

P13

OMAN TO HOST
KEY HYDRAULIC
FRACTURING
CONFERENCE



P18

IT IS ALMOST THE
PERFECT TIME FOR
AN ADVENTURE TO
AL WUSTA



P10

BRAZIL THRASH BOLIVIA
5-1 IN NEYMAR'S
RECORD-BREAKING
APPEARANCE



MUSCAT

FORUM ON ZAKAT IN MANAH TODAY

A training forum for the authorities responsible for managing and distributing Zakat in Gulf Cooperation Council countries, accompanied by the first annual meeting of the Zakat committees for the years 1445 AH corresponding to 2023, will be held under the auspices of Abdullah bin Salem al Salmi, Executive President of Capital Market Authority, from Sunday at the ‘Oman Across Ages Museum’ in Manah. **SEE P3**

1,233 GOVT WEBSITES INTEGRATED: OFFICIAL

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology said that the unified government network now covers 1,233 government websites as of mid-2023. A total of 23 new government websites and 63 portals were added to the high-speed network this year. **SEE P13**

Oman calls for joint action on climate and development

NEW DELHI: Representing His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, chaired the Sultanate of Oman’s delegation at the G20 Summit, which began in New Delhi, the Republic of India, on Saturday. HH Sayyid Asaad was received upon arrival at the summit venue by Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India.

At the opening of the summit, HH Sayyid Asaad delivered a speech reading as follows: “First of all, it is my honour to convey to you greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman, and His Majesty’s best wishes of success to this summit, as well as his appreciation for the achievements made in tracks during Indian presidency.

We welcome the theme of the Indian Presidency for this year’s G20 edition, ‘One



HH Sayyid Asaad at the summit in New Delhi on Saturday.

Earth, One Family, One Future.’ We stress the importance of joint action, not only for the preservation and protection of the earth, but for the progress and prosperity of all mankind.

“The Sultanate of Oman believes in the spirit of cooperation and shared responsibility, and is committed to it in the pursuit of public benefit. Therefore, we in the Sultanate of Oman are aware of our role and responsibility. We are committed to the visions and initiatives of the

international community to achieve the 2030 economic development goals and the Paris Climate Agreement, to name a few.

“In conclusion, we look forward to continuing boosting cooperation and partnership with all G20 countries, in all desired areas that benefit everyone.”

The 18th G20 Summit carries the themes of ‘One Earth, One Family, One Future.’ It focuses on sustainable development, in addition to measures to spread economic growth in a more balanced manner between developed and developing countries.

It also discusses various issues such as loans to developing countries, debt reform, regulation of cryptocurrencies and geopolitical tensions, in addition to climate change.

Oman is participating in the 18th G20 Summit as a guest country, as per an invitation extended from the Republic of India. — **ONA** **SEE ALSO P2**

Over 1,000 killed in earthquake

HIS MAJESTY SENDS CONDOLENCES TO KING OF MOROCCO

QUAKE TOPPLES MINARET IN MARRAKESH OLD CITY

PEOPLE FLEE HOUSES IN CASABLANCA, RABAT, ELSEWHERE



AMIZMIZ: Rescuers dug through rubble for survivors in collapsed houses in remote mountain villages of Morocco on Saturday, in the wake of the country’s deadliest earthquake for more than six decades, which killed more than 1,000 people.

The quake which struck in Morocco’s High Atlas mountains late on Friday night damaged historic buildings in Marrakesh - the nearest city to the epicentre - while the most of the fatalities were reported in mountainous areas to the south. The Interior Ministry said 1,037 people had been killed and another 672 injured by the quake, gauged by the US Geological Survey at a magnitude of 6.8 with an epicentre some 72 km southwest of Marrakesh.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to his brother King Mohammed VI of the Kingdom of Morocco, on the victims of the devastating earthquake that struck

the province of Al Haouz southwest of Marrakesh.

His Majesty expressed his heartfelt condolences and sympathy to King Mohammed VI, the Moroccan people and the victims’ families, praying to Allah the Almighty to dwell the departed souls in paradise and to grant their families solace wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

EPICENTRE

In the village of Amizmiz near the

epicentre rescue workers picked through rubble with their bare hands. Fallen masonry filled narrow streets. Outside a hospital, around 10 bodies lay covered in blankets as grieving relatives stood nearby.

“When I felt the earth shaking beneath my feet and the house leaning, I rushed to get my kids out. But my neighbours couldn’t,” said Mohamed Azaw. “Unfortunately no one was found alive in that family. The father and son were found dead and they are

still looking for the mother and the daughter.”

Rescuers stood atop the pancaked floors of one building in Amizmiz, bits of carpet and furniture protruding from the rubble. A long queue formed outside the only open shop as people sought supplies. Underlining the challenges facing rescuers, fallen boulders blocked a road from Amizmiz to a nearby village.

The quake, which hit at around 11 pm (2200 GMT), affected a sweep of the High Atlas mountain range. Tremors

ALGERIA OPENS AIRSPACE TO QUAKE AID FLIGHTS

WORLD OFFERS SOLIDARITY AFTER DEVASTATING QUAKE

were felt as far away as Huelva and Jaen in Andalusia in southern Spain.

Street camera footage in Marrakesh showed the moment the earth began to shake, as men suddenly looked around and jumped up, and others ran for shelter into an alleyway and then fled as dust and debris tumbled around them.

In Marrakesh, where 13 people were confirmed dead, residents spent the night in the open, afraid to go home.

In the heart of its old city, a Unesco World Heritage site, a mosque minaret had fallen in Jemaa al-Fna Square.

Injured people filtered into Marrakesh from the surrounding areas seeking treatment.

State television footage from the Moulay Ibrahim area some 40 km south of Marrakesh showed dozens of houses collapsed at the foothills of a mountain, and residents digging graves as groups of women stood in the street.

SEE ALSO P6 AND P7



Oman aims to bolster bilateral relations with G20

KABEER YOUSUF

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The high-level Oman delegation led by His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, to the 18th meeting of the G20 Summit being held in the Indian capital, New Delhi, aims to bolster bilateral relations with the G20 countries and to address the shared economic, political and health challenges, according to the delegation member Pankaj Khimji, Adviser for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

The 30-member official delegation from Oman includes Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy; Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Pankaj Khimji, Issa bin Saleh al Shibani, Oman's Ambassador to India; advisers from HH Sayyid Asaad's office, and other officials.

"The cultural relations between Oman and India are over 5,000 years old, and the economic ties are over 2,000 years old. We are



Pankaj Khimji, Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation at MoCIIP

aiming at enhancing bilateral cooperation where the friendly economies, alongside the other G20 participants, can bolster our economic ties and explore ways of enhancing our energy and education ties with the rest of the G20 members and guests as well as combating corruption, creating labour and employment through the G20," Pankaj Khimji, who is also the Chairman of the Oman-India Joint Business Council (OIJBC), told the media.

Oman has attended this year's G20 round of meetings as an invitee by India, which is holding the G20 presidency alongside seven other guest countries, such as the UAE, Egypt, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Mauritius, Singapore and Switzerland. The



HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the G20 summit in New Delhi on Saturday.

G20 Summit, hosted by India, focuses on the theme 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' and aims to discuss climate action and achieving net-zero emissions. Over 30 heads of state and 14 heads of international organisations are participating.

Oman recently attended the Trade and Investment Working Group meeting from August 21 to 23. Qais bin

Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, attended the event after a delegation participated at the B20 in Delhi and explored through a series of panel discussions how private companies can contribute to tackling some of the major challenges of the day, including on the green energy transition and financial inclusion for

sustainable growth.

Oman's bilateral trade with India, one of Oman's top trading partners and the second largest market for Oman's crude oil exports for 2022 after China, touched \$9.988 billion in 2021-2022, an increase of nearly 90 per cent from the previous year. Oman's imports from India in 2021-2022 are \$3.148 billion, while Oman's exports to India are

\$ 6.840 billion, underlining robust and buoyant bilateral economic and commercial relations.

According to the reports from the Indian Embassy in Oman, India is also the 4th largest market for Oman's non-oil exports for 2022 after UAE, US and Saudi Arabia and the second largest source of its import after UAE.

Besides, the Oman-India Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF), a 50-50 Joint Venture between the State Bank of India and the erstwhile State General Reserve Fund (SGRF) of Oman set up in July 2010 as a special purpose vehicle (SPV) to invest in India, is a \$320 million worth initiative.

The initial seed capital of \$100 million from 2011, fully invested across seven Indian companies from diversified sectors, raised another \$220 million for its tranche-II and is being invested in India.

Countries like Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkiye, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union are participating in the G20 Summit 2023 whose agenda is predominantly the Global Economy, Cryptocurrency and other similar issues.

Early settlements in Oman date back to 6,000 years



PHOTO BY SHAMSA AL HARTHI

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The history of Qurum, which is one of the modern areas of Muscat, dates back to about 6,000 years. It is one of the oldest settlements in Oman along with Ras Al Hamra and Wattayah where people settled during Stone Age once the climate became drier.

They roamed through green valleys abundant with water, leaving scatters of tools behind them during the early Stone Age. Eventually, people settled at havens such as Ras Al Hamra as the climate became hotter and drier.

Archaeologists also discovered that the burials of the settlers hinted at deep spiritual beliefs and strong connections to the sea.

Oman's main Stone Age sites are Wadi Al Filayj, Ghinayyim, Wubar, Al Hashman, Wadi Ghadun, Wadi Dawkah, Wadi Ayout and Anqitat. All of these sites belong to the Paleolithic

period. The neolithic sites in Oman are Ras Al Hamra, Wadi Al Wattayah, Ras Al Hadd, Assiwayh and Natif.

In addition to the barrier sites, another feature that narrates the story is the Shell midden. Ancient waste dumps are known as Shell middens. They consist mainly of the remains of shellfish, meals and bones of fish, birds, turtles and mammals. Here, the archaeologists also found discarded tools, ornaments and fireplace charcoal.

The layers of a midden represent different phases of human occupation, often over a long period of time, "They can be dated with precision and contain valuable truths about everyday life. Middens also provide evidence of changes in climate and other environmental conditions."

One can also see the reconstruction of a Shell midden from the site of Ras Al Hamra dated 5600-4500 BC.

Early people established a semi-permanent settlement at

Ras Al Hamra on the coast of present-day Muscat before 6000 BC. The settlement touched on three different ecological zones: mangroves, sea coast and wadis - the dry riverbeds, which together provided for a diverse range of year-round resources.

According to the findings of the archaeologists, the people of Ras Al Hamra developed religious beliefs. They used advanced skills to improve the quality of their existence. They made specialised equipment for hunting and fishing and were skilled jewellery makers.

They lived in a circular hut, and outside the hut, they had fire pits, and these were used for cooking, warmth and protection. It was up to a metre wide and made by making a shallow hole and lining it with limestone pebbles. At the Oman Across Ages Museum, a screen displays the life people lived in Ras Al Hamra. Today, modern technology allows us to visualise how they must have lived just by moving the viewer left and right.

Authorities caution against risk of bushfires in post-khareef Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI

SALALAH, SEPT 9

With the khareef season having all but receded in Dhofar Governorate, authorities are cautioning local residents and tourists alike about the risk of bushfires triggered by barbecue sessions, campfires or any the unsafe disposal of a burning cigarette butt during this time.

While the khareef season brings much-needed rain to Dhofar, these rains also leave behind plenty of dead vegetation, creating perfect fuel for potential fires. Furthermore, the approaching dry conditions can turn even a small spark into a raging blaze.

Campers should always reach out to local authorities

to ascertain any existing fire restrictions. Only approved fire pits should be used, and campfires should never be left unattended.

"The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority in Dhofar Governorate urges vigilance and adherence to safety measures. With the arrival of spring, known locally as 'Serab,' following the Khareef season, dry grasses and wind conditions heighten the risk of wildfires. Complying with the Authority's safety guidelines is essential to prevent such incidents," it said in an advisory on Saturday.

Here are some further guidelines for safe camping:

1. Choose your campsite wisely: Opt for open areas, far from trees and shrubs.

2. Fire safety equipment: Keep a fire extinguisher or water hose readily available.

3. Never leave fires unattended: Even momentary neglect can have dire consequences.

4. Weather awareness: Be mindful of weather conditions, avoiding camping on hot, dry days.

5. Report any incidents: If you spot an unattended fire, notify authorities immediately.

6. Avoid lighting fires under trees or near dry vegetation.

7. Ensure your fire is completely extinguished before leaving it.

8. Dispose cigarettes and smoking materials with care.

9. Be cautious not to knock over hot coals or embers.

JABAL AL MASHAT IDEAL FOR EXTREME SPORTS



Jabal Al Mashat, home to rare trees and animals, is an ideal location for adventure and tourism. The Wilayat of Ibri sits at the foot of the mountain, which soars to a height of about 2,090 metres. Jabal Al Mashat is adorned with many waterfalls and water pools. Wadi Al Hajar, one of the largest wadis of Al Dhahirah Governorate, originates from Jabal Al Mashat. Adventure enthusiast Rashid bin Ali al Alawi said that Jabal Al Mashat overlooks a number of villages in the Wilayat of Ibri. He said the rugged and tough terrain poses a challenge as it lacks proper sign boards for safe climbing. Al Alawi said authorities must set more facilities to attract families to enjoy scenic views.



Hospitality industry witnesses surge in jobs

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As the average spending by inbound or domestic tourists is centred around accommodation (hotels) and food and beverages, the Sultanate of Oman saw the number of employees in the hotel activity increase during 2022 by 37.3 per cent to reach 20,294 from 14,780 in 2021, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Of these, 6,642 Omanis working in the hotel industry accounted for 32.7 per cent, an increase of 27 per cent in 2022 compared to 2021, while 13,652 expatriates accounted for 67.3 per cent of the total hotel employees.

Meanwhile, the report said that the spending of inbound tourists is basically focused on accommodation, food and beverage services, road transport, travel agencies, cultural services, and specific tourism goods and services.

Hotels in Muscat Governorate accounted for the largest number of employees (37.9 per cent) at 7,698, followed by 4,421 in Al Sharqiyah North, 3,091 in Dhofar and 2,058 in Al Dakhiliyah, among others.

The revenues of the hotel activity during 2022 increased by 82.7 per cent to reach RO224.4 million compared to RO122.8 million in 2021.

6,642

Omanis and

13,652

expatriates are working in the hotels of Oman

The value of hotel room rental income accounted for 61.8 per cent of the total revenues of the hotel activity to reach RO138.8 million during 2022, and the percentage of revenues from food and beverage sales amounted to 22.7 per cent and 8.9 per cent, respectively, while other revenues amounted to 6.6 per cent.

The number of hotels in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 13.1 per cent to reach 674 hotels in 2022 from 412 hotels in 2018, including 27 five-star hotels, 32 four-star hotels, 61 three-star hotels, 66 two-star hotels, while 488 hotels include one-star hotels, unrated hotels, lounges and hotel apartments.

The 674 hotels are distributed across all governorates, with 213 hotels in Muscat, 95 hotels in Al Sharqiyah South, 90 hotels in Al Dakhiliyah, 62 hotels in Al Batinah South, 45 hotels in Al Batinah North and Al Sharqiyah North Governorate and 41 hotels in Dhofar among others.

Forum on Zakat aims to boost social responsibility

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A training forum for the authorities responsible for managing and distributing Zakat in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, accompanied by the first annual meeting of the Zakat committees of 2023, will be held under the auspices of Abdullah bin Salem al Salmi, Executive President of Capital Market Authority at Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah on Sunday.

Entitled 'Modern Methods in Managing and Distributing Zakat Resources', the forum, which is conducted by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) in accordance with Oman's Vision 2040, aims at achieving decent living standards for the people of Oman and is based on the fact that achieving sustainable well-being requires creating a stimulating environment for social responsibility programmes, civil voluntary contributions, and programmes to support women and youth that aim at economic empowerment and social empowerment.

"The Forum on Modern Methods in Managing and Distributing Zakat Resources based on the Oman Vision 2040 envisages the promotion of social protection that requires organising the efforts of the



The three-day forum begins at Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah on Sunday.

concerned institutions and social responsibility projects and their governance, defining its principles and fields, managing it effectively and efficiently, and measuring the impact of the results," said a MoARA spokesperson.

The three-day forum is an effort to align social responsibility activities and the real needs of society, provide them with the necessary sustainable financing, and improve their levels of well-being. He further said that the principle of effective partnership between the government and private sectors and civil society institutions was proposed to be discussed at the forum.

The forum will exchange expertise and experiences among the various parties participating in the forum and introduce the Zakat committees in the Sultanate

of Oman to their counterparts in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and demonstrate their efforts and their social and pioneering role in effective distribution of Zakat.

"Some of the outcomes expected from the meeting are, clarification on the concepts related to Zakat and its legal limits, understanding the systems and laws for Zakat management and its governance, and stimulating various sectors and institutions to support the work of committees and cooperate with them in various programmes and events."

Scholars and eminent speakers like Dr Saif bin Salem al Hadi, Dr Ibrahim bin Rashid al Ghamary, Dr Ali bin Sulaiman al Jhdhami, Shaikh Aflah bin Ahmed al Khalili, and Ahmed bin Salem al Kharousi will share their insights at the three-day forum.

Crackdown on unlicensed fishing in Masirah Sea

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, Sept 9

The Fisheries Control Team of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate has announced the seizure of three fishing vessels operating in waters off-limits to fishing in the Masirah Sea.

The three fishing vessels were operating in restricted areas, all situated within a three-mile radius of Masirah Island's shoreline. In strict adherence to maritime regulations, the team impounded the vessels and also confiscated the fish caught unlawfully in these prohibited zones.

An expatriate worker found engaged in fishing activities without the required licence was detained as well, the ministry said in a post. Legal proceedings are currently in progress to address this violation, it stated. The team reiterated the ministry's commitment to enforce fishing regulations in Al Sharqiyah South. By swiftly responding to violations and enforcing maritime laws, they not only protect the sustainability of marine resources but also ensure a compliant fishing industry.



National conference on physiotherapy held

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health, represented by the Directorate-General of the Royal Hospital (the Rehabilitation and Physiotherapy Department), organised the national conference on the role of physiotherapy at the intensive care unit (ICU), under the auspices of HH Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said.

The conference was attended by 215 medical professionals from various medical specialties representing different



governorates. It coincides with the World Physiotherapy Day which is celebrated on September 8 each year.

Dr Amer bin Khamees al

Toobi, Consultant Speech and Hearing Diseases and Head of the Rehabilitation and Physiotherapy Department at the Royal Hospital, delivered the welcome

speech in which he highlighted the significance of holding the conference and the role of physiotherapy in critical care and in improving the patient's condition in terms of respiratory and movement.

A visual display about the Rehabilitation and Physiotherapy Department at the Royal Hospital and the physiotherapeutic and rehabilitation services provided by the critical care unit (CCU) at the Royal Hospital. — ONA

Smooth rocks testament to Oman's geological diversity

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

The formation of smooth rocks in the Sultanate of Oman is not only a geological marvel but also a feast for the senses. It is interesting to know about the formation of smooth rocks over the years.

When rains fall it cascades through the mountain faults and these waters converge to form cascading waterfalls over rocks, setting in motion the art of nature's slow sculpture over millions of years.

They eventually turn into smooth stones distinguished by their striking silver and white hues. It is a breathtaking spectacle when the sun's rays dance upon their surfaces. These rocks sometimes form natural reservoirs for seasonal rainwater, a crucial resource in the arid landscape.



However, the significance of these sites extends beyond their aesthetic allure. They have evolved into vital freshwater sources for the region's wild animals and birds. As the fertile season approaches, deer, ibex, foxes, and a diverse array of resident and migratory birds eagerly anticipate the life-sustaining gifts of nature. Rare species of butterflies and reptiles also find refuge within this ecological haven.

Accessing these remote sites

demands a robust physical constitution, often necessitating carefully planned expeditions. Dedicated nature enthusiasts meticulously research the geological characteristics of the terrain before embarking on their journeys. Equipped with the tools required for the adventure, some even seek guidance from local communities to navigate the quickest and least strenuous routes.

These pristine locations



provide a playground for outdoor enthusiasts, offering opportunities for activities such as hiking, mountaineering, and even swimming in the deep natural pools formed by these geological wonders. For those passionate about wildlife, it is an ideal spot for birdwatching, a chance to observe birds and their behaviours.

"We voluntarily promote these sites through social media," one Omani adventurer said. "Our messages are filled with detailed

information and captivating imagery, offering a glimpse into these sites' geological and natural splendour. However, we believe some of these locations could benefit from proper signage, especially those far from the main roads. This is a task that official authorities should consider undertaking."

Indeed, petrology, the study of rocks, plays a pivotal role in understanding the nuances of these geological formations. It provides invaluable insights

into the reasons behind their creation, texture, material and cultural significance, and geological history.

As the winter tourism season unfolds in the northern governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, many itineraries spotlight visits to villages nestled amidst these mountainous landscapes. These settlements are prized for their exceptional geological and biological diversity, attracting an increasing number of visitors.

With this surge in tourism, raising awareness about the importance of choosing safe pathways to reach these often remote sites, far removed from residential communities, is imperative. Visitors must equip themselves with safety tools to ensure a secure exploration experience.

As people continue to explore and appreciate these natural wonders, let us do so responsibly, preserving their splendour for generations.



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

KHOULA HOSPITAL is one of the major reference hospitals in Oman, which patients from all over the Sultanate frequent. However, parking availability has become a major concern for patients and visitors. They often find parking far from the hospital premises, which exposes patients and the elderly to exhaustion and fatigue due to walking a long distance to reach the hospital.

The parking issue at Khoula Hospital is not a recent development but a persistent concern that demands immediate attention. It requires plans to reduce crowding and provide alternatives to parking. With the increase in new health facilities that accommodate more patients, finding suitable parking spaces has become more difficult.

Saada al Numani, one of the hospital visitors, said, “We face difficulty due to the lack of parking spaces, as we have to leave the house very early, and when we arrive, we always find the parking spaces full.” Al Numani expressed dissatisfaction with one golf cart in Khoula Hospital, saying, “Khoula Hospital is one of the largest hospitals in Oman and receives huge numbers of patients, and more than one golf cart is supposed to be allocated to it.”

Al Numani suggests coordinating the number of appointments per day to be consistent with the number of available parking spaces and providing more than one golf cart to transport visitors to reduce this crisis.

Salem al Buraiki, a frequent visitor to the hospital, shared his experience, saying, “I find it very difficult to secure a parking spot during every visit to the hospital. We are often forced to park far away from the hospital grounds, resulting in lengthy walks. This can be especially burdensome for critically ill patients and elderly individuals who struggle with long distances, especially in the scorching sun.”

While Khoula Hospital has attempted to mitigate the issue by providing a golf cart to assist the elderly and individuals with special needs, it is evident that one golf cart is insufficient to cater to the significant volume of patients and visitors.

The parking lot at the hospital is very large, and finding a convenient spot is a rarity, necessitating long walks for many.

Hassan al Wahaibi, another visitor, echoed these sentiments, stating, “We face significant challenges finding parking during each hospital visit, resulting in distant parking spots and extended walks. It is imperative to address this issue promptly. Increasing the number of golf carts to assist critically ill and elderly patients is one viable solution, alongside addressing the shortage of parking spaces.”

Al Wahaibi emphasised the importance of prioritising this matter, considering the hospital’s steadily increasing number of visitors. He stressed that individuals seeking medical attention should be able to search for parking spaces or endure long walks, especially those needing immediate medical care.

Yousef al Rahbi, another concerned visitor, suggested, “Efficient parking management strategies must be implemented to accommodate reviewers’ vehicles effectively, particularly during peak times. This will ensure smooth traffic flow and provide convenient access to the hospital.”

“In addition to increasing the number of golf carts and deploying them across all parking areas in the hospital to transport all patients and visitors to the hospital entrance or the emergency and accident department or to other hospital facilities and vice versa. This is to facilitate the movement of patients and visitors within the hospital,” Al Rahbi said.

PARKING WOES AT KHOULA HOSPITAL

CALL FOR MORE GOLF CARTS TO FERRY PATIENTS AND SAVE THEM FROM WALKING LONG DISTANCE IN SCORCHING SUMMER



I find it very difficult to secure a parking spot during every visit to the hospital. We are often forced to park far away from the hospital grounds, resulting in lengthy walks. This can be especially burdensome for critically ill patients and elderly individuals

SALEM AL BURAIKI, Hospital visitor





A man carries his belongings in the flooded village of Palamas near the city of Karditsa, central Greece. — AFP

Rescues under way in Greek cut off towns

ATHENS: Firefighters backed by the army were rescuing hundreds of people on Saturday in villages in central Greece blocked off by floods that have claimed at least 10 lives.

“More than 2,850 people have been rescued since the beginning of the bad weather,” fire department spokesman Yannis Artopios said.

“There are still many people in the villages around Karditsa, Palamas and towards Trikala. They are not missing, they are trapped,” he said, adding that six people were officially missing.

Several houses remain under water in the village of Palamas and rescue workers were trying to reach marooned people.

“We were stuck without help or information for hours. The emergency services 112 message to evacuate arrived just as we were facing up to the flooding and we had no means of escape,” said 54-year-old Palamas resident Eleni Patouli.

The situation also remains worrying near the city of Larissa, a few kilometres to the east.

The flooding has laid waste to thousands of hectares of rich

agricultural land and farmers have also lost substantial livestock numbers.

In the port city of Volos, the water supply has become a problem, since pumping stations and a large part of the supply network were damaged. The health ministry has warned that the water is not suitable for drinking.

“Gastroenteritis cases have appeared and there is a risk of that increasing if people don’t have enough water. Authorities need to distribute at least two litres of drinking water to everyone,” Elena Riza said, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Athens School of Medicine.

Traffic also remained challenging on Saturday with the highway connecting Thessaloniki, the country’s second largest city, and the capital Athens cut off in several places.

The storm, named “Daniel”, struck the central coastal region of Magnesia on Monday and Tuesday before hitting other towns such as Karditsa and Trikala further inland. — AFP

G20 leaders paper over divisions on Ukraine, climate issues



Leaders of the G20 nations attend the second working session of the G20 Leaders’ Summit at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi. — AFP

NEW DELHI: G20 leaders papered over deep divisions on the war in Ukraine and tackling climate change on Saturday, avoiding direct criticism of Moscow-Ukraine war and any concrete pledge to phase out polluting fossil fuels.

Leaders of the grouping, which brings together Russia as well as some of Ukraine’s most ardent backers, have struggled to agree on much, in particular about the 18-month-old dispute.

But facing a major diplomatic embarrassment, host India had pressed members to agree a common statement at a two-day summit in the capital New Delhi.

The Group of 20 denounced the use of force for territorial

gain but refrained from direct criticism of Russia by name.

“There were different views and assessments of the situation,” the leaders’ statement said.

European nations and the United States had pressed for the G20 not to water down its earlier condemnation of a war that has caused food and fuel price spikes worldwide.

With long-time Russian ally India in the G20 chair, Ukraine’s allies appeared to have failed in that bid.

Kyiv’s foreign ministry denounced the statement as “nothing to be proud of”, but a top White House official said Washington was happy with the outcome.

“From our perspective, it does a very good job,” US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters.

He said the G20 statement stood up “for the principle that states cannot use force to seek territorial acquisition or to violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty or political independence of other states.”

On climate, too, the G20 found minimal common ground, despite meeting in what the EU’s climate monitor says is likely to be the hottest year in human history.

With major fossil fuel producers and coal-dependent nations around the table, there was no overarching commitment

to phase out the polluting fuels.

Such a measure was deemed “indispensable” by the United Nations just a day earlier to achieve a net-zero goal.

Instead, G20 countries pledged to triple renewable energy sources by 2030 while committing only to a “phasedown” of coal “in line with national circumstances”.

The G20 leading economies account for 85 per cent of global GDP and a similar amount of global climate-warming emissions.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked leaders for their “hard work” and banged a ceremonial gavel to adopt the declaration. — AFP

Russia sticks to demands on Black Sea grain deal

MOSCOW: Russia said on Saturday it was sticking to its conditions for a return to the Black Sea grain deal which it quit in July.

In particular, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia needed its state agricultural bank - and not a subsidiary of the bank, as proposed by the United Nations - to be reconnected to the international SWIFT bank payments system.

“All our conditions are perfectly well known. They do

not need interpretation, they are absolutely concrete and all this is absolutely achievable,” Peskov said.

“Therefore Russia maintains its responsible, clear and consistent position, which has been repeatedly voiced by the president.”

The Black Sea deal was brokered by Türkiye and the United Nations in July 2022 to enable Ukraine to export grain by sea despite the war and help ease a global food crisis.

It was accompanied by an



Combines load wheat into a truck during harvest in a field of a local agricultural enterprise in the Cherlasky district of the Omsk region, Russia. — Reuters

agreement to facilitate Russia’s own exports of food and fertiliser, which Moscow says has not been fulfilled. Since quitting the grain deal, Russia has repeatedly bombed Ukrainian ports and grain stores, prompting Kyiv and the West to accuse it of using food as a weapon.

Moscow’s uncompromising restatement of its position came five days after President Vladimir Putin met his Turkish counterpart Tayyip Erdogan and discussed the grain issue.

Russia appears to have drawn

encouragement from Erdogan’s statement at that meeting that Ukraine should “soften its approaches” in talks over reviving the deal, and export more grain to Africa rather than Europe. Ukraine said it would not alter its stand and would not be hostage to “Russian blackmail”.

Russia says its grain and fertiliser exports, though not specifically sanctioned by the West, face barriers in practice because of sanctions affecting port access, insurance, logistics and payments. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

KYIV

Japanese FM discusses Ukraine aid during visit

Japan’s Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi discussed the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine in a visit to the war-torn country on Saturday, Ukraine’s Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said.

“We discussed the prospects of cooperation in housing reconstruction, ensuring global food security, supporting small and medium-sized businesses, and humanitarian demining,” Shmygal said after a meeting



with Hayashi.

Ukraine has already received \$2.1 billion in macro-financial assistance from Japan, Shmygal said. — AFP

LONDON

UK police arrest escaped terror suspect

UK police on Saturday arrested a terror suspect who escaped from a London prison earlier this week, sparking a nationwide manhunt.

“Metropolitan Police officers have arrested Daniel Khalife. Officers apprehended him just before 11am in the Chiswick area, and he is currently in police custody,” the force said.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak told UK media he was “very pleased with the news”.



“My thanks to the police officers for their fantastic work over the past couple of days,” he added, as he attends the G20 summit in India. — AFP

TEHRAN

UN, Iran urge cooperation to battle sandstorm

Countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia must work together to combat sand and dust storms made increasingly severe by climate change, the United Nations and Iran said on Saturday.

“Cooperation is key. I urge you to use your time in Tehran to build partnerships, increase cooperation and commit to practical action,” UN chief Antonio Guterres said in a video broadcast. Iran’s President



called on countries in the region to create “a fund” to pursue common solutions. Sand and dust storms are expected to increase. — AFP

OVER 1,000 DEAD

RESCUERS DIG FOR SURVIVORS



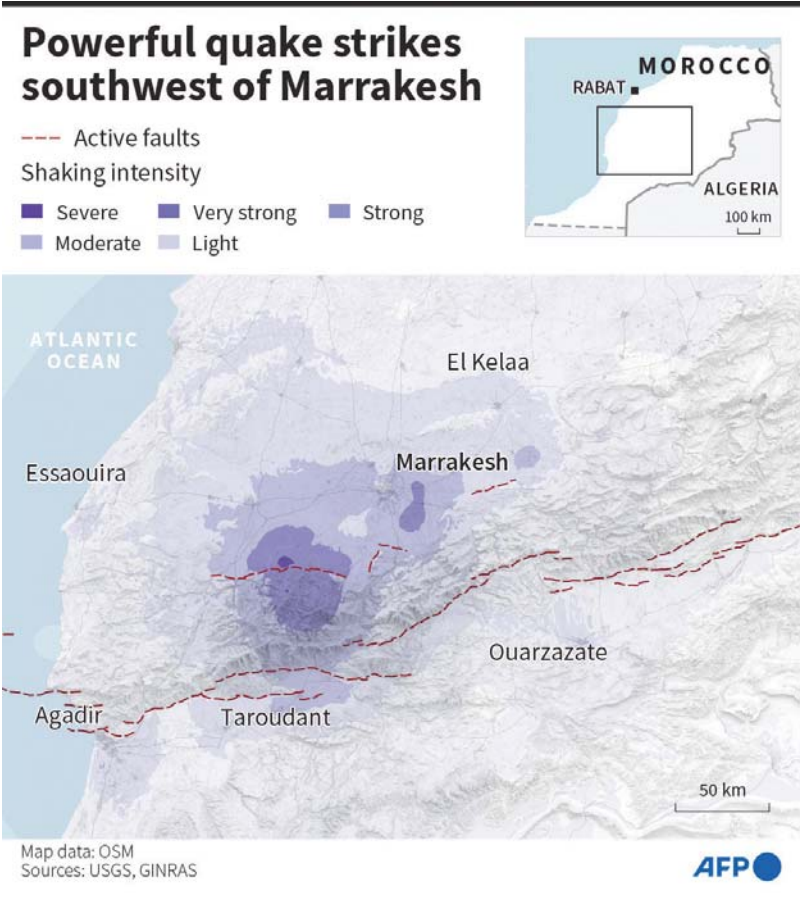
A man looks at damage in the historic city of Marrakech, following a powerful earthquake in Morocco. — Reuters

AMIZMIZ: A powerful earthquake in Morocco has killed more than 1,000 people and injured hundreds more, the country’s deadliest in more than six decades, toppling houses in remote mountain villages where rescuers dug through rubble for survivors.

The quake struck in Morocco’s High Atlas mountains late on Friday night, damaging historic buildings in Marrakech, the nearest city to the epicentre, while the most badly affected areas were in the mountains nearby.

The Interior Ministry said 1,037 people had been killed and another 672 injured by the quake, gauged by the US Geological Survey at a magnitude of 6.8 with an epicentre some 72 km southwest of Marrakech.

In the village of Amizmiz near the epicentre rescue workers picked through rubble with their bare hands.



“When I felt the earth shaking beneath my feet and the house leaning, I rushed to get my kids out. But my neighbours couldn’t,” said Mohamed Azaw. “Unfortunately no one was found alive in that family. The father and son were found dead and they are still looking for the mother and the daughter.”

About 20 men including firefighters and soldiers in fatigues stood atop the ruin of a house in Amizmiz as they tried to remove rubble, bits of carpet and furniture protruding from gaps between pancaked concrete floors.

The quake, which hit at around 11 p.m., affected a sweep of the High Atlas mountain range. Tremors were felt as far away as Huelva and Jaen in Andalusia in southern Spain, Spanish television RTVE reported.

Street camera footage in Marrakech showed the moment the earth began to shake, as men suddenly looked around and

jumped up, and others ran for shelter into an alleyway and then fled as dust and debris tumbled around them.

In Marrakech, where 13 people were confirmed dead, residents spent the night in the open, afraid to go home.

In the heart of its old city, a Unesco World Heritage site, a mosque minaret had fallen in Jemaa al-Fna Square.

Injured people filtered into Marrakech from the surrounding areas seeking treatment.

State television footage from the Moulay Ibrahim area some 40 km south of Marrakech showed dozens of houses collapsed at the foothills of a mountain, and residents digging graves as groups of women stood in the street.

Montasir Itri, a resident of the village of Asni near the epicentre, said most houses there were damaged.

— Reuters



Rescue workers search for survivors in a collapsed house in Moulay Brahim, Al Haouz province. – AFP



Residents take shelter outside at a square following an earthquake in Marrakesh. – AFP



Rescuers carry a search operation following a powerful earthquake, in Amizmiz, in Morocco. – Reuters

MOROCCO QUAKE LEAVES HEARTS AND HERITAGE BROKEN, WORLD LEADERS OFFER SOLIDARITY



A general view of damage in the historic city of Marrakech, following a powerful earthquake in Morocco. – Reuters

MARRAKESH: The old city, or medina, of Marrakesh is on the UNESCO World Heritage list, drawing tourists who help account for about seven per cent of Morocco’s economy.

“We were asleep when the quake hit. Part of the roof fell and we found ourselves trapped inside but my husband and I managed to escape,” Ghabar recounted after the “nightmarish” events.

Interior ministry data on Saturday listed at least 13 quake fatalities in Marrakesh, known for its views of graceful red buildings set against palm trees and snow-capped mountains.

One of its landmarks, Jemaa el-Fna square, provided refuge for hundreds of residents and tourists seeking safety after the disaster. Some slept on the bare ground, without even a cover over themselves.

Others, like Ghannou Najem, in her 80s, spent a sleepless night.

Najem had arrived in Marrakesh from Casablanca, further north, just hours before the quake.

“I came to visit the city with my daughter and granddaughter,” who had gone out and left her in their hotel room when the quake hit.

“I was nearly asleep when I heard the doors and the shutters banging. I went outside in a panic. I thought I was going to die alone,” Najem said.

Leaders and diplomats the world over expressed condolences and support on Saturday for Morocco after a devastating earthquake struck near tourist hotspot Marrakesh.

The 6.8-magnitude earthquake that hit late on Friday killed more than 1,000 people and injured more than 1,000 more, many of them critically, according to Moroccan authorities.

Support poured in from leaders across the world, including:

The pope expressed his “profound solidarity” with Morocco after the quake, according to the Vatican.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, of Morocco’s cross-strait neighbour Spain, expressed his “solidarity and support to the people of Morocco in the wake of this terrible earthquake... Spain is with the victims of this tragedy”.

US President Joe Biden expressed his sympathy on Saturday for the victims of an earthquake in Morocco which killed more than 800 people,

adding the United States was “ready to provide any necessary assistance”.

“I am deeply saddened by the loss of life and devastation caused by the earthquake in Morocco,” he said in a statement. “Our thoughts and prayers are with all those impacted by this terrible hardship.”

The European Council President Charles Michel wrote on X, formerly Twitter, “that EU stands ready to support Morocco in these difficult moments”.

Swiss President Alain Berset expressed his condolences. The country’s foreign ministry said it activated a crisis cell and is evaluating sending aid.

Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a “message of condolence” to Morocco on Saturday, state media reported, joining a chorus of international support for the North African country in the wake of a devastating earthquake.

“On September 9, President Xi Jinping sent a message of condolence to King Mohammed VI of Morocco over the severe earthquake in Morocco,” official broadcaster CCTV said.

Algeria offered “its sincere condolences to the brotherly Moroccan people for the victims of the earthquake”, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The president of the United Arab Emirates, Shaikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, said we “stand with the Kingdom of Morocco during this difficult time and wish a speedy recovery ahead to all those affected”.

He also ordered an “air bridge to deliver critical relief” to the country, according to state news agency WAM.

The head of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, said he “learnt with great sadness of the tragic consequences of the earthquake that hit the kingdom of Morocco”, expressing his “sincere condolences” to the king, the Moroccan people and the families of the victims.

The Secretary-General of the Jeddah-based Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, Houssein Ibrahim Taha, prayed for “mercy on the victims and a speedy recovery for the injured”.

UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said he was “deeply saddened by news of the quake.”

Teams from the Moroccan Red Crescent responded immediately supporting the affected people”.

— AFP

Would you rather work from home?



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

The last week of August marks the end of the school holidays and the traffic on that day is very busy causing stress and delays for people driving to their workplaces. Working from home, which became popular during the pandemic lockdowns and social distancing, would be a smart alternative to avoid traffic jams. The question that occupies the minds of many companies after the end of the pandemic is, “Would remote work be better than office work?”

In 2020, Harvard Business Review published a survey of over 600 employees in the United States exploring the impact of remote work. The study found that participants adapted to virtual work quickly, and many reported increased productivity. They also reported reduction in negative emotions and task-related conflicts, along with improvements in self-efficacy and focus. The study showed that after two months of remote work, individuals began to establish consistent routines and manage their time better. The debate over whether working from home is better than office work continues even after the

pandemic.

Advocates for office work believe it boosts workers’ productivity, mood, and time management. It also enables them to communicate face to face and develop better networking opportunities while being more cost-effective. On the other hand, the downside involves a long commute and busy traffic, while some organisations encourage rigid working hours and dress codes. Some believe office work is more likely to cause work-related stress.

On the other hand, people favouring working from home believe it saves time spent commuting to and from the office, allows workers to achieve a better work-life balance, and reduces carbon footprint. They acknowledge that people working from home may be easily distracted, lack the necessary office equipment, and fall prey to toxic productivity when the worker tends to overwork in the absence of a fixed office working hours, which can eventually lead to stress and burnout.

I asked a friend who is an engineer about his opinion. he said, “I strongly prefer working from home due to several reasons. Firstly, it

ADVOCATES FOR OFFICE WORK BELIEVE IT BOOSTS WORKERS’ PRODUCTIVITY, MOOD, AND TIME MANAGEMENT. IT ALSO ENABLES THEM TO COMMUNICATE FACE TO FACE AND DEVELOP BETTER NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

offers a remarkable level of flexibility, allowing me to have greater control over my work hours and schedule. The absence of a daily commute not only saves me valuable time but also reduces expenses related to transportation, work attire, and lunch. The advantages extend beyond financial savings. Working from home greatly enhances my productivity, as it minimises workplace distractions, enabling me to focus more effectively on my tasks. This, in turn, contributes to a healthier work-life balance, alleviating stress commonly associated with commuting and office-related issues. Moreover, the ability to create a comfortable and tailored workspace at home facilitates better health management. Additionally, the environmental benefits are notable, as fewer commuters mean reduced traffic congestion and lower pollution levels, aligning with sustainability goals.

Finally, whether you prefer working in the office or from home, or a mixture of both, remember to have a balanced work-life schedule so you can prevent work-related stress and be more productive in the long term.

Conspiracy theories falsely link wildfires to ‘smart cities’

MARISHA GOLDHAMER

Disinformation about deadly wildfires in the United States and Canada has run rampant across social media, with posts falsely blaming coordinated arson, lasers —and plans to develop “smart cities.”

Allegations that the fires are a deliberate policy to clear areas for urban redesign deploy screenshots of government websites or headlines about everything from traffic monitoring to conferences about new technology.

“So what are the odds that we have two fires in two places within a week’s time, and both of these places have initiatives to become smart-intelligent cities?” says a woman in a TikTok video, pointing to Lahaina, Hawaii and West Kelowna, British Columbia —both of which were ravaged by wildfires in August.

Some of the videos fact-checked by AFP are no longer available on TikTok, but copies continue to circulate on Facebook, Instagram and X.

Kelowna did publish an “intelligent city” strategy in 2020, but there is no evidence that ground is being cleared on purpose —a theory that has amassed millions of views in clips shared across platforms.

“I cannot conceive why a government would intentionally burn down a city to increase its use of smart city technologies,” said Harvey Miller, director of the Center for Urban and Regional Analysis at The Ohio State University.

“There is no reason to destroy infrastructure to rebuild it smarter.”

The conspiracy theories come amid widespread distrust in digitising urban areas. A 2022 Axios-Momentive poll found only half of Americans are comfortable with the prospect of living in a smart city. Kristina Dahl, principal climate scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists, said claims that fires are being used to force changes on communities were “utterly baseless.”

Similar conspiracy theories have circulated online after other disasters in North America, including Hurricane Idalia in Florida and a February train derailment in Ohio.

In Canada, plans for smart cities are often linked to supposed climate lockdowns or the elimination of cash. Sometimes the rumours make their way to the real world.

David Mitchell, the mayor of Bridgewater, Nova Scotia, said in May that a disinformation campaign targeted his city’s participation in Canada’s Smart Cities Challenge. — AFP

A transport corridor bypassing Suez

SERGEY PLEKHANOV

The 19th century is a time of tremendous achievements in science and technology. It was then that humanity reached the power that allowed it to change the direction of the world’s trade routes. If in previous centuries they learned to connect inland waterways with canals and gateways, then in the age of steam and electricity they swung at the construction of artificial rivers separating continents. Between Africa and Asia, a 160-kilometer path was struck, called the Suez Canal. This project was given universal significance.

A few decades later, the equally great construction of the Panama Canal was completed, halving the route from Asia to Europe. But even two isthmuses were not the limit for the creative imagination of engineers. Against the backdrop of the success of their Western colleagues, the Russians began to develop a project that would make it possible to further shorten the path from the Indian Ocean to Europe and, along with the Suez Canal, bypass the Black Sea straits, which were controlled by the Ottoman Empire, hostile to Russia.

The general outlines of this project were presented in 1910. But the First World War, and then the Russian Revolution, did not allow the project to take off. Relations between the Soviet Union and Iran under Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi were not very friendly, so the canal project was forgotten for many decades. In the 1970s, it resurfaced, and Soviet engineers continued development. But again the revolution interfered – this time the Iranian one.

The new era of confrontation with the West, in which Russia and Iran became participants, has led to a significant rapprochement between the two countries. And recently in the media began to appear messages that the old project can find a new life. The establishment of the International Transport Corridor “North-South” was agreed upon by a number of countries back in 2002, and now it is entering the practical phase.

It’s not just about confrontation. Significant changes have taken place



If today the delivery of goods from India to Europe takes from 25 to 38 days, then along the International Transport Corridor it will take 15-18 days, while the cost will decrease by 30-40 per cent.

in the economic development of the countries of the East. China, India, Southeast Asia have become the main suppliers of goods to the markets of Europe, they will be the main beneficiaries of the new, shorter and faster route. While the investment seems huge, economists believe the project will pay off quickly, in about 5 years.

THE NEW ROUTE FROM EAST TO WEST THROUGH IRAN, THE CASPIAN SEA AND RUSSIA WORKS IS BENEFICIAL TO OMAN, LOCATED DIRECTLY NEAR THE MOUTH OF THE CANAL

The canal route between the Caspian and the Indian Ocean basin can be laid both along the western part of Iran and along the eastern part, the second option is preferable, since this area is mostly flat. The main difficulty in implementation is that the level of the Caspian is 19 meters below the level of the ocean. It will require the construction of many locks and a large

expenditure of energy to raise water for passing ships. And Iran is not rich in energy capacities. Therefore, a “land channel” — a railway route from the border of Iran with Azerbaijan to the Sea of Oman — seems more realistic.

The missing links of such a route have already begun to be built, without waiting for a decision on the fate of the canal. It will take three years to connect the transport network of Iran and Azerbaijan with a 165-kilometer branch line, build hundreds of kilometres of infrastructure in the centre of Iran, which will make it possible to switch to electric traction, and hence increase the capacity of trains. The main goods supplied in universal containers will be food, metals, wood and paper, machinery and equipment, and mineral fertilisers.

By 2030, the volume of traffic on this route will reach 14-24 million tonnes. If today the delivery of goods from India to Europe takes from 25 to 38 days, then along the International Transport Corridor it will take 15-18 days, while the cost will decrease by 30-40 per cent.

If the new route from East to West through Iran, the Caspian Sea and Russia works, the countries located near its route will receive tangible benefits. Oman, located directly near the mouth of the canal – both water and railway- will be in the most advantageous position.

Once imagined... now real

AREN'T innovation and invention marvellous words? The implication is not just of something new or better, but something to change the world... like electric cars are becoming, almost life-changing. I love it!

If we think back on those things that have changed the world forever, that even a short time before would have seemed absolutely impossible... these evolutions have led the way. The discovery of fire must have been mind boggling at the time. Not only for warmth, but for cooking, hardening wooden spear-points, smelting metals for a thousand uses, created new means of processing foods and skins, and so much more.

The wheel though, for me, arguably set the ball rolling, and once the implementation of an axle led to the first carts, mankind's ability to move around, to travel, even in the most basic way, taking their possessions with them, made the world a very different place. The wheel also provided a 'seed' to so much that followed, from farming, to grinding and processing grains, to trading, to clocks, to propellers, turbines, and even the modern computer. It's an invention that has been with us now for 5,500 years, and will influence our progress forever.

The compass has been with us too for a while, and while almost taken for granted today as few of us actually use them... but we do use maps, we do need to know where 'other places' are, we do all use Google maps and GPS. Most of all, the compass inspired travel, exploration and discovery, doing exactly that, inspiring our ancestors, and transforming every generation since to travel.

The printing press, in a crude form has been with us since Oriental scholars used woodcut impressions over 1,500 years ago, but the printed word exploded with German, Johannes Gutenberg's invention of a printing press using metal typesets in just about 700 years ago. This forerunner of the print media, has driven the emergence of the media as a gargantuan social and political influence. It has educated and informed billions, allowed the spread of several written languages and religions through the Holy Quran, the Bible, and other significant tomes of



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faith, of international prominence and primacy. Finally, the printing press has led to the printing of banknotes of hundreds of denominations, changing all of the world, forever. The internal combustion engine has made us all somewhat more adventurous, and a little lazy, but has evolved with almost indecent haste, become so much faster every year. It evolved through an inspired need to use energy derived from non-physical effort, chemically induced power and therefore pressure and movement, enabling a widespread industrial revolution, and a plethora of different transportation options on land, sea, and air.

One of the key surprises is that it's only less than a century since Scotsman Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin in 1928, growing in a petri dish, after he returned from a holiday. Honestly, where would we be without penicillin today? And whether it was an 'accident or design thing doesn't really matter does it? Along with these, batteries, contraception, lightbulbs, mobile phones, nails, screws, submarines, the 'bomb', the telephone, televisions, vaccinations, X-rays, and of course the Internet, have all played their parts in history... so where will the next breakthrough come from?

I am fascinated at the new foiling mono-hulled yachts designed by the Emirates New Zealand Americas Cup Team, which can, in 10 mph winds, do upwards of 40 mph. However that, as impressive as it is, barely holds a feather to their hydrogen-powered chase boat. 'Chase Zero', is a 10 metre hydrogen-powered, foiling, 'crash boat' that can do almost 50 mph, powered by two hydrogen cells, a renewable energy source of inestimable potential. These two, I believe, have implications for the future of energy in mainstream vehicular propulsion. We will see...

Maybe a universal language will one day emerge, or a way to balance wealth and equity... No, you're right, that sort of thing will never happen... but the lottery dream remains doesn't it? So whether it was the Emperor Augustus, or Queen Elizabeth I who was the first to 'lotterise' fundraising, we can all dream of innovation, invention, and the money to make things happen.

THE DISCOVERY OF FIRE MUST HAVE BEEN MIND BOGGLING AT THE TIME. NOT ONLY FOR WARMTH, BUT FOR COOKING AND OTHER PURPOSES

A BUBBLE PLAY!



A child plays with bubbles from a street performer at the Old Port, Marseille, France, on Saturday. – Reuters

A new financing pact for climate-vulnerable countries

AMID an escalating climate emergency and a global debt crisis, calls for a new "fit for climate" global financial architecture are growing louder throughout the developing world. The urgent need for decisive action has been underscored by Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Mottley's Bridgetown Initiative, the V20 group of climate-vulnerable countries, and the recent Paris Summit for a New Global Financing Pact. This week's Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi presented a unique opportunity to promote much-needed measures to support low-income countries in pursuing sustainable growth.

The situation is particularly urgent in Africa. According to recent estimates by the African Development Bank (AfDB), the continent requires \$2.8 trillion in climate financing between 2020 and 2030. But Africa currently receives only 3 per cent of global climate finance, of which just 14 per cent comes from the private sector. It is worth noting that the continent accounts for 3.8 per cent of global greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions, while the Global North is responsible for 90 per cent.

But even though the world's most vulnerable countries are bearing the brunt of a crisis they did not create,



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development-related climate financing has actually decreased, as has overall development aid to Africa. Preliminary 2022 figures show that flows of bilateral official development assistance (ODA) from OECD Development Assistance Committee members to Africa totalled \$34 billion last year, a decline of 7.4 per cent in real terms compared to 2021. Meanwhile, total private market assets under management surged to \$11.7 trillion in 2022, having increased at an annual rate of nearly 20 per cent since 2017.

Given the severity and urgency of the climate crisis, the international community must rally to devise and agree on concrete solutions ahead of November's United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai. To build resilience against inevitable climate shocks, we must fully fund the "loss and damage" fund global leaders agreed to establish at last year's COP27 in Egypt, agree to double funding for adaptation efforts, and apply the "polluter pays" principle to maritime activities.

To reduce GHG emissions and mitigate the worst effects

of climate change will require mobilising financial resources on an unprecedented scale. But the proposals currently circulating among global policymakers lack focus. In the face of the greatest challenge to human survivability, we risk getting trapped, like Sisyphus, in a cycle of futile, incremental actions. In the lead-up to COP28, we must focus on a few essential steps that could spur global climate action and help limit global warming to the internationally agreed target of 1.5° Celsius.



Africa currently receives only 3 per cent of global climate finance.

First, we must tackle Africa's debt problem. The international community must support vulnerable developing countries grappling with debt crises and enable them to invest in climate adaptation, resilience, and sustainable development. To achieve debt sustainability, developing countries must diversify their economies, negotiate debt-restructuring deals, foster partnerships with MDBs, the private sector, and philanthropies, and ensure transparent and accountable

governance. Developed countries and global financial institutions, especially the 550 members of the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero, could support these efforts by providing concessional financing for climate-adaptation policies.

Second, ongoing efforts to reform the system of multilateral development banks, including the World Bank's "Evolution Roadmap" initiative, could enable MDBs to assist developing countries at the speed and scale necessary to meet global development goals and address challenges such as climate change, energy access, and pandemic preparedness. These reforms should also seek to direct resources towards regional lenders such as the AfDB and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Third, significant investments should be redirected towards the green transition, with a particular focus on expanding climate-vulnerable countries' access to renewable energy. To this end, African governments could initiate regional programs to harness their natural resources to produce clean energy.

sport

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Brazil's forward Neymar celebrates after scoring a goal during the 2026 Fifa World Cup South American qualifiers. —AFP

BRAZIL THRASH BOLIVIA 5-1 IN NEYMAR’S RECORD-BREAKING APPEARANCE

BELEM: Brazil lived up to expectations by smashing Bolivia 5-1 at home in their 2026 World Cup qualifiers opener on Friday, with Neymar surpassing the late great Pele as the country’s top scorer.

The 31-year-old Neymar, who recently joined Saudi side Al Hilal, bounced back after missing a penalty in the first half, scoring two goals in the 61st and 93rd minutes to become the country’s all-time top scorer with 79 goals.

“Congratulations Neymar for surpassing the King in goals for Brazil,” the official account of the late Brazil soccer legend Pele wrote on X, the platform formerly called Twitter. “Surely Pele is applauding you today!”

Neymar said after the game, “I never imagined reaching this record. I want to say that I am not a better player than Pele. I always wanted to make my own story, write my name in the history of

Brazilian football and the national team. And today I did that.”

Neymar has played 125 times for Brazil and was part of the team that won the Confederations Cup in 2013. Real Madrid’s Rodrygo also shone with a double, opening the scoring in the 24th minute and bagging his second in the 52nd off a great through ball from Newcastle United’s Bruno Guimaraes for 3-0.

“It really is a very special day...

Neymar is my idol, being able to help him become the top scorer will stay with me forever,” the 22-year-old Rodrygo told Brazilian broadcaster TV Globo.

Raphinha, who replaced Antony in the Brazilian squad, scored to make it 2-0 in the opening seconds of the second half with a shot at the far post after picking up Neymar’s pass in the edge of the box.

Bolivia got their consolation goal through Victor Abrego’s powerful shot in

the 78th minute.

Brazil will look to continue their good form when they visit Peru on Tuesday in the second round of CONMEBOL qualifiers.

Elsewhere, Uruguay started their qualifying campaign on the right foot by beating Chile 3-1 at home to hand former Leeds United coach Marcelo Bielsa his first official win at the helm.

— AFP

Al Harthy lines up P12 on GTE Am grid for FIA WEC Rd6

FUJI: Aston Martin Vantage GTE racer Ahmad al Harthy had to settle for a top 12 placing in FIA World Endurance Championship qualifying at Fuji in Japan, after a drying session which had initially looked incredibly promising for Oman Racing with TF Sport.

While expecting a tough and competitive battle throughout, the choice to run with slick Michelin tyres on the initially wet track proved to be the correct one. As Fuji Speedway dried more and more though, Al Harthy’s early session timesheet-topping performance couldn’t be sustained as the life of the tyres ebbed away.

Setting the pace with his first flying lap, a time of 1m 43.517 seconds, the Omani – on his first visit to the world-famous Japanese track – improved markedly the next time around to 1m 40.128 seconds and stayed on provisional pole, but by a reduced margin of 0.171 seconds. Taking another half second off his best on his

third flyer, Al Harthy remained on pole momentarily but was then edged back to third. With six minutes to go in the session only half a second covered the top six runners.

BEST OF THE SESSION

He responded with his best of the session, a time of 1m 39.344 seconds to retake pole, but that was the most he could extract out of the car and the Michelin tyres and was ultimately edged back to 12th position and a sixth row start for the big race, the penultimate round of the FIA WEC season. Al Harthy, who is supported by key partners Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS, is determined to try and make progress in the weekend’s race – his first around Fuji Speedway – and will be challenging as hard as he can along with team-mates Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood.

Ahmad al Harthy said “It was a drying track and we opted to

go out with slicks, which was the right call, but I think I maybe pushed too much on the first three laps. For 60 per cent of the session we were P1, but as the track became a lot quicker our tyre pressures were going high and so we lost performance and lost the window. Only 0.5 seconds would move us from where we are into the top three, so it shows how competitive it was. Had the session ended five minutes earlier, I’m sure we would have been pole.

“Looking at data and studying for tomorrow, I think we should be able to have a stronger race and a better performance overall. I’m looking forward to the 6 Hours of Fuji and pushing from the very first lap to see what we can achieve. It’s our first time here, weather conditions have been changing so much with storms, so I think in the race we will need to be in the right place at the right time. We will focus as always and hopefully have a strong car.”





Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen celebrates winning the men's 2000m. – REUTERS

Ingebritsen moves 2,000m into 21st century with new record

BRUSSELS: Jakob Ingebrigtsen set the first outdoor world record of his career in the little-run 2,000m at the Diamond League meeting in Brussels on Friday.

The women's 200m world champion Shericka Jackson was also in blazing form as she clocked the fourth fastest time in history in 21.48 sec. Ingebrigtsen, 22, ran 4min 43.13sec to smash a record set in 1999, before he was born, by Moroccan great Hicham El Guerrouj, by more than a second and a half.

The 2,000m is not on the Olympic or World Championships programme, but the Norwegian said: "It's always fun to break a record."

Ingebrigtsen is the reigning Olympic champion in the 1500m and has held the world indoor record at the distance since February 2022 when he ran 3:30.60. El Guerrouj holds that outdoor record too with a time of

3:26.00 set in July 1998.

Ingebrigtsen ran the fourth fastest ever outdoor 1500m time when he timed 3:27.14 in July but the lost his world title to Britain's Josh Kerr in Budapest in August.

Jackson, a 29-year-old Jamaican, is also chasing a longstanding record. She set the second fastest time in history at the World Championships in Budapest but her time of 21.41sec was still 0.07sec off the world record set by the late Florence Griffith-Joyner at the Seoul Olympics in September 1988.

After her run on Friday, she now owns three of the four fastest women's 200m times in history.

Jackson is due to conclude her summer season at the Diamond League final in Eugene, Oregon in mid-September.

"It has been a good season and I hope to get one more win and to get closer to that record," Jackson said. — AFP

SEEB THRASH OMAN CLUB TO MAKE EXCITING START TO OFA CUP



AHMED AL KAABI

MUSCAT, SEPT 9

The Oman Football Association (OFA) Cup kicked off this Friday, featuring thrilling matches involving Omantel League clubs.

In the opening match, defending champions Seeb launched their campaign with an impressive 3-0 victory over Oman Club at the Seeb Sports Stadium.

Seeb, dominated the first match, with two goals scored in the first half by star players Omar al Fazari and Abdulaziz al Muqbali. The team sealed their victory in the second half with a goal from Marwan Taab.

This strong performance catapulted Seeb to the top of the first-group standings. The tournament format divides participating clubs into three groups:

Group 1: Seeb, Dhofar, Al Nasr and Oman clubs.

Group 2: Al Nahda, Al Rustaq, Sohar and Al Shabab.

Group 3: Bahla, Ibra, Al Wahda and Sur.

Seeb clinched the championship in the previous season, defeating Bahla on penalties in the final.

In another electrifying match, Dhofar secured a 2-0 victory over Al Nasr at Al Saada Complex Stadium.

The first half remained goalless, but Dhofar Club found their rhythm in the second half, with Omega and Abdullah al Mushrafi netting two goals to secure second place in the first group.

Meanwhile, Al Nahda and Al Shabab played to a goalless draw in their first-round match at the Al Buraimi Complex Stadium.

This result mirrored their previous encounter at the beginning of the league championship for the season, leaving them at the bottom of the second-group standings in the OFA Cup.

SOHAR HOLD AL RUSTAQ

Sohar and Al Rustaq battled to a 1-1 draw in the first round of the OFA Cup at the Sohar Complex Stadium.

In a balanced match, Al Rustaq were able to take the lead in the first half through Abdullah al Saadi. Sohar returned and equalised the score in the second half through Khalil al Balushi, resulting in a final score of 1-1.

With this result, the two teams topped the second group after Al Nahda and Al Shabab tied without goals.

Notably, the clubs that finish first from each group will qualify for the semifinals, in addition to the team that wins the best second place from the three groups. The matches in the group stage are played in a two-round league system home and away.

44 athletes to represent Oman at Asian Games in China

ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, SEPT 9

The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) unveiled the details of Oman's participation at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, which will take place from September 23 to October 8.

With just over 13 days before the start of the Games, the OOC announced in a press meet recently at the headquarters of OOC that Oman's delegation will comprise 44 athletes competing in seven sports namely: athletics, weightlifting, aquatics (swimming), sailing, shooting, hockey and beach volleyball.

Taha al Kishry, OOC Secretary-General, said that OOC in coordination with the participating sports associations and committees completed all the technical and logistics arrangements ahead of the Asian Games. "This edition of the Asian Games will also feature the presence of five Omani umpires in different competitions including aquatics, hockey and shooting. We are confident that the selected teams and athletes will put in their top show to register the desired results," he added.

The chief of OOC highlighted during the meeting, attended by the team's representatives, on the travel dates, competitions schedules, the venues, Olympic village's location and Oman's delegation roles and



responsibilities. Moreover, he focused on the health procedures and the guidelines upon arrival in China against Covid 19.

Later on, Asaad al Hasani, Oman's head of athletes committee, recommended all the participating athletes in the Asian Games to take part in the athletes election of Olympic Council of Asia as he explained the procedures of voting through an online system.

DIFFERENT SHOW

The competitions of beach volleyball and sailing will begin ahead of the official start of the Asian Games as it will commence on September 19 to 28. As many as six sailors will challenge at the Ningbo Xiangshan Sailing centre while four players from beach volleyball will represent Oman in volleyball competitions

at the Ningbo Banbianshan Beach Volleyball centre.

Four athletes will vie in the athletics competition which will begin from September 30 until October 7 at Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre Stadium. Shooting competitions will start on September 24 to October 1 at Fuyang Yinhu Sports Centre and the shooting team will comprise eight members. Two swimmers will take part in the aquatics competitions which will start from September 24 to 29 at Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre Aquatics Sports Arena.

As many as 24 players from the hockey team will attend the competitions which will begin on September 24 to October 7 at Gongshu Canal Sports Park Stadium.

Oman athletes will eye a

different show in this edition of the Asian Games as 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia ended with no medals despite Oman attending with 46 athletes.

Oman's historic credit at the Asian Games is four medals including a lone gold and three bronze medals.

Oman's Olympian sprinter Mohammed al Malki had created history when he became the first Omani to claim a gold in the men's 400m race in Beijing Games in 1990. Al Malki had also bagged a bronze medal in the same category in Asian Games in Seoul in 1986. Oman's men's 4x100m relay team won the bronze medal in Bangkok Games in 1998 while the latest Asian bronze medal was won by Oman's fastest sprint Barakat al Harthy in men's 100m at the 2010 Guangzhou Games in China.

Oman Sail finishes third at the International Süleymanpaşa Optimist Cup in Türkiye

MUSCAT: Oman finished in third place overall at the International Süleymanpaşa Optimist Cup in Tekirdağ, Türkiye. In a competition dominated by sailors from the host nation, winners of the Country Cup, and neighbouring Bulgaria who finished as runners up, Oman Sail's team competed well and Mohsin Al Busaidi, Head of Performance, took away many positives from the experience.

Competition featured two categories. One for sailors under the age of 10, and one for sailors aged 10-18 years. In the Junior competition Silver fleet, Habib bin Aziz al Hassani finished 48th out of 75, and one of just three non-Turkish sailors in the top 50. Harib bin Mohsin al Busaidi finished 13th in the Bronze fleet out of 75 and the only visiting sailor in the race.

The Senior competition Gold fleet featured 66 sailors, the vast majority of whom were from the host nation. Oman Sail's five competitors showed promise but were left trailing by the more experienced Turkish and Bulgarian sailors. Tameem bin Sulaiman al Balushi was the highest ranked Omani sailor in 25th place, followed by Feras bin Haitham al Nabhani in 46th, Abdul Rahman bin Khalid Al Hadi in 50th, Hassan bin Nasser Al Wahaibi in 52nd and



Saud bin Talib al Shaqsi in 62nd.

The Silver fleet comprised 65 sailors, including 58 from across Türkiye. Hassan bin Mohsin al Orami led the Omani team in 22nd place, followed by Khamis bin Nasser al Mashaikhi in 26th. The two female sailors in the team Tarteel bint Zaid al Hassaniyah and Hadeel bint Yousuf al Mushafriyah finished in 43rd place and 60th place respectively.

Mohsin al Busaidi, Oman Sail Head of Performance, said, "This was a tough challenge against sailors far more experienced and familiar with the environment, but that provides opportunities for our

team to learn and that is our goal at this stage. The more exposure our team receives, the better they will become and by racing against their peers from other nations we are able to incorporate real-life scenarios into training. We would always like to rank as high as possible, but the long-term goal is to develop the sailors and events like this serve as short-term progress checks for the whole team."

Held at the Tekirdağ Sailing Club on northern coast of Türkiye's Sea of Marmara, the competition featured over 400 sailors from Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Kuwait, Thailand and Malaysia, as well as

hosts Türkiye and Oman.

The team was led by Ghalib al Mamari, sailing coach at Oman Sail, and supported by coach Sultan al Zadjali and assistants Jasim al Harbi and Hajir al Amrani.

The Optimist team will return to Türkiye in next month for the 11th Erk Çelik Halat Bodrum International Optimist Regatta in Bodrum from 10-15 October. They will then compete on home waters at the Mussanah Race Week from 18-24 October before heading to Abu Dhabi for the 2023 IODA Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship from 29 October to 5 November.



NEED TO RAISE GAME AGAINST DJOKOVIC, SAYS MEDVEDEV

NEW YORK: Daniil Medvedev expects Novak Djokovic to be in top form at Sunday’s US Open final, but the third-seeded Russian adds that he will try to produce his “best-ever version” to beat the record-23-time Grand Slam champion.

Medvedev prevailed 7-6(3) 6-1 3-6 6-3 in a fascinating encounter that ended top seed Carlos Alcaraz’s reign as Flushing Meadows champion, with the 27-year-old setting up a rematch of his triumphant 2021 finale against Djokovic.

Djokovic, 36, is hunting a fourth US Open title that would see him equal Margaret Court’s record haul of 24 Grand Slams and a good measure of revenge on Medvedev.

“He (Djokovic) is always better than the previous time he plays. For example, I beat him in the US Open final, he beat me in Bercy (Paris Masters) in a great match. Carlos beat him in Wimbledon, he beat him in Cincinnati,” Medvedev told reporters.

“Novak is going to be his best version on Sunday, and I have to be the best-ever version of myself if I want to try to beat him.

“Novak, when he loses, he’s never the same after... It’s just a different mentality... So, I have to use it knowing that he’s going to be 10 times better than he was that day. And I have to be, if I want to still beat him, 10 times better than I was that day.”

Medvedev, however, said he would stick to his pre-match routine before facing Djokovic.

“I’m going to do all the same. It’s just the mental preparation where... you want to fight till the end, you want to win, and that’s how you should be in the final of a Grand Slam,” he said.

Medvedev said the win against Alcaraz was a confidence boost but acknowledged that he would be “hell-disappointed” if he were to lose the final despite a successful run at New York.

“To know I’m capable of doing it on the big stage every time you do it one more time brings more confidence,” Medvedev added.

“You know you can do it again. You want to do it again. You want to feel this. And at the same time, what is most important is to kind of use it but forget about it and go for the next one.” — Reuters



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Oman’s high-speed digital network now integrates 1,233 government websites

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology revealed that the unified government network now covers 1,233 government websites as of mid-2023.

A total of 23 new government websites and 63 portals were added to the high-speed network this year. According to Eng Sami bin Suhail Beit Fadel (pictured), Director General of Infrastructure and Digital Platforms at the Ministry, the enhanced connectivity aims to provide secure communication between government institutions and raise the level of electronic services.



He added that 32 state administrative bodies now provide services through the government integration platform,

catering to the requirements of fellow administrative agencies, private sector organisations and other entities of the state’s

administrative apparatus. Significantly, since its inception, the high-speed network has handled 800

million requests, around 100 million of which were processed during the first half of this year alone, underscoring the pivotal

importance of this platform in providing government services to all stakeholders.

The integrated platform is one of the basic infrastructures for government digital transformation. It is a central system that allows the exchange of data sets between the electronic systems of administrative apparatus units automatically, and works to reduce the time of completing transactions and reduce paper use. — ONA

Calls for fair pricing of retail fish receive official nod



NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources says it supports calls for retail prices of fish to be prominently displayed at the local fish souq.

The endorsement came in a post over the weekend in response to social media appeals by consumers calling for transparency in fish pricing at the local souq in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

The rising prices in the Jalan Fish Market have been a topic of concern among local residents, sparking discussions about the need for intervention by the Consumer Protection Authority.

Prices in the fish market at Jaalan Bani Bu Ali have been notably higher compared to other regions, leaving residents seeking fair and reasonable pricing.

Taking to social media, consumers have demanded that the central market in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali provides customers with a comprehensive pricing list for all types of fish, whether on a fixed or variable rate basis, and on a weekly or recurring schedule.

The Ministry, along with the Consumer Protection Authority, have been steadfast in their calls for pricing transparency in fish sales. As winter approaches, a season marked by increased demand for fish and vegetables, the importance of careful market monitoring becomes clear.

In response, the Ministry is collaborating with other agencies in ensuring a level playing field for both customers and traders.

IPO of OQ Gas Networks potentially worth \$700 – 800m

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

A keenly anticipated Initial Public Offering (IPO) by OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), the exclusive owner and operator of Oman’s gas transportation system, could be potentially worth between \$700 – 800 million, according to a key stock market analyst.

Geetika Gupta, Vice President -- Head of Research at Ubhar Capital, a leading brokerage and investment advisory firm, also pointed out that, given the strong fundamentals of the state-owned gas transporter and the low-risk nature of its business, investor interest in the IPO is expected to be strong.

“The OQGN IPO is set to be the biggest IPO to be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) in the past decades, post-Omantel, which raised \$748 million in 2005. The potential size of the OQGN IPO is expected to be between \$700 - \$800 million,” said Gupta.

“OQGN is the second company, after Abraj Energy Services, to undergo an IPO within the framework of the exit plan led by Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the parent holding company. The listing comes as a unique opportunity for investors to have access to a company which has a natural monopoly over critical gas transportation in the country,” she stated.

OQ Gas Networks – part of OQ Group – announced last week that it intends to float 49 per cent of its share capital via an IPO sometime this month.

In remarks to the *Observer*, the Ubhar Capital executive said the public



offering will help boost the local stock market by attracting fresh capital into Oman.

“This IPO will help in economic diversification, especially since this offering is expected to attract many investors from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

This listing would contribute to empowering the MSX and enhance the performance of the Omani economy through the diversification of financial instruments.

The gas sector is one of the priority sectors, and after the upstream oil & gas company, Abraj Energy Services, this IPO gives opportunity to investors to gain exposure to a midstream oil & gas company.”

Importantly, interest from local investors in the IPO is expected to be very high, says Geetika. “There is increasing awareness among local investors around IPOs.

It is an incredibly attractive business investment on offer. OQGN itself is a unique opportunity as an investment

choice. It is a monopoly business, and unique in the sense that its valuation and business does not depend on hydrocarbon pricing. It is low-risk and very well-managed business.”

Also boding well for the strong performance of the IPO is the current bullish sentiment in the region, which has benefited from the geopolitical crises of the past year.

“The price of oil has rallied and investors are in search of a relatively safe haven, which has ensured new money flows to the region,” the market analyst explained.

“The Middle East is rife with IPOs and the increase in investor attention has led to setting up new asset managers in the region adding to what were already present. There is strong momentum being generated by state-based enterprise IPOs. OQGN ticks all the check marks of being an attractive sentiment in the current macro – low-risk monopolistic business which should offer reasonably high dividend yield.”

Oman to host key hydraulic fracturing conference



HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

An international hydraulic fracturing conference begins at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Muscat, from September 12, 2023.

The “International Hydraulic Fracturing Technology Conference and Exhibition” is organised by the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE), with the support of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

The three-day event aims to provide industry professionals with a comprehensive understanding of current and future hydraulic fracturing technologies, while simultaneously exploring their potential for enhancing oil and gas production, according to a statement from SPE.

The conference will include technical presentations from over 50 hydraulic fracturing experts, sessions on sustainability, new digital technologies and growth and development imbalances, and discussion panels with high-level executives.

Alongside the conference will be a technology exhibition featuring over 20 industry exhibitors.

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

Last year, Minister of Energy and Minerals, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, dubbed hydraulic fracturing as a “game changer” during his keynote speech at the 2nd edition of the conference, “Nothing comes close to hydraulic fracturing. It changed the fundamentals of oil and gas, whether it’s on the oil side or the shale oil and gas revolution that happened in the US,” Al Aufi noted.

IntercityHotel Muscat celebrates first year anniversary

MUSCAT: IntercityHotel Muscat, proudly operated by Deutsche Hospitality, is thrilled to commemorate the first anniversary of delivering renowned German hospitality to guests in the heart of Muscat.

Over the past year, the hotel has provided guests with comfort, exceptional service, and unforgettable experiences that reflect the hallmark of German excellence.

Nestled amidst the stunning landscape of Oman's capital city and part of the A'Raya Complex, IntercityHotel Muscat has quickly become a premier destination for both business and leisure travellers.

Its prime location in the Ministry and Embassy district offers guests easy access to major



attractions, shopping districts, and corporate hubs while enveloping them in the rich culture and warm hospitality that Oman is

renowned for. IntercityHotel Muscat is also the home of the Al Raya Ballroom which can accommodate up to 1,200 guests. IntercityHotel, boasting contemporary decor with a touch of Omani tradition.

As part of the renowned Deutsche Hospitality brand, the hotel seamlessly integrates German precision and efficiency into every aspect of guest experience.

“As we celebrate this momentous occasion to mark the first anniversary of IntercityHotel Muscat, a year that has been filled with remarkable moments, heartfelt hospitality, and unforgettable memories.

It is my pleasure to elaborate our gratitude to our partners, shareholders, management, and employees who were the driving force behind the success. Our commitment to providing an exceptional blend of renowned German hospitality and Omani warmth has allowed us to create a unique space where every guest

feels truly at home.

As we reflect on this journey, we are excited to continue setting new standards in service delivery, and we look forward to welcoming guests for many more years of exceptional experiences.” said Renjith Chandran, General Manager. Our anniversary symbolises a year of achievements, growth, and exceptional experiences.

IntercityHotel Muscat is enthusiastic about the journey ahead, as it continues to exemplify renowned German hospitality and Omani warmth which allows us to create a unique space where every guest feels truly at home and create lasting memories for our guests and local community. We look forward to welcoming for guests for many more years of exceptional experiences.

With a desire to combat climate change, Toyota plants a greener future



MUSCAT: Toyota continues to go beyond mobility in pursuit of a carbon-neutral future by addressing weather-related uncertainties and market fluctuations within the agriculture sector. At Toyota's Kamigo Plant, which produces Crown and Lexus model engines, four strawberry varieties are being cultivated in experimental greenhouses. Similarly, the Myochi Plant is doing its part by raising cherry tomatoes.

Established in April 2022 with the help of farmers, these greenhouses are now thriving. Vehicle production and agriculture, two seemingly disparate practices, now go hand in hand thanks to the Toyota Production System (TPS).

This economical approach, which produces up to 1.5 times the yield of a similarly sized operation, employs systematic cultivation methods to achieve high added value while reducing production costs.

This initiative's success may also contribute to enhancing the future profitability of farmers, through their adoption of efficient agricultural systems and other forms of technical support provided by Toyota.

The strawberries and cherry tomatoes are now being served up to Toyota employees free of charge, a testament to the company's interest in employing novel methods to achieve carbon neutrality across all its factories by 2035.

Lulu Financial Holdings' MD wins fintech personality award at GFF 2023

MUSCAT: It was an evening to remember at the prestigious Global Fintech Awards (GFA) 2023, held annually as part of the Global Fintech Fest (GFF) 2023 in Mumbai, India.

This year, the coveted global award for 'Leading Fintech Personality of the Year' from the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) region was awarded to Adeeb Ahamed, Managing Director of the Abu Dhabi based Lulu Financial Holdings.

A visionary entrepreneur in the financial services world, Adeeb has been instrumental in revolutionising cross-border payments between the GCC and India.

His company operates a network of 300+ customer engagement centres and digital payment solutions in 10 countries across the Middle East, Asia Pacific and GCC regions.

Accepting the award, Adeeb Ahamed, said, “I am deeply honoured to receive this year's 'Leading Fintech Personality of the Year Award - GCC'. The GCC payments landscape is among the fastest evolving globally,



and this award is a testament to the collective efforts of the LuLu Financial Holdings team to revolutionise cross-border payments. I am also immensely grateful for the regulatory support that has accelerated our progress in the region and beyond. This award isn't just my win; it reflects the tireless efforts of those working towards a shared vision: of enhancing lives through an inclusive financial system.”

Recognising outstanding accomplishments of individuals and entities in the fintech ecosystem around the globe, GFA award are given in three categories, divided into 15 subcategories.

The winners were selected from a large number of nominations, through meticulous adjudication by a jury comprising 15 members, all leading captains of the fintech industry.

New India Assurance welcomes new COO



MUSCAT: New India Assurance Company Oman has announced a significant transition in the company. Gaurav Sharma has taken charge as Chief Operating Officer (COO) from the incumbent V V Raghavan who has completed his tenure of four years.

The company has expressed its sincere gratitude for the invaluable leadership of V V Raghavan during the last four years. He has attained various milestones during his service in the Sultanate of Oman.

Gaurav Sharma brings with him a wealth of experience, and his knowledge and fresh perspective will undoubtedly contribute to the continued growth and success of New India Assurance in Oman. Sharma is a distinguished Fellow of the Insurance Institute of India.

He has worked in major metro cities in various capacities with exposure to retail clients as Branch in charge in Delhi and large/mega clients during his tenure at Mumbai. His journey is a testament to dedication and expertise.

V V Raghavan thanked and conveyed his sincere gratitude for all the support he had got from various stakeholders, and regulator — the Capital Market Authority — of Oman. He also expressed his gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of Oman for their warmth, generosity and genuine spirit.

Mazda CX-9: Where luxury meets performance

MUSCAT: Unveil the ultimate driving experience with the Mazda CX-9, a 7-seater SUV meticulously crafted to elevate your journeys. Combining Japanese luxury with turbo-charged performance, this exceptional vehicle sets new standards on the road.

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Experience the artistry of Japanese craftsmanship within. Premium materials and meticulous attention to detail create a relaxing and inviting space, catering to all age groups. A journey of comfort and enchantment for everyone.

Make a statement with the Mazda CX-9's captivating exterior. The titanium gray metallic front grill and brilliant silver finish alloy wheels exude elegance and sophistication, turning heads as you traverse the streets.

More than an SUV, it's a statement of luxury and performance. Elevate your driving experience and embark on unforgettable journeys. Visit your nearest Mazda showroom today and ignite your passion for driving.

Nama Group's 2022 operating revenues reach RO 1.8 billion



MUSCAT: Nama Group is currently working on raising the efficiency of the system and the performance of its subsidiaries to save costs by employing modern technologies and renewable energy sources and improving the services provided to subscribers.

The group achieved a significant increase in its pre-tax profits to reach RO 139.8 million, and the group's total operating revenues increased by 21.2 per cent to reach RO 1.8 billion by end of last year.

The group confirmed that its restructuring step in line with the directives of the Oman Investment Authority came to achieve a number of goals, including financial sustainability, achieving cost savings and increasing the efficiency of the supply chain, as the group restructured the debts of its subsidiaries to ensure they have sustainable financing structures for future requirements.

The group pointed out that unifying all services related to electricity distribution contributed to enhancing efficiency and increasing the number of subscribers and sales,

which was reflected in the size of the group's assets, which exceeds RO 2 billion.

It explained that it is implementing a series of initiatives related to green energy and sustainability, and has issued a number of tenders for renewable energy projects, and it is expected that these stations will generate approximately 1,000 megawatts during the next three years.

The group seeks to adopt various digital technologies to ensure an enhanced customer experience, as digital transformation initiatives contribute to strengthening meter reading systems, improving collection services and effectively serving customers in keeping with the latest technical developments.

The group merged 4 distribution and supply companies into two companies in order to be able to combine resources, benefit from unified contracts, save its operating expenses and increase its revenues, with a focus on improving the efficiency and quality of its basic operational processes. — ONA

Pakistan energy firm considers Oman for spot LNG purchase

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

A leading energy firm in Pakistan, Pakistan GasPort, is considering Oman as a potential source for a spot liquefied natural gas (LNG) purchase. The company's Chairman, Iqbal Ahmed, revealed that they are in the process of acquiring a spot LNG cargo for delivery in November.

This move marks Pakistan's first spot LNG deal since June 2022 and signals a growing interest in diversifying its LNG supplier base. To secure the best deal, Pakistan GasPort is evaluating offers from LNG sellers in Oman, the US, and the UAE. Ahmed, in an interview with Reuters, expressed his satisfaction with the interest shown by these countries, stating, "We've got different countries which have offered us different options. We are extremely encouraged by what we've heard today."

This demonstrates the company's commitment to exploring multiple avenues to ensure a reliable and cost-effective supply of LNG.

This potential spot LNG purchase is significant for Pakistan as it would be the first cargo shipped in by a private sector company, highlighting the country's increasing involvement in the global LNG market.

Moreover, Pakistan's decision to pursue spot purchases reflects a strategic shift, driven by the expectation of declining LNG prices in the coming years. Spot purchases enable flexibility and



(Image for illustration only)

the ability to take advantage of market fluctuations, making them an attractive option for energy companies.

Ahmed emphasised that Pakistan GasPort is seeking a competitive price for the LNG cargo. He stated that a discount of 12% to the Brent slope, which equates to approximately \$11 per million British thermal units (mmbtu), would be the "price to beat" for a cargo to Pakistan. This rate represents a one-sixth discount to the current average Asian LNG prices of \$13 per mmbtu.

Ahmed further explained, "If

the government or anybody else can bring LNG at a price of 12% of Brent or lower, there is a market. The minute you cross that barrier, there is resentment," he added.

Pakistan GasPort is the owner of the largest LNG import and regasification terminal in Pakistan. It owns and operates the 750 million standard cubic feet per day (mmscfd) LNG import terminal at Mazhar Point, Port Qasim in Karachi.

However, in the past, the responsibility of LNG imports has primarily rested with Pakistan LNG, a government-owned company. The last spot cargo

purchase made by Pakistan LNG was in June 2022 from PetroChina.

In 2021, Pakistan imported goods worth \$346 million from Oman. The primary items included petroleum gas (\$94.5 million), non-retail pure cotton yarn (\$41.9 million), and refined petroleum (\$41.7 million). Over the past 26 years, Oman's exports to Pakistan have witnessed steady growth, with an average annual increase of 23%. This growth trajectory can be observed from the export value of \$1.58 million in 1995, which has risen to \$346 million in 2021.

Fitch rates EDO Gas Sukuk programme 'BB (EXP)'

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 9

International ratings agency Fitch Ratings has assigned Energy Development Oman SAOC's (EDO, BB/Positive) trust certificate issuance programme an expected rating of 'BB (EXP)'.

The programme is issued on behalf of EDO Gas SPC via the special-purpose vehicle EDO Sukuk Limited and guaranteed by EDO, which is the sole owner of EDO Gas.

The expected rating is in line with EDO's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) and senior unsecured rating of 'BB'. The Recovery Rating is 'RR4'.

EDO Sukuk Limited is also the trustee of the programme and an exempted company with limited liability incorporated in the Cayman Islands and has been incorporated solely for the purpose of participating in the transactions contemplated by the transaction documents



to which it is a party and its shares are held by MaplesFS Limited as share trustee.

EDO Gas is the obligor, seller, lessee, buyer and servicing agent and EDO guarantees EDO Gas's payment obligations under the trust certificate issuance programme. The trust certificate issuance programme's rating is aligned with that of the ultimate parent and guarantor's IDR, said Fitch in a statement.

"This reflects Fitch's view that default of these senior unsecured obligations would reflect the

default of EDO in accordance with the agency's rating definitions.

Fitch has given no consideration to any underlying assets or any collateral provided, as we believe the trustee's ability to satisfy payments due on the certificates ultimately depends on EDO Gas satisfying its unsecured payment obligations to the trustee under the transaction documents described in the base offering circular," it noted.

EDO is Oman's national energy company and the EDO Group owns participating interests in two concessions, accounting for approximately 65% of Oman's oil and gas production.

EDO Gas SPC is a newly formed, wholly-owned subsidiary of EDO to which the entirety of EDO's gas concession was transferred alongside all related contractual obligations, undertakings, and related tangible and intangible assets.

676 fuel filling stations in Oman in 2022

MUSCAT: The number of fuel filling stations in the various governorates of Oman until the end of 2022 reached about 676 stations, according to statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The number of fuel filling stations in Muscat Governorate reached 169 stations, and 73 stations in Dhofar Governorate, while the number of fuel filling stations in Musandam Governorate reached 11 stations and 21 stations in Buraimi Governorate.

As for the filling stations in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate,



there were 83 stations, and in the South and North Al Batinah Governorates, there were 167 stations, while the number in the South and North Al Sharqiyah Governorates reached 81 stations, and in Al Dhahirah Governorate, 38 stations, while the number of stations in the Al Wusta Governorate reached 33 stations. — ONA

Over 395K tonnes of fish caught by artisanal fishing

MUSCAT: The total quantities of fish landed by artisanal fishing in of Oman at the end of July 2023 reached 395,888 tonnes, with a value of RO 218.316 million up by 5.3 per cent compared to the same period in 2022, with 375,992 tonnes.

Initial statistics issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that by end of July, commercial fishing reached 20,590 tonnes, while the amount landed in coastal fishing reached 3,088 tonnes.

The highest quantity of fish landed by artisanal fishing came in the Al Wusta Governorate, where the quantity reached 150,648 tonnes, followed by the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate with 117,387 tonnes, then Dhofar Governorate with 44,287 tonnes, and North and South Al Batinah with 42,678 tonnes.

The amount of fish landed by artisanal fishing in Musandam Governorate reached 23,892 tonnes, and 16,996 tonnes in Muscat Governorate. The largest quantity of fish



landed by artisanal fishing came from small pelagic fish, as their quantity reached 230,448 tonnes at end of July, compared to 193,982 tonnes at the end of July 2022, an increase of 18.8 per cent.

The quantity of large pelagic fish landed by artisanal fishing decreased by 7.1 per cent, reaching 91,829 tonnes at end of July, compared to 98,863 tonnes at end of July 2022.

The amount of demersal fish landed by artisanal fishing reached 62,883 tonnes, a decrease of 12 per cent compared to the

same period in 2022, which amounted to 71,427 tonnes.

As for the quantities of sharks landed by artisanal fishing, they increased by 9.6 per cent to reach 3,708 tonnes, compared to 3,384 tonnes at the end of July 2022.

Regarding crustaceans and molluscs caught by artisanal fishing until the end of last July 4,757 tonnes were caught, compared to 5,146 tonnes at the end of July 2022, and the quantity caught by artisanal fishing of other fish reached 2,263 tonnes.

— ONA

OOMCO launches operations in Saudi Arabia



ALI AL MATANI
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It is good to see Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) expand into nearby markets since it has done so in accordance with a defined strategy and properly considered, actionable strategies. It's a solid move in the appropriate and honest investment path to start expanding in the

markets of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and opening petrol stations under the name of OOMCO.

We are extremely pleased with this move because it has great significance in terms of reflecting Omani brands abroad and promoting the Sultanate of Oman in other countries, in addition to the fact that entering these markets helps this entire national company achieve financial sustainability, growth, and development and opens up new opportunities for it.

We are pleased with the results of this launch on every level.

Without a doubt, Oman Oil Marketing Company is seeing significant growth. After the shares of BP of Oman were sold, it was founded in 2003. OQ controls 49 per cent of the shares

of OOMCO, while 51 per cent are held by various governmental bodies, pension funds and stockholders.

This demonstrates the company's vision in realising that the local market, in which it holds a 40 per cent share — thanks to great network of petrol stations in Oman — would not enough.

As a result, OOMCO kept growing in international markets that are seeing stable expansion, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

According to a plan, the first of its type for oil derivatives marketing firms, there should be 26 OOMCO stations in Saudi Arabia by the end of 2023.

By working constructively with the Saudi Excellence Co to delve into the depths of the Kingdom's

markets and its investment potentials that are supported by the Kingdom's vision, this step also came to increase the presence of Omani goods and businesses in this sector and free competition in the Saudi market, one of the largest markets in the region.

The growth OOMCO is experiencing, both in terms of quantity and quality, is a reflection of a clear strategy developed by the company's board of directors and executive management regarding how to advance the oil derivatives industry and how to double its contribution through numerous expansion plans in foreign markets and qualitative business development.

The company started to develop a company to electric vehicle charging and conducted

experimental steps in this direction in conjunction with Synergy Investment LLC in light of the quantitative and qualitative expansion to invade new global markets.

In addition to forming relationships with airlines to supply them with fuel and satisfy their demands, this is done to grow in the areas of alternative energy and leadership in the market for electric vehicle charging stations.

Inevitably the growth of Omani businesses must continue to be a top priority for all businesses that are able to do so due to its critical role in supporting and solidifying the idea of diversifying income sources and promoting Omani brands.

This pattern also illustrates Omani businesses' faith in the

excellence of their offerings in an effort to win over clients from other nations.

The phrase 'survival of the fittest' dominates the scene at this precise time, and the contestants compete within the parameters of a brutal market.

We hope that the Oman Oil Marketing Company's attempts to expand in international markets will be successful, that it will maintain this strategy over the next phase, and that all Omani businesses will follow suit in a world that has shrunk to the size of a tiny hamlet.

These actions are crucial in fostering growth and development and supporting our national economy within the context of an established strategy of income diversification.

G20 grant permanent membership to the AU



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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nasignificant development for the African continent, the G20, a grouping of the world's largest economies, has agreed to grant permanent membership to the African Union (AU).

This historic decision elevates the AU's status from its current designation of "invited international organisation" to that of a permanent member, holding immense promise for Africa's growth and development.

As the world turns its attention towards this momentous decision, it is essential to explore the potential that the African continent holds for growth and prosperity.

The G20 comprises 19 nations and the European Union, collectively representing a substantial share of global GDP, trade, and population. This exclusive club of nations has historically focused on addressing pressing global economic and financial challenges.

Now, with the inclusion of the AU as a permanent member, it signifies a shift in recognising Africa's vital role in shaping the future of the global economy.

The AU is a continental body comprising 55 member states, making it one of the largest regional organisations in the world. Its inclusion in the G20 acknowledges Africa's growing economic influence and its potential to be a driver of global growth.

Here's why AU's permanent membership in the G20 matters:

Economic potential: Africa is home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies. With a young and dynamic workforce, abundant natural resources, and increasing investments in infrastructure and technology, the continent offers immense economic potential.

By granting permanent membership to the AU, the G20 opens doors to enhanced economic cooperation, trade,

and investment opportunities.

Trade and market expansion:

The African Union's inclusion in the G20 will foster greater trade relations between African countries and other G20 members. This will enable African nations to access larger markets and diversify their export destinations, promoting economic stability and growth.

Infrastructure development:

Africa's infrastructure needs are substantial, spanning transportation, energy, and telecommunications. The G20 membership will provide access to financial resources and expertise, facilitating infrastructure development crucial for economic expansion and regional integration.

The decision to grant permanent membership to the AU by the G20 is particularly timely, coinciding with significant developments in infrastructure investment on the African continent.

One such milestone is the recent signing of a loan agreement by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire for EUR 187.4 million (\$200 million) to support the Inclusive Connectivity and Rural Infrastructure Project.

Notably, this project is co-financed by both the Government of Côte d'Ivoire and the World Bank. Several G20 member countries, including Germany, Brazil, South Africa, and Canada, have expressed their support for AU's permanent membership.

This backing underscores the recognition of Africa's potential and its role in the global arena. South Africa, as a G20 member, has been particularly active in advocating for the AU's inclusion, further demonstrating Africa's unity and commitment to driving its own development agenda.

As Africa continues to rise as an economic powerhouse, this move paves the way for increased cooperation, investment, and engagement between African nations and the rest of the world.

It is a moment of optimism and promise, where Africa's voice will be heard and its contributions to the global economy will be acknowledged and celebrated.

The future of Africa is undoubtedly one of growth, progress, and prosperity.

The global economy's real enemy is geopolitics, not protectionism



DANI RODRIK

The author, Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard Kennedy School, is President of the International Economic Association and the author of Straight Talk on Trade: Ideas for a Sane World Economy (Princeton University Press, 2017).

The era of free trade seems to be over. How will the world economy fare under protectionism?"

This is one of the most common questions I hear nowadays. But the distinction between free trade and protectionism (like the one between markets and the state, or mercantilism and liberalism) is not especially helpful for understanding the global economy. Not only does it misrepresent recent history; but it also misconstrues today's policy transitions and the conditions needed for a healthy global economy.

"Free trade" conjures an image of governments stepping back to allow markets to determine economic outcomes on their own. But any market economy requires rules and regulations — product standards; controls on anticompetitive business conduct; consumer, labour, and environmental safeguards; lender-of-last-resort and financial-stability functions — which are typically promulgated and enforced by governments.

Moreover, when national jurisdictions are linked up through international trade and finance, additional questions arise: Which countries' rules and regulations should take precedence when businesses compete in global markets? Should the rules be designed anew through international treaties and regional or global organisations?

Viewed in this light, it becomes clear that hyper-globalisation — which lasted roughly from the early 1990s until the onset of



WHAT SOME DECRY AS PROTECTIONISM AND MERCANTILISM IS REALLY A REBALANCING TOWARD ADDRESSING IMPORTANT NATIONAL ISSUES. THE BIGGEST RISK TO THE GLOBAL ECONOMY STEMS NOT FROM THIS BROADER REORIENTATION — WHICH SHOULD BE WELCOMED — BUT FROM A SINO-AMERICAN RIVALRY THAT THREATENS TO DRAG EVERYONE DOWN

the Covid-19 pandemic — was not a period of free trade in the traditional sense.

The trade agreements signed over the past 30 years were not so much about removing cross-border restrictions on trade and investment as they were about regulatory standards, health and safety rules, investment, banking and finance, intellectual property, labour, the environment, and many other issues that previously lay in the domain of domestic policy.

Nor were these rules neutral. They tended to prioritise the interests of politically connected big businesses, such as international banks, pharmaceutical companies, and multinational corporations, over all else. These businesses not only got better access to markets globally; they also were the primary beneficiaries of special international arbitration procedures to reverse government regulations that reduced their profits.

Similarly, tighter IP rules — which allow pharmaceutical and tech companies to abuse their monopoly positions — were smuggled in under the guise of freer trade. Governments were pushed to free up capital flows,

while labour remained trapped behind borders.

Climate change and public health were neglected, partly because the hyper-globalisation agenda crowded them out, but also because the creation of public goods in either domain would have undercut business interests.

In recent years, we have witnessed a backlash against these policies, as well as a broad reconsideration of economic priorities more generally. What some decry as protectionism and mercantilism is really a rebalancing toward addressing important national issues such as labour displacement, left-behind regions, the climate transition, and public health.

This process is necessary both to heal the social and environmental damage done under hyper-globalisation and to establish a healthier form of globalisation for the future.

US President Joe Biden's industrial policies, green subsidies, and made-in-America provisions are the clearest examples of this reorientation. True, these policies are a source of irritation in Europe, Asia, and the developing world, where they are seen as antithetical to

established free-trade rules. But they are also models for those — often in the same countries — seeking alternatives to hyper-globalisation and neoliberalism.

We don't have to go too far back in history to find an analogue to the system that could emerge from these new policies.

During the post-1945 Bretton Woods regime, which prevailed in spirit through the early 1980s, governments retained significant autonomy over industrial, regulatory, and financial policies, with many prioritising the health of their domestic economies over global integration.

The situation today is entirely different. America's main rival now is China, which occupies a very large position in the world economy. A true decoupling between the West and China would have major repercussions for the entire world, including the advanced economies, owing to their heavy dependence on China for industrial supplies. One therefore can find plenty of good reasons to worry about the future health of the world economy.

But if the global economy does become inhospitable, it will be because of American and Chinese mismanagement of their geopolitical competition, not because of any supposed betrayal of "free trade." Policymakers and commentators must remain focused on the risk that really matters.

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INDIAN male 34 years, MBA-Marketing, 12yrs Oman Exp, looking for a job. Experience in sales, operations and project. Presently working as operation manager. Driving licence. Contact: 98469481

■ ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Bahar Al Arab Al Mutamyzah Trading SPC**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1160654**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO **100,000.000** to **30,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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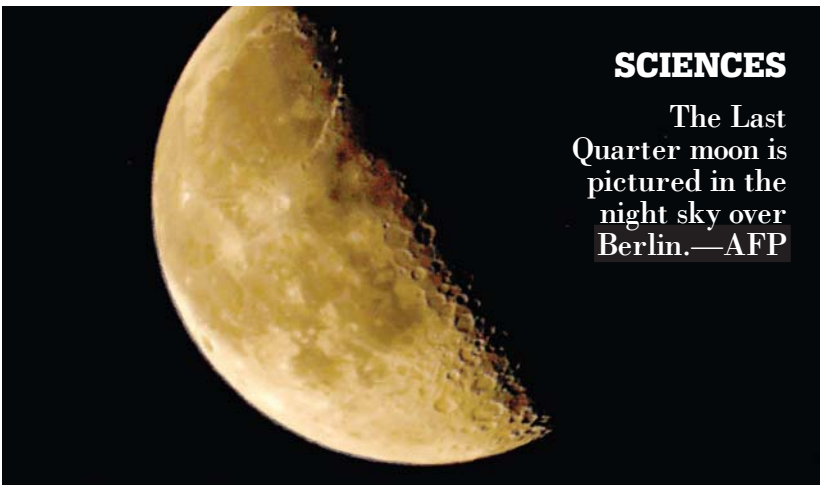
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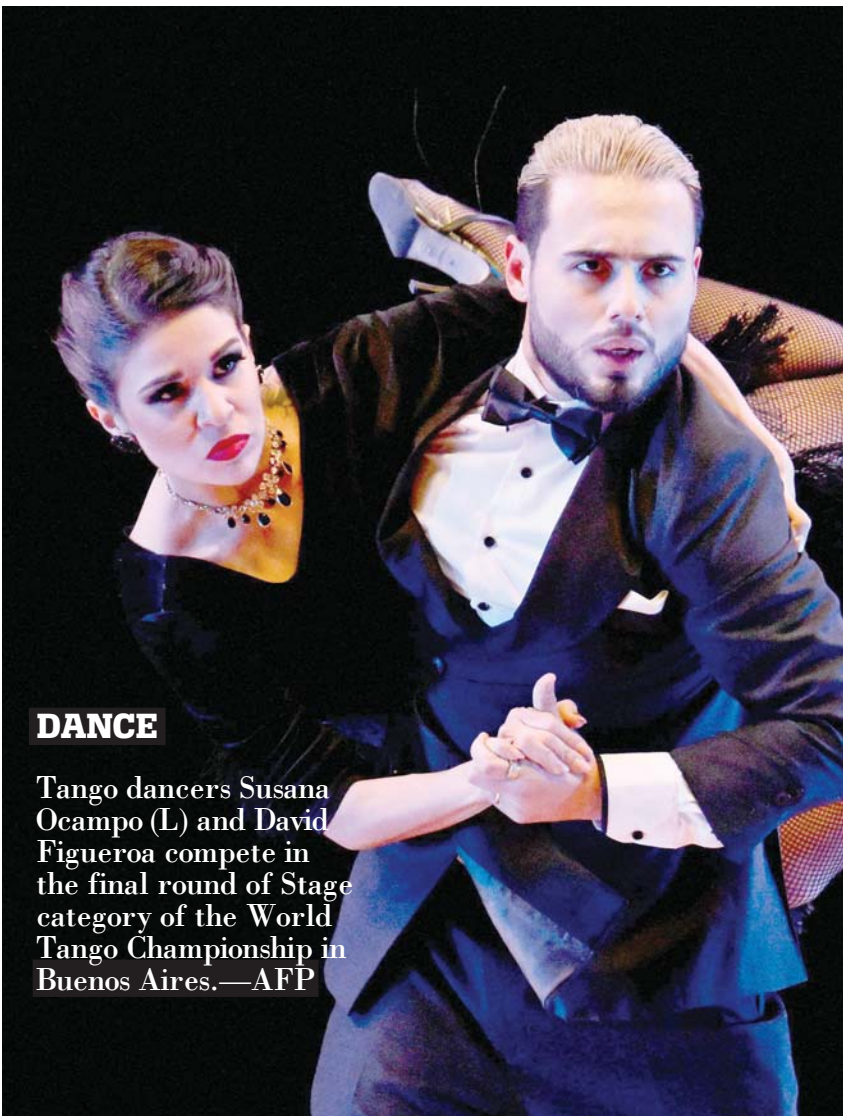
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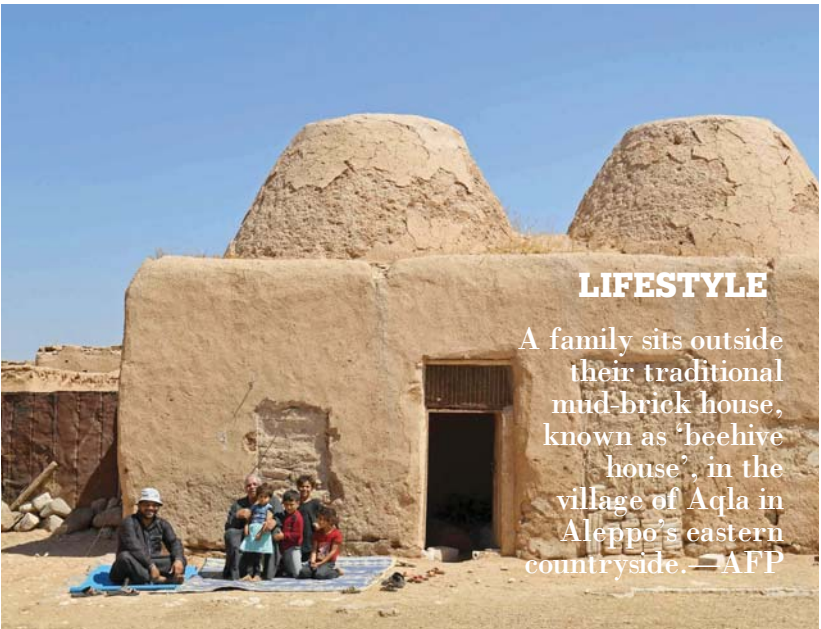
SCIENCES
The Last Quarter moon is pictured in the night sky over Berlin.—AFP



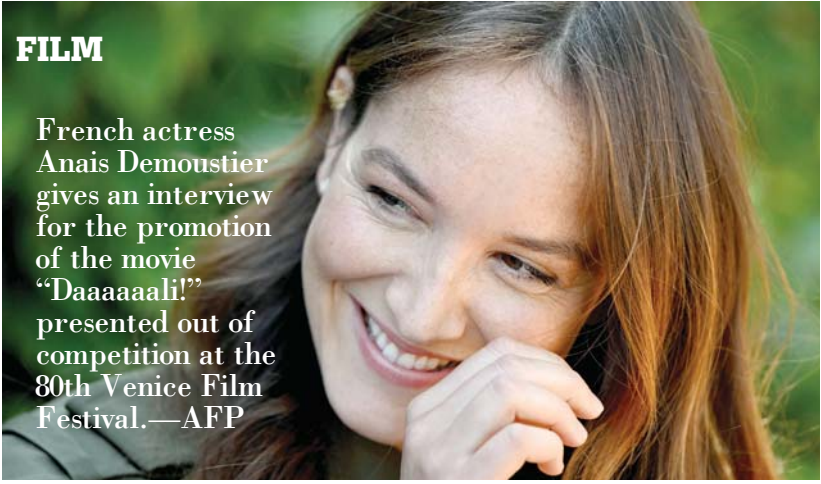
ZOO
A newborn Zebra is pictured at Rome's zoo (Bioparco).—AFP



DANCE
Tango dancers Susana Ocampo (L) and David Figueroa compete in the final round of Stage category of the World Tango Championship in Buenos Aires.—AFP



LIFESTYLE
A family sits outside their traditional mud-brick house, known as 'beehive house', in the village of Aqla in Aleppo's eastern countryside.—AFP



FILM
French actress Anaïs Demoustier gives an interview for the promotion of the movie "Daaaaaali!" presented out of competition at the 80th Venice Film Festival.—AFP

art & life

SUNDAY | SEPTEMBER 10, 2023 | SAFAR 24, 1445 AH

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NASRULAH AL AJMI

The seasonal misty khareef is finally exiting Dhofar, which means that the monsoon season is now coming to an end and this governorate in the southern part of the country is now ready to welcome serb or the autumn season. As Dhofar heads for a change of season, this also means that people in the country will be looking for alternative places to visit.

Within the next few weeks, the weather conditions would become perfect and cooler for an adventure in Al Wusta, one of Oman's remote governorates but filled with some of the best, awe-inspiring natural attractions.

Al Wusta is about a five-hour drive from Muscat and while there are two ways to reach the governorate, the most enjoyable means is by taking the coastal highway passing through Sur, Ras al Hadd, and Ashkarah.

When in Al Wusta, never miss visiting Al Khaluf. The journey from Muscat to Al Khaluf is an adventure tailored

for rugged off-roading enthusiasts. The fact is, whichever part of Al Wusta you are planning to visit, it is highly recommended to take a four-wheel drive.

The route around Al Khaluf demands a double-gear off-road vehicle, as the terrain can be challenging. Facilities along the way are scarce so camping is the primary accommodation option. With no access to electricity and a limited cellular signal, this journey offers a true escape from the modern world.

Road conditions are ever-changing, with shifting sands that can pose risks, including thick and loose sand patches that may turn treacherous, resembling quicksand in some areas. Careful navigation is key.

With its long stretch of white sandy beaches and sleepy villages, Al Khaluf will be enjoyed by those who love the pure bliss of silence only broken by the loud thunderous noise of waves hitting virgin shores or birds fighting over food.

Villagers living in the area are dependent on fishing as their main source of living. Most of them find the most convenient places to build their homes where they can access shallow shores where they built

salt ponds. During some periods of the year, you will find people harvesting salt in these ponds.

Drive a few kilometers deeper into the heart of Al Wusta and you will be rewarded with the beautiful views of Sugar Dunes which got its name from the powdery white sand incomparable anywhere else in the country.

In winter, one will easily find a group of campers spread across its entire expanse enjoying beach activities from swimming, to kayaking to dunes bashing and for those who can afford, even ATV rides by the beach.

As a side trip, people usually make a stop in one of the most remarkable shallow caves in the country. Referred to as the Al Khaluf Cave, it is an intriguing chamber with a narrow entrance that gives way to a beach hidden inside a cave perfect for picnics.

Within the governorate, one of the frequently visited locations is Barr al Hikman, also known as Shorebird Paradise. Every year, thousands, if not millions, of migrating birds come to visit for food. These birds include flamingos, sand

plovers, sandpipers, egrets, herons, and even spoonbills. The beaches of Barr al Hikman are rich in seashells and algae that are perfect for foraging animals. Other than outdoor enthusiasts, this also makes Barr al Hikman ideal for bird photographers.

As of late, some adventure companies have built temporary shelters and adventure centre in the area where one can rent a kayak or even kite surfing and surfing gear. These companies however may charge a bit more so it is still highly recommended to bring your own tent and food. It is also advisable to bring your own kayaking gear as access to such equipment can be limited.

For those who have more time on their hand, you can visit the three islands facing Mahoot namely Mahoot Island, Rak, and Heb. These islands are famous for their abundance of shrimp and many types of fish.

As you embark on this adventure, prepare for a journey into the heart of Oman's raw and untamed landscapes, where nature's unpredictability and the thrill of off-roading converge to create an unforgettable experience.



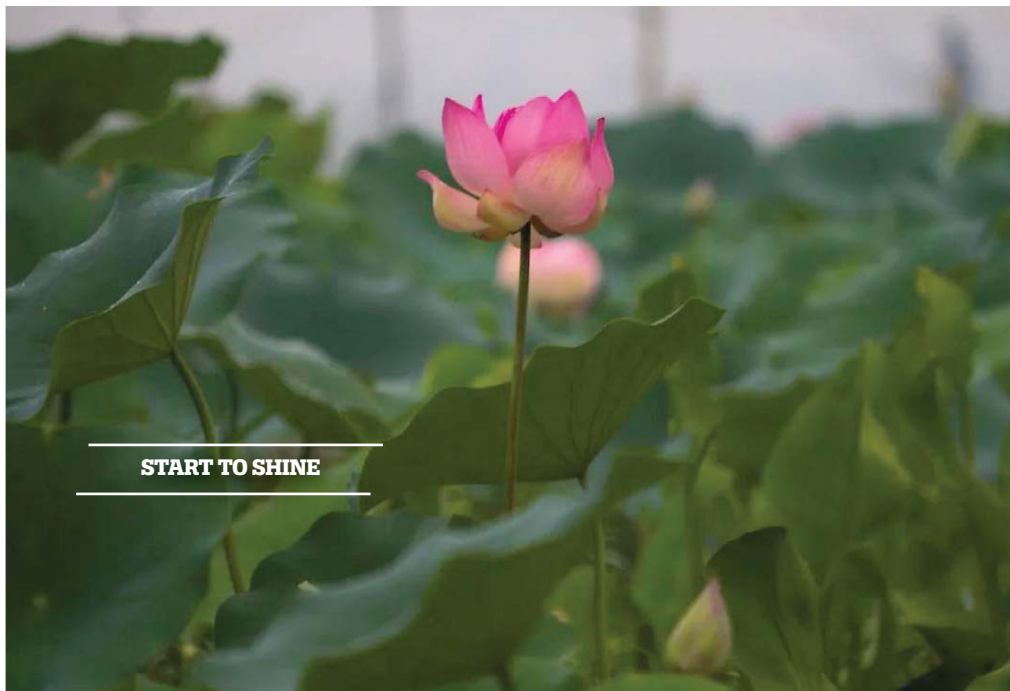


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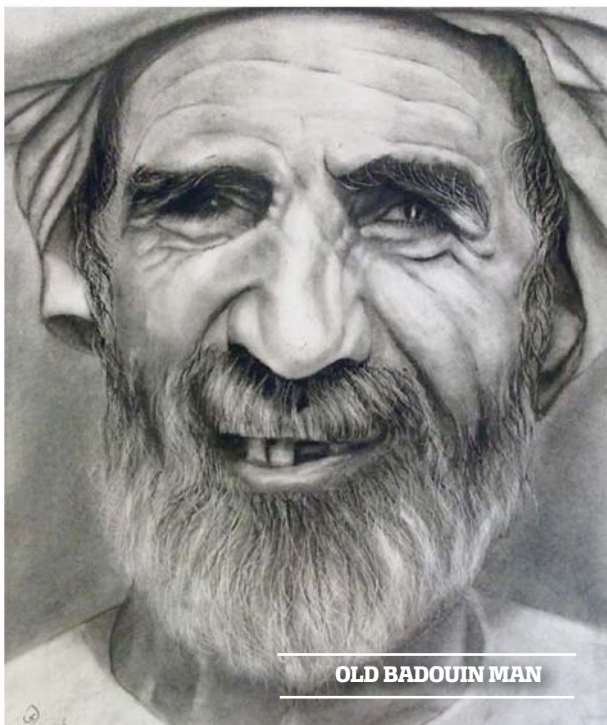
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Honorary Oscars gala postponed until January amid strikes



THE GOVERNORS AWARDS gala, at which honorary Oscars are handed out for lifetime achievement, has been pushed back from November to January, organizers said Wednesday, as Hollywood reels from the ongoing actors' and writers' strikes.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which organizes the Oscars, had initially planned the ceremony for November 18, with US comic Mel Brooks and actress Angela Bassett to be honored.

But on Wednesday, the Academy offered the new date without explanation, simply referring to the event as "rescheduled."

It was the latest high-profile casualty on Hollywood's calendar as the crippling industry-wide strikes drag on with

no resolution in sight.

The Emmy Awards, television's equivalent of the Oscars, were postponed by nearly four months to January, and several high-profile films including "Dune: Part Two" have seen their release dates delayed.

Writers walked off the job in May, followed by actors in July. Both unions are asking for better pay, and guarantees that artificial intelligence will not steal their jobs and income, among other demands.

The ongoing walkout by both actors and writers, the first in more than 60 years, would likely prevent the honorees from attending the Governors Awards.

The strikes have halted production on many studio films and television series, and also have kept most actors from hitting

the red carpet at film festivals and other events.

The 97-year-old Brooks — a prolific actor, producer and lyricist — memorably sent up Adolf Hitler in his seminal Oscar-winning satire "The Producers," exposed racial bigotry in "Blazing Saddles," and lampooned horror flicks in "Young Frankenstein."

He is already one of the few entertainers to win an Oscar, Emmy, Tony, and Grammy — collectively called an "EGOT" — across a career spanning eight decades.

Bassett, 65, has been nominated twice for Oscars — she earned a nod for portraying Tina Turner in "What's Love Got to Do with It," and earlier this year became the first actor ever nominated for a Marvel superhero film, with "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever."

The Governors Awards were spun off into a separate event in 2009 to declutter the main Oscars gala's packed schedule.

Last November, honorees included Michael J. Fox, who received the Jean Hersholt statuette, which is specifically for humanitarian work by a film industry figure.

This time around, that award goes to Michelle Satter, founding senior director of the Sundance Institute's Artist Programs, which help foster the early careers of filmmakers, especially from underrepresented communities.

A fourth honorary Oscar will go to "E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial" editor Carol Littleton—**AFP**

SCIENCES

Lab-grown human 'embryos' offer new research hope

Scientists have developed human embryo-like structures without using sperm, an egg or fertilisation, offering hope for research on miscarriage and birth defects but also raising fresh ethical concerns.

Earlier this year, several labs around the world released pre-print studies describing their development of early human embryo-like structures.

That work has not yet been peer-reviewed, but now one group's research has been published in the journal Nature, describing how they coaxed human embryonic stem cells to self-organise into a model resembling an early embryo.

The research was welcomed by some scientists as an "impressive" advance that could help unlock secrets about the precarious early stages of pregnancies, when failure is most common.

The work will however renew debate on the need for clearer ethical rules on development of lab-grown human embryo models.

The researchers, led by Palestinian scientist Jacob Hanna at the Weizmann Institute in Israel, harnesses the power of embryonic stem cells, which can become any kind of cell.

They produced embryo models up to 14 days old, which is the legal limit for such research in many countries, and the point at



which organs like the brain begin to develop.

The researchers say their work differs from those of other teams because it uses chemically rather than genetically modified embryonic stem cells and produces models more like real human embryos, complete with yolk sac and amniotic cavity.

These similarities could make the models more useful for research into conditions like miscarriage, birth defects and infertility, said James Briscoe of Britain's Francis Crick Institute.

The model "seems to produce all of the different types of cells that form tissues at this early stage of development," said Briscoe, principal group leader and associate research director at the biomedical research charity.

The research "is a step towards opening a window on the period of human development where many pregnancies fail and which has been really difficult to study up until now."

Both the researchers and scientists not involved in the work emphasised that the models should not

be considered human embryos.

The structure "highly resembles, but (is) not identical, to the in utero situation", the research notes.

The success rate on generating the models was also low, with the stem cells organising correctly just a small percentage of the time.

Still, the research and other recent work shows "that models of human embryos are getting more sophisticated and closer to events that occur during normal development," said Darius Wiedera, an expert in stem cell biology at the UK's University of Reading.

The work highlights "that a robust regulatory framework is more needed than ever before", he added.

In Britain, Cambridge University has begun developing the first governance framework for stem cell-based human embryo models.

The Weizmann Institute research does not involve transferring the models into a human or animal womb, or developing the structures beyond 14 days—**AFP**

AGRICULTURE

Seeds of vegetables distributed free

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Agriculturists and those who loved farming gathered together at an event that marked the free distribution of seeds of vegetables, in an attempt to inculcate the fading culture of agriculture among the youth.

The gathering of like-minded people called 'Oman Krishikootam' hosted this year's seed distribution at the Al Arai Complex



recently.

As many as 250 families in Muscat region were provided with a variety of high-yield seeds as part of the initial phase of seed distribution over the last week-end.

Packets containing seeds of tomatoes, eggplants, chili, carrots, beetroot, onions and more than 15 other varieties were distributed to pot growers while soil growers received packets containing 21 varieties of seeds

of various kinds of vegetables.

Muhammad Safwan, Muscat in-charge at the Purushottam Kanji Exchange presented the first packet of seeds to Nida Jasfan and inaugurated the



ceremony.

Oman Krishikootam Seed Distribution 2023 commenced with a welcome address by Selvi Sumesh, followed by a Q&A session conducted by Suni Shyam, Rashmi Sandeep and Santhosh Varghese which covered a wide range of topics varying from soil preparation and seed germination to fertilisers. The gathering was concluded by Vidyapriya with a hearty vote of thanks.

"We will continue with the seed distribution ceremony

for Oman Krishikootam members residing in Batinah region, predominantly in Sohar, Salalah and Buraimi regions in the forthcoming days," said Vinod Kumar M, representative of the group.

He further said that those who are interested to enrich their farming skills or to begin agriculture as a hobby or are interested in cultivating but do not have access to high-quality seeds, can get in touch with Oman Krishikootam on social media.



LIFESTYLE

Generation AI: education reluctantly embraces the bots



AT LEADING SWEDISH university Lund, teachers decide which students can use artificial intelligence to help them with assignments. At the University of Western Australia in Perth, staff have talked to students about the challenges and possible benefits of using generative AI in their work, while the University of Hong Kong is allowing ChatGPT within strict limits.

Launched by Microsoft-backed OpenAI on Nov. 30, ChatGPT has become the world's fastest growing app to date and prompted the release of rivals like Google's Bard.

GenAI tools, such as ChatGPT, draw on patterns in language and data to generate anything from essays to vid-

eos to mathematical calculations that superficially resemble human work, spurring talk of unprecedented transformation in many fields including academia.

Academics are among those who could face an existential threat if AI is able to replicate - at much faster speeds - research currently done by humans. Many also see the benefits of

GenAI's ability to process information and data, which can provide a basis for deeper critical analysis by humans.

"It can help the students to adapt the course material to their individual needs, aiding them much like a personal tutor would do," said Leif Kari, vice president for education at Stockholm-based KTH Royal Institute of Technology.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on Thursday launched what it says is the first global guidance on GenAI in education and academic research.

For national regulators, it outlines steps to take on areas such as data protection and revision of copyright laws, and urges countries to make sure teachers get the AI skills they need.

CHEATING VERSUS HELPFUL SHORT-CUTS

Some educators draw a comparison between AI and the advent of handheld calculators, which began entering classrooms in the 1970s and stirred debate on how they would affect learning before they were quickly accepted as essential help.

Some have expressed concern that students might similarly rely on AI to produce work and effectively cheat - especially as AI content gets better with time. Passing off GenAI as original work could also raise copyright issues, prompting questions over whether AI should be banned in academia.

Rachel Forsyth, a project manager in the Strategic Development Office at Lund University in southern Sweden, said a ban "feels like something that we can't enforce".

"We're trying to put the focus back on learning and away from cheating and policing the students," she said.

Worldwide, the software Turnitin has for decades been one of the main ways to check for plagiarism.

In April it launched a tool that uses AI to detect AI-generated content. It has provided that tool free to more than 10,000 education institutions globally, although it plans to charge a fee from January.

So far, the AI detection tool has found that only 3% of students used AI for more than 80% of their submissions and that 78% did not use AI at all, Turnitin data shows.

Problems have arisen over what are known as false positives when text written by humans - in some cases by professors trying to test the software - has been flagged as written by AI, though those wrongly accused of using AI can defend themselves if they have saved various drafts of their work.

Students themselves are busy experimenting with AI and some give it a

poor grade, saying it can summarise at a basic level, but that facts must always be checked because GenAI cannot distinguish fact from fiction or right from wrong.

Its knowledge is also limited to what it can scrape from the internet, which is not enough for very specific questions.

"I reckon AI has a far way to go before it's properly useful," said Sophie Constant, a 19 year-old law student at England's University of Oxford.

"I can't ask it about a single case. It just doesn't know and it doesn't have access to articles I am studying so it is not very helpful."

CORPORATE SPEED AND SLOW-MOVING REGULATION

UNESCO's latest guidance also flags the risk GenAI will deepen societal divisions as educational and economic success increasingly depend on access to electricity, computers and internet that the poorest do not have.

"We are struggling to align the speed of transformation of the education system to the speed of the change in technological progress," Stefania Giannini, assistant director-general for education at UNESCO, told Reuters.

So far, the European Union (EU) is among those at the forefront of regulations around the use of AI with draft legislation that has yet to be adopted as law. The regulations do not specifically deal with education but its broader rules on ethics, for instance, could be applied to the field.

After its exit from the EU, Britain is also trying to work on guidelines for the use of AI in education by consulting educators and says it will release the results later this year.

Singapore, a leader in efforts to train teachers on how to use the technology, is among the nearly 70 countries that have developed or planned strategies on AI.

"In terms of universities, as a professor, rather than fighting it, you need to leverage AI, experience it, develop a good framework, guidelines and a responsible AI system, and then work with students to find a mechanism that works for you," said Kirsten Rulf, a partner at Boston Consulting Group who helped draft the EU's regulations on AI in her previous role.

"I think we are the last generation that has lived in a world without GenAI."—Reuters

This gecko's camouflage is so good, it masqueraded as another species



AS NIGHT FALLS on the northern forests of Madagascar, trees come alive. What appears to be a piece of bark peels off a tree trunk, and starts slowly crawling along a branch. It's actually Uroplatus garmaso, a newly identified species of leaf-

tailed gecko. This animal is a dazzling camouflager - better than the chameleon - but it's long been hiding in plain sight. And many of the features that make it unique are still an evolutionary mystery.

"They look totally different

from all of the other reptiles," said Mark D. Scherz, curator of herpetology at the Natural History Museum of Denmark and a co-author of the paper describing the find. The 22 species of leaf-tailed geckos that are unique to Madagascar can be split into two categories: those who've evolved to look uncannily like leaves, and those who imitate tree bark. U. garmaso and the others that blend into bark have a fringe hugging their flanks and legs, a beard around the bottom of their chin, and flattened tails.

During the day, they fold out that fringe and rest on tree trunks, becoming "practically invisible," Scherz said. At night, they come out of that sleeping position and prowl the forest for invertebrate prey, like "little leopards or jaguars," he added.

U. garmaso is so talented at disguise that it's long been mistaken for another leaf-tailed gecko in Madagascar called U. henkeli. It was probably British pet traders in the early 2000s who first wondered if they had their hands on a different beast, Scherz said. The traders noticed small physical differences. This lizard is smaller than U. henkeli and has a narrower tail. Its diamond-pupiled eyes are tinted a gaudier yellowish-red. — NYT

Jessica Lange leads starry cast of New Paula Vogel Play on Broadway

JESSICA LANGE, JIM Parsons and Celia Keenan-Bolger will return to Broadway in the spring to star in a new family drama by acclaimed playwright Paula Vogel.

The show, called "Mother Play," begins outside Washington in 1962 and is about a strong-willed mother raising two children as the family relocates.

Lange, 74, will play the mother. She is a two-time Oscar winner (for "Tootsie" and "Blue Sky") who won a Tony Award in 2016 for playing another difficult mother - Mary Tyrone in a revival of "Long Day's Journey Into Night."

Keenan-Bolger, 45, is a four-time Tony nominee who won the prize in 2019 for "To Kill a Mockingbird"; she will play the daughter. Parsons, 50, who last appeared on Broadway in



a 2018 production of "The Boys in the Band," will play the son.

Vogel, who is considered one of the nation's leading teachers of playwriting as well as a top practitioner of the craft, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1998 for "How I Learned to Drive," which was later staged on Broadway in 2022. She has had one other Broadway outing with the play "Indecent," which was staged in 2017.

"Mother Play" will be directed by Tina Landau ("SpongeBob SquarePants") and presented on Broadway by Second Stage Theater, a nonprofit dedicated to work by living American writers. The play is scheduled to begin previews April 2 and to open April 25 at the Helen Hayes Theater, which is a small Broadway house owned by Second Stage.

"Mother Play" will follow Second Stage's Broadway production of "Appropriate," a 2014 drama by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, also at the Hayes. That production will be directed by Lila Neugebauer and will star Sarah Paulson; previews begin Nov. 29, and the opening is scheduled for Dec. 18.—NYT