FISH MARKET

Queenfish culinary delights

By YAHYA AL SALMANI
Photos by the author

Once you arrive at the famous Muttrah fish market marina, you can notice dozens of boats lining the pier extending from the sea to the entrance to the fish market. However, the visitor's attention is drawn to people standing in the form of circular rings. The boats are loaded with many types of fish of which Queenfish, locally called 'Al Hebesah', is one of the fish that receives a large share of offers these days. The fish is distinguished by its streamlined shape, its length ranges between 100-120 cm, and its weight reaches more than 15 kg. Queenfish, also known as Queenies or Queen Croaker, is a category of fish found in the coastal waters of the Indo-Pacific region. Queenfish is a popular food fish that is prized for its firm, white flesh, and mild flavour. Several health references assert that Queenfish is a rich

source of protein and essential nutrients such as Omega-3 fatty acids, Vitamin D, and Vitamin B12. Omega-3 fatty acids are important for heart health, brain function, and reducing inflammation in the body. Vitamin D is important for bone health, while Vitamin B12 is essential for the nervous system and red blood cell production. The number of calories in Queenfish can vary depending on the size and preparation method. On average, a 100-gram serving of queen fish contains around 129 calories. However, this can vary depending on whether the fish is baked, grilled, or fried, and whether any additional ingredients or sauces are used in the preparation. The best way to prepare Queenfish for maximum nutritional benefits is by grilling or baking it. This method helps to preserve the delicate flavour and tender texture of the flesh while keeping the calorie count low. Avoid deep frying Queenfish, as this can add unnecessary calories and reduce the nutritional value of the fish. Queenfish is a nutritious seafood with low calories and high

protein, making it an excellent option for building and repairing body tissues. This fish is also rich in essential vitamins and minerals, including vitamin B12 and niacin, which are crucial for healthy skin, proper digestive system function, and nervous system functioning. To incorporate queen fish into a healthy diet, one can enjoy it grilled, baked, or sautéed, and its use is popular in many traditional cuisines. Queenfish is also a good source of Omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential fatty acids that the body cannot produce on its own. Omega-3 fatty acids are important for maintaining heart health and brain function, and they may also help to reduce inflammation in the body. A 3.5-ounce serving of Queenfish contains approximately 190 milligrams of Omega-3 fatty acids. Queenfish is a popular ingredient in many traditional cuisines, including Indian, Thai, and Indonesian cuisine. In India, Queenfish is often used to make curries, while in Thailand, it is used to make a popular street food called 'pla thot kamin,' which is deep-fried Queenfish marinated in turmeric and gar-



lic. In Indonesia, Queenfish is often grilled with a spicy sauce made from chili peppers, coconut milk, and tamarind. This fish is greatly admired by Omanis and Asian communi-

ties, as is used in preparing many traditional meals that are very popular. This fish is often eaten in grilled or fried dishes and is added to salads while preparing the main dish.