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EGYPT DEFEAT OMAN IN CIS GAMES BEACH SOCCER



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LUMINOUS THREADS TAKES CENTRE STAGE IN BAIT AL ZUBAIR



P13

OXY OMAN ACHIEVES RECORD-BREAKING INITIAL PRODUCTION TEST IN BLOCK 65



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO CÔTE D'IVOIRE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Alassane Dramane Ouattara, of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Dr Alassane and the people of his country further progress and prosperity.

SALALAH

CAMPAIGN TO BOOST SMES IN DHOFAR

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) continued with its promotional campaign (Our Pioneers in Dhofar) to mark the importance of the prominent role played by SMEs and the success of the Khareef Dhofar events. The campaign included media and marketing activities on social media platforms through video clips, influencers and media actors to promote institutions, projects, and locations at various tourist sites. They are for the general public to benefit from their services and products. The sites included Al Askar Tower in the Wilayat of Taqah, the Nawafeth Park site on the Itin Plain, Al Dahariz Beach, Al Baleed Archaeological Park, Raysut Beach, the Small and Medium Enterprises Exhibition in Itin Plain, and others.

DETAILS ON P3

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 OMAN OBSERVER





RAFO'S MUSIC BAND WINS FIRST PLACE IN UK

The Royal Air Force of Oman's Music Band won the first place in the general appearance category within the framework of its participation in the International Music Competition presently held in Scotland, United Kingdom. The participation of military bands in international music competitions aims to hone the skills of its members and enhance their abilities and artistic potential in addition to providing them with varied musical experiences. – ONA

28,832 SEATS AVAILABLE FOR 23/24 ACADEMIC YEAR

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, AUG 6

The Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation recently declared that a total of 28,832 academic seats are available for the academic year 2023/2024, offering various opportunities for higher education. These seats encompass diverse options, including those offered by government higher education institutions, internal scholarships, private sector grants

for studying in private higher education institutions, foreign scholarships, and grants from other countries.

The distribution of these academic seats is as follows: 16,315 are allocated to different government higher education institutions, which signifies a considerable opportunity for students seeking quality education in state-funded colleges and universities. Additionally, 621 academic seats have been specifically reserved for foreign scholarships and grants,

There are 11,896 academic seats available in private universities and colleges, indicating a growing presence of private institutions and an alternative pathway to pursue their academic aspirations

providing international learning opportunities to deserving candidates. Furthermore, there are 11,896 academic seats

available in private universities and colleges, indicating a growing presence of private institutions and an alternative pathway for students to pursue their academic aspirations.

Following the completion of the seat choice modification stage on July 31, 40,958 successful applicants have been enrolled in the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC). The high number of enrolment reflects the keen interest among students to seize these educational opportunities.

Investments in Khazaen Economic City stand at RO 316m

BARKA: The volume of investments attracted by Khazaen Economic City in Barka till the end of June 2023 stood at RO 316 million (\$821 Million).

Statistics issued by Khazaen Economic City showed that the value of foreign investments amounted to RO 186 million, while the value of local investments amounted to RO 130 million.

The statistics further showed that the total number of nationalities invested in the city are 16, the number of signed agreements reached 100, the number of projects under construction reached 23, and the number of direct job opportunities reached 300 for national cadres in various sectors.

Khazaen Economic City said that the most prominent investments are in the logistics as the total value of investments in this sector stood at RO 60 million, while the number of deals stood at 20. **DETAILS ON P13**

INSIDE

NO SUBSTITUTION FOR BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING



THE ADVANTAGES OF BREASTFEEDING FOR THE CHILD ARE EXTENSIVE IF NOT ONLY PROVIDES ESSENTIAL NUTRIENTS DURING THE EARLY MONTHS BUT ALSO ENHANCES AND STRENGTHENS THEIR IMMUNE SYSTEM, REDUCING THE RISK OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES AND

SPOTLIGHT

P4

Oman 7th fastest-growing destination

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 6

The Sultanate of Oman was the seventh fastest-growing destination (post-Covid) for international arrivals in 2022.

Austria, the UAE, Dominican Republic, Andorra, the Netherlands, and Qatar were the top six countries.

The report by Skift Research tracked 84 travel indicators across 22 countries with data from 22 partners. The first time that the global travel rebound surpassed 2019 levels was in April 2023.

In exactly three years after its lowest point in April 2020, the industry underwent a stunning swing back. 17 out of 22 countries tracked by the Travel Health Index are part of the '100 Club' with an



index score of 100 or higher as of June 2023.

This indicates complete recovery to pre-pandemic performance levels. Of the five countries that have not reached full travel recovery, Hong Kong and Russia remain the slowest to bounce back. While international travel in most regions still lags behind 2019 levels, the Middle East is the only region to witness a complete recovery of international travel in the first quarter of 2023. As the pandemic has been left behind in many ways, there are some habits that have not reverted back to pre-pandemic levels, such as travellers opting for flexible booking to avoid cancellation costs and 55 per cent of travellers buying insurance to face any adverse situations.



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Oman has over 800 species of frankincense



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate of Oman is home for more than 800 species of frankincense and over 58 per cent of the known plants in the country are of the same, according to experts in the field.

According to the organisers of the Second International Forum on Frankincense and Medicinal Plants which will be held on September 3 and 4, most of the cultivated, medicinal and wild plant species are found in the highlands of Dhofar Governorate.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Professor Louay Rashan, researcher in frankincense and medicinal plants and chief organiser of the upcoming forum said that frankincense has been the most successful source of potential drugs since times immemorial.

“Oman’s land of frankincense includes more than 58 per cent of the known plants in the Sultanate of Oman, which are more than 800 species. Historically, natural products, which is called secondary metabolites, have been used since ancient times and in folklore to treat many ailments, and they have been the most successful source of potential drugs,” Professor Louay said.

The Second International Forum on Frankincense and Medicinal Plants, is considered to be a quantum leap in the field of research on frankincense and medicinal plants where several new researches will be presented for the first time.

The area is rich in plants and trees such as Commiphora, Boswellia, Acacia, Anogessius dhofarica, Aloe dhofarensis, Aloe vera and many other interesting plants waiting to be explored. It is believed that these plants may play a role in treating some of the world’s current and future diseases.

The unique aromatic gum resin is extracted from many species of frankincense tree, which includes about 23 scientific species, which are spread in many countries, including India, Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea of the genus Boswellia, including the Omani frankincense tree type Boswellia sacra (from the south of the Arabian Peninsula).

Scores of researchers and experts from Western, Asian, Arab and local universities, institutes and companies, and more than 45 speakers for innovative scientific papers and research as well as experts in food and cosmetics will be attending the forum which will be conducted in hybrid mode.

‘Think Tank’ initiative has 90 projects to foster sustainable development

SIHAM AL SAIDI
AL BATINAH, AUG 6

In a significant stride towards sustainable development, the Al Batinah North Governorate has embarked on a unique and promising ‘Think Tank’ initiative. This visionary project aligns with Oman Vision 2040 and aims to foster sustainable development in the region.

Recently, an event took place at the Science and Innovation Centre in the Wilayat of Liwa, where representatives from various sectors, including the Ministry of Finance, government bodies, academic institutions, and 33 experts from diverse fields, gathered to support this groundbreaking initiative.

The event sought to strengthen community partnerships and promote sustainable growth through knowledge exchange and collaboration with official authorities in the governorate, backed by the office of the Al Batinah North Governor and the local municipal council.

Central to the gathering was the essential role of the expert team in crafting and evaluating impactful projects. A presentation by the Ministry of Finance highlighted the ongoing cooperation between



the private and government sectors in the region. The concept of public-private partnerships was emphasised as an efficient strategy to attract investments and drive sustainable development. Attendees were inspired by the insights into the ministry’s current and future projects.

One of the hallmarks of the “Think Tank” initiative was the announcement of a competition that led to the submission of more than 90 unique projects through the “Think Tank” platform. Each of these innovative projects offered diverse ideas contributing to the overarching goal of sustainable development for the governorate. Participants enthusiastically discussed and analysed evaluation mechanisms and stages that could shape the future of the region.

The initiative was launched

with a forward-thinking purpose, intending to serve as a hub for bright ideas, proposals, and recommendations that could drive sustainable development in the region. This initiative exemplifies the government’s commitment to involving citizens in the journey towards progress.

The event was a remarkable gathering of perspectives, expertise, and enthusiasm, fostering collaboration between the public and private sectors. It showcased how such cooperation can lead to transformative projects that make a meaningful impact on society.

The initiative aims to create an effective ecosystem that nurtures ideas for a prestigious, optimistic future by promoting community engagement and establishing lasting partnerships. In a region

brimming with potential, this initiative serves as a stepping-stone towards realising the dream of sustainable development.

As the Al Batinah North Governorate marches confidently towards a brighter tomorrow, the “Think Tank” stands at the forefront, inviting visionaries, pioneers, and change-makers to join hands in creating a sustainable and thriving community. With determination, innovation, and collective effort, the region paves the way for a sustainable future.

The seeds of progress have been sown, and with the transformative projects presented, Al Batinah North Governorate is poised to become a leading example of sustainable development — an inspiration for others to follow.



HEAC to announce first sorting results on August 16



MUSCAT: The Higher Education Admission Center (HEAC) at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation will announce on August 16, 2023 the results of the first sorting for the academic year 2023/2024.

Dr Hamad bin Khalfan al Numani, Director General of HEAC said that the results of the

first sorting are expected to witness high competition, especially on high-demand educational programmes.

They include programmes of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and scholarships abroad, as well as health and education specialisations in various establishments that offer such programmes. — ONA

Oman Air flight delayed due to a technical issue in Kaula Lumpur



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 6

Oman Air’s flight WY824 on Saturday travelling from Kuala Lumpur to Muscat experienced a technical issue while on the ground and the passengers had to disembark after boarding.

“A number of passengers have been connected to alternative flights and we are working on arranging flights for the remaining passengers as soon as possible,” the airline said.

At the airport, all passengers were provided with refreshments, based on the available resources. After 5 hours, as per protocol, the passengers were provided with accommodation.

“There was a several-hour delay at immigration, however, all passengers have been safely accommodated in nearby hotels.” Hammoud al Touqi, a journalist who was onboard the same flight shared a tweet about the situation at Kuala Lumpur on Saturday.

RAIN IN AL RUSTAQ, AL AWABI



AL RUSTAQ: The wilayats of Al Rustaq and Al Awabi in the Al Batinah South Governorate on Sunday witnessed heavy rains. In Al Rustaq, the rain fell on the villages of Wadi Al Sahtan, the villages of Wadi Bani Ghafir and Wadi Bani Awf. The rains led to the flow of a number of wadis. — ONA

Recall

Hyundai Tucson LM

Recall Date: 7 August 2023

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Hyundai- Tucson LM	2013- 2015	4678

Description of defect:
Some vehicles might experience the HECU module damage electrically.

Recall consequence

Procedure:
Install the supplied multi fuse kit and replace the upper cover.

Recall Action

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>
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CDAA launches awareness exhibition in Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 6

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) inaugurated an awareness exhibition in Dhofar Governorate under the patronage Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of Environment Authority (EA), running concurrently with the activities of the Dhofar Khareef.

The exhibition is part of this year's ongoing efforts to raise awareness and enhance preventive measures against risks related to CDAA work. It will be open to the public until August 10.

Held at Salalah Gardens Mall, the exhibition features several sections showcasing the diverse capabilities of the CDAA. These sections cover areas such as fire, ground rescue, water rescue, search and rescue (urban and mountainous), handling hazardous materials accidents, ambulance services, civil protection, and an awareness corner.



Visitors to the exhibition can explore and learn about the various equipment and mechanisms employed by the CDAA to respond to different types of emergencies. The displays also include demonstrations of high building landings and other rescue operations on land, water,

and hazardous materials.

To promote safety education, the CDAA has set up a dedicated corner for training visitors on the proper use of fire extinguishers, fire blankets, and first aid procedures. Additionally, an interactive corner designed for children offers an engaging experience to learn about



safety practices.

In his remarks, Dr Al Amri expressed his utmost satisfaction with the exhibition, acknowledging the CDAA's preparedness. The strategic timing of the exhibition coinciding with the activities of Dhofar Khareef further highlights its significance.

Dr Al Amri extended his heartfelt appreciation to the dedicated civil defence and ambulance personnel for their unwavering commitment and tireless efforts in ensuring public safety.

The exhibition serves as a testament to the CDAA's state-

of-the-art technologies and equipment, providing concrete evidence of their readiness to handle any emergency situation.

He emphasised the EA's strong commitment to collaborating closely with the CDAA, working together to safeguard the safety of all citizens and residents of Oman.

Oman takes part in Brunei Darussalam Book Fair



BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, took part in the Brunei Darussalam Book Fair.

The participation aims to introduce Omani publications and highlight Oman's cultural, historical and literary heritage. It also targeted boosting cultural communication between the two countries.

Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Nazmi bin Haji Mohamad, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth of Brunei Darussalam viewed several Omani publications during the book fair's opening ceremony.

He expressed his admirations of the publications, as well as the

heritage and cultural exhibits in Oman's pavilion. The minister said that the Oman-Brunei relations extend for more than three decades of active cooperation in various fields, especially in cultural and related fields.

Erma bint Said al Kithiriyah, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Brunei Darussalam said that participating in this event aims to highlight the cultural and intellectual movement in Oman.

This participation, she added, contributes to enhancing cultural ties between the Sultanate of Oman and Brunei Darussalam. Moreover, Oman's pavilion saw a great turnout of visitors from various nationalities. — **ONA**

Campaign to boost SMEs continues in Dhofar

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) continues its promotional campaign (Our Pioneers in Dhofar) to mark the importance of the prominent role played by SMEs and the success of the Khareef Dhofar events.

The campaign includes media and marketing activities on social media platforms through video clips, influencers and media actors to promote institutions, projects, and locations at various tourist sites. They are for the general public to benefit from their services and products.

The sites include Al Askar Tower in the Wilayat of Taqah, the Nawafeth Park site on the Itin Plain, Al Dahariz Beach, Al Baleed Archaeological Park, Raysut Beach, the Small and Medium Enterprises Exhibition in Itin Plain, the Oman Crafts Exhibition in Samhura Village, the Osara event in Raysut.

In addition, they are shedding



light on the institutions incubated in the authority's business incubator at the Sultan Qaboos Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

Mohammed bin Ahmed al Ghassani, Director of the SMEDA Department in Dhofar

Governorate, said: "The campaign targets small and medium enterprises to maximise the benefits of the opportunities offered by the season, in addition to exploiting the media momentum to highlight a category that has an influential role in the success

of the season through advertising breaks in The People and Khareef programme on Oman TV focuses on small and medium enterprises and projects, in addition, to the campaign complementing the efforts of other government institutions such as the Dhofar Municipality and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism." The campaign included 18 small and medium enterprises that obtained the Entrepreneurship Card through billboards in various locations in the Dhofar Governorate.

The work assigned to SMEs during the Khareef Season 2022 amounted to RO 3,500,000, also to usufruct contracts and lease contracts for lands belonging to the Dhofar Municipality.

Within the framework of partnership and integration between the SMEDA and Dhofar Municipality, Dhofar Municipality has provided continuous support during the past year in its various tourism seasons to SMEs to strengthen its position in activating the tourism sector.

Unlocking the enchanting history of Wadi Al Maawil

TEXT & PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

Nestled in the northern part of the Sultanate of Oman lies Wadi Al Maawil. This wilayat is a harmonious blend of ancient castles, forts, and historical towers that stores the rich history and culture of the country. Walking through the alleys of its ancient neighbourhoods (Harat), the visitors are transported back in time, where towering structures, ancient mosques, and Quranic schools once hosted revered scholars of jurisprudence and religion.

Within the boundary of Wadi Al Maawil stand over 15 castles, each a testament to the region's storied past. Among them, the Al Safala Castle takes centre stage, donning the emblem of this ancient wilayat. The Al Mutala'a, Al Ghubrah, Hujrat Musalmat, and Hujrat al Sheikh castles are among those that recount the



history of this wilayat. Dotting the mountain heights, historic towers like Shammas, Zarhar, Sabah, Al Midfa'a, Al Qarn, and Sweifeh offer a glimpse into the region's strategic



significance. Meanwhile, the forts of Habra and Al Muhaideth, alongside Bait al Khandaq, known locally as 'Al-Roshan', add to the richness of the landscape.

At the heart of the Al Sefala district stands the Great Mosque, an architectural marvel that harks back three centuries. With intricate inscriptions, the mosque

exudes an air of timeless beauty. A historical well inside the mosque still quenches the thirst of the neighbourhood's inhabitants, serving as a reminder of the region's

reliance on ancient water sources. With a capacity to hold 300 people, the mosque boasts 20 interlinked columns forming majestic arched arches, symbolising strength and endurance.

Evident in these castles, towers, and mosques is their location within the old lanes and their encirclement by robust circular walls. With stones and mud, these historical monuments bear witness to the remarkable architectural skills of their creators. Over time, some of these historical treasures have fallen into disrepair. However, the essence of their grandeur remains unblemished, leaving visitors captivated by their charm and elegance.

Wadi Al Maawil is not only a repository of historical landmarks; it also boasts a rich tapestry of traditional industries. The skilled craftsmen here continue to craft daggers, jewellery, pottery, and palm fronds, sustaining age-old traditions in their everyday lives.



NO SUBSTITUTION FOR BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

As the World Breastfeeding Week concludes, the focus has been firmly on the incredible benefits that breastfeeding provides to both mothers and babies. Celebrated annually from August 1 to August 7, this global campaign aims to raise awareness about the importance of breastfeeding and highlight its numerous advantages for both infant and mother.

The Sultanate of Oman's Ministry of Health, in a recent statement, emphasised the profound bond between a child and its mother from the moment of birth, which deepens through breastfeeding. This emotional connection not only benefits the child's well-being but also positively impacts the mother's health.

The ministry distributed a comprehensive awareness brochure underlining that despite various options for infant formula available in the market, nothing compares to the nutritional value and benefits of breast milk. Breast milk provides all the essential nutrients a baby needs, strengthens their immunity, and protects them from diseases and infections. Additionally, breastfeeding fosters a strong emotional bond between the baby and mother, creating a sense of warmth and security for the child.

The brochure explained the significance of colostrum, the first milk produced by the mother's breast during the initial days after birth. Colostrum is rich in essential nutrients and contains vital antibodies that safeguard the child from illnesses and infections.

"Breastfeeding has innumerable benefits for the child, we summarise the most important of them here. In addition to providing the baby with all the essential nutrients needed during the first months, it enhances and strengthens the child's immune system and protects him from infectious diseases. It also reduces the risk of obesity and related diseases in the long term. It helps the child to grow in a healthy way. The advantages of breastfeeding for the child are extensive. It not only provides essential nutrients during the early months but also enhances and strengthens their immune system, reducing the risk of infectious diseases and obesity-related issues in the long run.

Furthermore, breastfeeding contributes to the child's overall healthy growth." For mothers, breastfeeding offers numerous health benefits too. It helps reduce bleeding after childbirth and decreases the risk of breast and ovarian cancer. Additionally, breastfeeding is associated with a reduced possibility of obesity, protects against osteoporosis, and lowers the risk of heart disease.

The brochure also addressed common questions, such as whether breastfeeding is safe when the mother has the flu. The response emphasised that breastfeeding is not only safe but also beneficial, as the mother's milk contains antibodies that help strengthen the baby's immune system. To minimise the transmission of infection, it is advisable for the mother to wear a mask and practice proper hand hygiene.

Experts provided practical advice for storing breast milk, recommending special containers and labelling to ensure its freshness and safety. For mothers who may be away from their babies, educating the caregiver on how to properly warm and feed expressed milk is crucial.

Breastfeeding after a cesarean delivery was also emphasised as essential for increasing milk production. Mothers who undergo cesarean sections may experience delays in starting breastfeeding, making initial support and guidance vital to establish successful breastfeeding.

Moreover, breastfeeding remains crucial even after the first six months of the baby's life. Specialists advocate breastfeeding for at least two years, as breast milk contains unique components that aid the child's natural and healthy growth, while also bolstering their immunity.

For further assistance and guidance, experts recommend visiting nearby Breastfeeding Clinics in the country. These clinics offer valuable support and information to mothers on their breastfeeding journey.

As World Breastfeeding Week concludes, it is crucial to recognise that no substitute exists for the unparalleled benefits of breastfeeding. It not only nourishes the baby but also strengthens the mother-child bond, fostering a healthy and loving start to life. Embracing breastfeeding can lead to a brighter and healthier future for both mother and child.

THE ADVANTAGES OF BREASTFEEDING FOR THE CHILD
ARE EXTENSIVE. IT NOT ONLY PROVIDES ESSENTIAL
NUTRIENTS DURING THE EARLY MONTHS BUT ALSO
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REDUCING THE RISK OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES AND
OBESITY-RELATED ISSUES IN THE LONG RUN



At least 30 killed after train derails in Pakistan

Nawabshah: At least 30 people were killed and 80 injured on Sunday when an express train derailed in southern Pakistan, government officials said.

Accidents and derailments occur frequently on the country's antiquated railway system, which has nearly 7,500 kilometres (4,600 miles) of track and carries more than 80 million passengers a year.

"This is quite a big accident," railway minister Khawaja Saad Rafique told reporters.

"There can be two reasons: first that it was a mechanical fault, or the fault was created -- it might be a sabotage. We will investigate it."

Rafiq said was not going at a fast pace and an inquiry into the cause of the accident has been ordered.

"It would be premature to talk about the cause of the accident, which could be a mechanical fault or an act of terrorism," Rafiq said.

The derailment of the Hazara Express happened near Sahara railway station close to Nawabshah city in the southern Sindh province.



Local residents and volunteers gather near the carriages at the accident site following the derailment of a passenger train in Nawabshah on Sunday. – AFP

"Eight coaches have derailed," Mohsin Syal, a railway official, told local HUM News. Earlier, Sharjeel Memon, spokesman for the Sindh provincial government, told reporters 19 people had been confirmed dead and more than 50 injured. There were chaotic scenes at the Nawabshah Trauma Centre as ambulances and private cars ferried the injured for treatment.

One man leapt from the back of an ambulance clutching a child, his clothes soaked in blood, while a woman moaned in pain as she was carried in on a stretcher.

"We don't know what happened, we were just sitting inside," said one dazed woman. At the accident site outside Nawabshah, dozens of cars, tractors, rickshaws and motorcycles could be seen parked on a road that runs alongside the track.

Volunteers were wading through a canal that separates the road from the railway line to help, and lifting the injured to get them assistance.

Some passenger compartments were upright but off the tracks, while

others lay on their side, mangled steel from the undercarriage twisted and buckled.

Senior police official Younis Chandio said some passengers remained trapped in one carriage.

Ijaz Shah, a provincial railway official, told AFP that a relief train had been dispatched to the site.

The Hazara Express is a daily passenger train that leaves the port city of Karachi in the south and takes around 33 hours to reach Havelian in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, some 1,600 kilometres north. In June 2021 two trains collided near Daharki in Sindh, killing at least 65 people and injuring about 150 others.

In that accident, an express derailed onto the opposite track, and a second passenger train crashed into the wreckage roughly a minute later. At least 75 passengers burnt to death in a fire aboard the Tezgam express train in October 2019, while a two-train collision at Ghotki killed more than 100 people in 2005. — **AFP and dpa**

Hiroshima marks a-bomb anniversary

TOKYO: Japan on Sunday marked the 78th anniversary of the US atomic bombing on Hiroshima, where its mayor urged the abolition of nuclear weapons and called the Group of Seven leaders' notion of nuclear deterrence a "folly".

The day to commemorate the victims of the world's first nuclear attack comes as Russia has raised the spectre of using nuclear weapons in its war with Ukraine.

It also comes as biopic "Oppenheimer", chronicling the creation of the atomic bomb, has become a box-office hit in the United States. Some have criticised the film for largely ignoring the weapons' destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki — bombed three days later, on August 9, 1945.

The film's release in Japan has yet to be announced.

Also causing controversy in Japan, the distributor of "Barbie", a blockbuster released on the same day as "Oppenheimer", latched on to fan-produced "Barbenheimer" memes that depicted the actors in the title roles alongside images of nuclear blasts. Hiroshima was in the spotlight in May, where Prime Minister Fumio Kishida hosted a G7 summit in the western city, his home constituency. G7 leaders issued a statement expressing their commitment to achieving disarmament but said that as long as nuclear weapons existed, they



Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui (R) and representatives of bereaved families enshrine a list of the atomic bomb victims at the cenotaph during a ceremony at the Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima on Sunday. – AFP

should serve to deter aggression and prevent war. On Sunday, a peace bell tolled at 8:15 am, the time the bomb was dropped. About 50,000 participants in the outdoor memorial ceremony including ageing survivors observed a moment of silence, with the summer heat hitting 30 degrees Celsius (86 Fahrenheit)

"Leaders around the world must confront the reality that nuclear threats now being voiced by certain policymakers reveal the folly of nuclear deterrence theory," Hiroshima Mayor Kazumi Matsui said at the ceremony, also attended by Kishida.

The prime minister said the road

to a world without nuclear weapons was getting steeper, due in part to Russia's nuclear threats, but that this made it all the more important to bring back international momentum towards that goal.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed his support.

"World leaders have visited this city, seen its monuments, spoken with its brave survivors, and emerged emboldened to take up the cause of nuclear disarmament," he said in remarks read by a UN representative. "More should do so, because the drums of nuclear war are beating once again."

— **Reuters**

Kim Jong Un tells North Korea arms factories to boost capacity

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has instructed factories making missile engines, artillery and other weapons to boost capacity as an important part of bolstering the country's defence capabilities, state media said on Sunday.

Kim's inspections from Thursday to Saturday included the production of engines for strategic cruise missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles, as well as shells for super large-calibre multiple-rocket launchers and transporter-erector-launchers, said state news agency KCNA.

His unusual visits to multiple arms production facilities over several days come as Pyongyang pushes to develop various strategic and conventional weapons and holds prominent displays of a range of arms.

The launchers Kim inspected are normally used to fire ballistic missiles.

North Korea has tested rocket launchers for larger calibre shells, advanced cruise missiles and last month its newest ballistic missiles, including a solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile.

Kim cited improved precision processing and modernised automation in the production of large-calibre multiple-rocket launcher shells, KCNA said.

He called for the mass production of "various kinds of cutting-edge strategic weapon



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at a major weapon factory. – Reuters

engines... and thus make a great contribution to bringing about a revolution in developing new strategic weapons of our style," the agency said.

Photos showed Kim firing different types of assault rifles, with fiery blasts coming off the muzzle as he took aim at a target that was out of frame.

Cheong Seong-chang, an expert on North Korea's political strategy at the Sejong Institute near Seoul, said Kim is likely focused on modernisation and technical innovation of weapons that will help with the export of arms to Russia.

Marking the 70th anniversary of the end of the Korean War on July 27, Pyongyang held a major

military parade displaying its newest nuclear-capable missiles and attack and spy drones, with Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and a senior Chinese official joining Kim in the reviewing stand.

At a large defence exhibition, Kim gave Shoigu a tour of the display of ballistic missiles and what appeared to be a new drone.

The United States has accused North Korea of providing arms to Russia for its war in Ukraine, including a "significant" number of artillery shells, as well as a shipment of infantry rockets and missiles to Russia's mercenary Wagner Group.

Russia and North Korea have denied those claims. — **Reuters**

Niger on edge as deadline looms

NIAMEY: An air of defiance, mixed with unmistakable disquiet: As a regional leaders' deadline ticks down to a threatened military intervention a week after a coup deposed Mohamed Bazoum as Niger's president, anxiety hung thick in the air in the capital Niamey on Sunday.

The capital is a stronghold for opposition to Bazoum, who has been confined to his official residence since July 26.

In the dusty alleyways of Niamey's Boukoki neighbourhood, the prospect of an armed intervention by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was largely being met with flinty determination. "We're going to fight for this revolution. We're

not going to retreat faced with the enemy, we're determined," said Boukoki resident Adama Oumarou.

"We were waiting for this coup for a long time. When it arrived, we breathed a sigh of relief," she said. The combative attitude is widely shared in alleys echoing with the sound of whirring sewing machines coming from nearby shops.

"If ECOWAS intervenes, that will make the situation worse. But the people are ready and the population is going to support the new leaders because we want change," said a textile trader who gave his name as Jackou.

Small traders regard the military takeover as a means of freeing themselves from the quagmire of deep economic

malaise in a country that ranks as one of the globe's poorest, after 12 years of rule by the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS). Whereas the political class is widely regarded as corrupt, the army has managed to retain its prestige -- to the extent that Nigeriens have little doubt as to how their troops might measure up against ECOWAS forces should they need to test their mettle.

"We have confidence in our soldiers!" said Abdoulaye Issaka, half hidden amid a heap of fabric behind his sewing machine.

Both neighbouring states -- which have experienced coups of their own in recent years -- have warned that they would consider any military intervention against Niger "an act of war". — **AFP**



مواصلات
MWASALAT

Tender Number

T-35-2023

Tender Announcement

"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tender:

Tender Name

Provision of Comprehensive Support for Mwasalat's Oracle EBS R12 Modules (Financial, & SCM)

Project Summary

Mwasalat invites competent and qualified Service Providers to submit proposals for comprehensive support for Oracle E-Business Suite (EBS) R12 Modules, backend Database, and Customized Reports in accordance with the terms and conditions stipulated in tender documents.

The Service Provider will be responsible in maintaining an optimal functioning and continuous improvement of our Oracle EBS system for the duration of contract (12-month).

Tender Fee

OMR 25/-, waived for SME
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Grade & Specialty

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Start date for tender document distribution

Monday 7th August 2023

Last date for tender document distribution

Tuesday 16th August 2023

Last date for submission

Monday 21st August 2023

- The Tender documents may be shared by email during official working hours between 9:00A.M - 2:00 P.M.
- Tenders are requested to share commercial registration (CR) & business card through email Tenders@mwasalat.om and tender number as the subject of email. Tender Document shall be shared by email.
- The submission Date / Time shall be on or before the deadline specified in the above table.

Participants should submit their offers in the tender box located in the head- quarter National Ferries Company LLC. (MWASALAT) at Ghala, Muscat (Cable Shams Building 5th floor). Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected.

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Head Quarter, Ghala Tel: +968 1551
P.O.Box: 911 , Al Khuwair, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman

For more information please send to:
tenders@mwasalat.om



Iraq taps Interpol to find former officials over \$2.5bn graft

BAGHDAD: Iraq plans to ask Interpol to issue international alerts seeking the arrest of former senior officials including an ex-finance minister and an ex-intelligence chief over the alleged theft of more than \$2.5 billion from the country's Tax Commission. The scandal centres on suspected illegitimate cash withdrawals from the Commission

between 2021 and 2022 totalling around \$2.5 billion, according to Iraqi officials — a staggering amount even in a country that regularly ranks among the world's most corrupt. Iraq's top anti-corruption official, Integrity Commission chief Judge Haider Hanoun, announced the move to seek so-called Interpol Red Notices on Sunday. Hanoun said

the judiciary would also ask for notices to be issued for the private secretary and a political adviser to former prime minister Mustafa al Kadhimi. Kadhimi and former finance minister Ali Allawi have both denied involvement in the alleged corruption, which came to light late last year after a new government came to

power. Allawi resigned from the government in August 2022 citing political interference in government work and graft. He has since said that he took steps to prevent theft from occurring at the Tax Commission but that his decisions were ignored by other officials. Reuters could not immediately reach the other officials for comment.Current

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani has said one of his priorities is fighting the rampant corruption that pervades the Iraqi state and has led to the pilfering of untold billions of the country's oil wealth dollars over the years. Hanoun, appointed by Sudani, said Iraq was working to extradite people involved in the theft from a number of states including the

UAE, Turkey, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and also called on the US and UK "to hand over fugitive suspects," though he did not name them. Hanoun said those allegedly involved in the corruption for whom he was demanding Red Notices had taken a share of no less than 100 billion Iraqi dinars (\$77 million). — Reuters

■ RACE HEALADS PADDY SEASON



Jockeys compete in the annual buffalo race festival in Chonburi province, Thailand, on Sunday. Thai farmers marked the beginning of rice cultivation during the monsoon season on Sunday with their annual water buffaloes race which dates back to the 1800s. — Reuters

Morocco minibus plunge kills 24

RABAT: A minibus carrying market-goers in Morocco plunged into a ravine on Sunday, killing 24 people in one of the North African country's worst-ever road accidents, officials said. The passengers were travelling a mountainous route to a weekly market in the town of Demnate, in the central province of Azilal, when the minibus overturned on a bend, the local authorities said. Images on public broadcaster 2M showed the vehicle crushed at the bottom of the ravine. "All the passengers are dead," Youssef Makhoulfi, director of the Demnate hospital, told 2M, which reported that at least two women and a child were among the victims. Local authorities said an investigation has begun. Accidents are frequent on the roads of Morocco and other North African countries, which see thousands of road deaths annually. Eleven people, mostly

agricultural workers, died in March when their minibus slammed into a tree after the driver lost control in the rural town of Brachoua, local officials said at the time. Many poorer citizens use coaches and minibuses to travel in rural areas. In August last year, 23 people were killed and 36 injured when their bus overturned on a bend east of Morocco's economic capital Casablanca. An average of 3,500 road deaths and 12,000 injuries are recorded annually in Morocco, according to the National Road Safety Agency, with an average of 10 deaths per day. The figure last year was around 3,200. Authorities have set out to halve the mortality rate by 2026 ever since the worst bus accident in the country's history left 42 dead in 2012. In neighbouring Algeria, 34

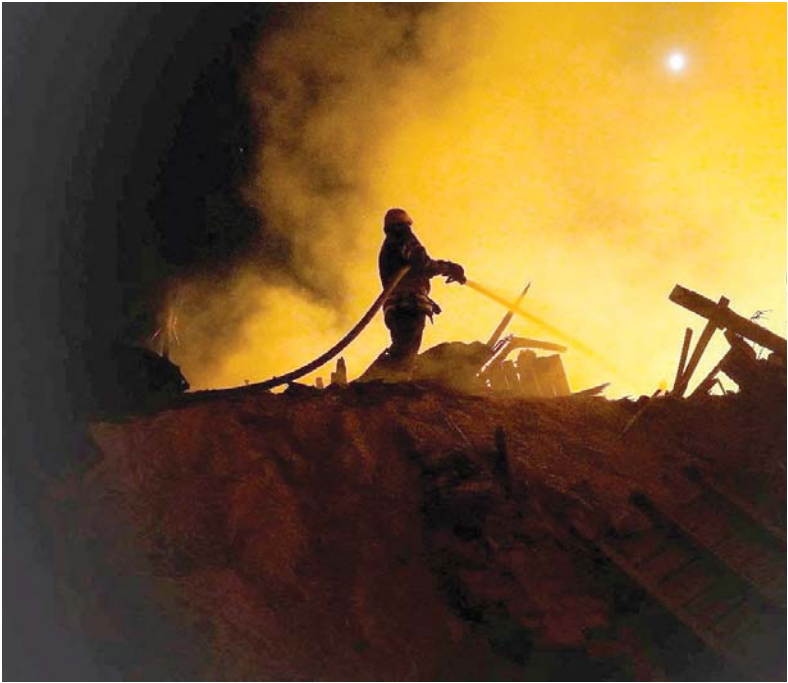
people were killed on July 19 when a passenger bus collided head-on with a pickup truck carrying fuel cans and burst into flames, deep in the southern Sahara region, officials said. Algeria's deadliest road crash in years also left 12 others injured, many with severe burns, Algeria's civil defence agency said. One of Tunisia's worst road accidents occurred in 2019 when a bus plunged into a ravine, killing at least 24 Tunisians and injuring 18 others. Libya's roads have ranked among the deadliest in the world. The Libyan interior ministry's traffic department recorded 4,115 road accidents across the country in 2018, with 2,500 people killed and more than 3,000 others injured. About 7,000 people lost their lives on the roads of Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country, in 2020, according to official figures. — AFP

Ukraine faces new wave of attacks, Russia says

airbases struck

KYIV: Ukraine said on Sunday it suffered several waves of aerial attacks overnight, which Moscow said targeted military airfields, a day after a strike on a Russian tanker on the Kerch Strait. The Ukrainian air force said on Sunday it shot down 30 out of the 40 cruise missiles and all Shahed drones launched by Russia. "In total, the enemy used 70 air attack weapons in several waves" in the night between Saturday and Sunday. It added that Russia launched three Kinzhal hypersonic missiles but did not say if they had been destroyed. The Ukrainian armed force did not specify which sites were hit by the missiles that got through air defences.

The Russian army however said it struck "Ukrainian armed forces airbases around the settlements of Starokostiantyniv in the Khmelnytskyi region and Dubno in the Rivne region." Home to a major airbase, the western Khmelnytskyi region located hundreds of kilometres from the front lines of the fighting has been repeatedly targeted during the war. "Since yesterday evening, the Khmelnytskyi region has been attacked three times... most missiles were shot down" said local official Sergiy Tyurin. Several buildings and the bus station were damaged, he said on Telegram. He also posted pictures of a crumbling building engulfed in flames, saying a corn waste warehouse had caught fire. Meanwhile in the Rivne region that Russia said it hit, "only a few private households were damaged" according to regional head Vitaliy Koval.



A firefighter extinguishes a fire in the aftermath of an attack in Starokostiantyniv, Ukraine, on Sunday. — Reuters

On Saturday Ukraine said Russian forces struck a blood transfusion centre in the Kharkiv region of northeast Ukraine. "This war crime alone says everything about Russian aggression," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said. The reported strike came shortly after Zelensky said Russian missiles had hit a facility of the Ukrainian aeronautics group Motor Sich, one of several companies requisitioned by the government since Moscow's attack. On Sunday morning the Russian army said "all targets were hit" in the overnight strikes. It said that separately Russian air defence forces shot down a drone approaching Moscow. The Russian capital was almost never targeted since the beginning of the offensive in Ukraine, until a series of attacks in recent months. The drone was downed without any casualties or damage,

and restrictions on flights at Moscow's Vnukovo airport were quickly lifted. There have been an increased number of drone attacks not only on regions bordering Ukraine, but also on Moscow. A Ukrainian drone hit a Russian oil tanker south of the Kerch Strait in the night between Friday and Saturday. On Sunday morning repair work was being carried out on the vessel that was still afloat, according to Russia's Federal Agency for Sea and Inland Water Transport. - 'Different views' - Attacks have multiplied on both sides of the Black Sea since Russia exited a deal protecting grain exports there, brokered by the UN and Turkey. Russia has hit port infrastructure on the Black Sea and the Danube, while Ukraine has targeted Russia's Black Sea Fleet. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BAGHDAD

Iraq suspends Telegram over 'national security'

The Iraqi government on Sunday said it was suspending the popular Telegram messaging application across the country on "national security" grounds, drawing criticism on channels close to pro-Iran factions. The service was effectively blocked by midday on Sunday, with new messages not loading for users in Baghdad. The application was still accessible to users connected using a VPN. Iraq's ministry of communications justified the



decision, citing "directives from higher authorities related to national security". The ministry also said the suspension was necessary to "protect the personal data of citizens."

PINGYUAN

23 injured, buildings collapse as quake hits China

At least 23 people were injured and dozens of buildings collapsed, state media reported, after a shallow 5.4-magnitude earthquake struck eastern China on Sunday. The US Geological Survey (USGS) said the quake struck at 2:33 am, 26 kilometres south of the city of Dezhou in Shandong province, at a depth of 10 kilometres. It was the strongest to hit the province in more than a decade, state-run tabloid the Global



Times said. The quake was felt as far away as Beijing and Tianjin, as well as in Shanghai, about 800 kilometres from the epicentre.

RIYADH

Saudi sets up firm to attract top sports events

The Saudi sovereign wealth fund on Sunday announced a new sports investment company designed to draw "major global events" to the kingdom, which has spent recent months luring top football stars. The company, SRJ Sports Investments, "will invest in acquiring and creating new sports events IP (intellectual property), commercial rights of popular and prominent sports competitions and hosting major global events in Saudi Arabia," the



Public Investment Fund (PIF) said in a statement. It will "target businesses specialised in offering unique fan engagement activities and transformative sports technology across the industry."

Film vs Novels: The debate continues



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

With the worldwide craze over the twin film releases of July – ‘Barbie’ and ‘Oppenheimer’, commonly called ‘Barbenheimer’, the debate about whether a film is better than the book it is based on is back. Of course, Barbie is not based on a book but a children’s toy, but Oppenheimer is loosely based on Kai Bird and Martin J Sherwin’s biography ‘American Prometheus’.

Novels began to be adapted into film as early as 1896, with Cinderella becoming a very short film and Charles Dickens’ ‘Oliver Twist’ being adapted in 1897 into a film called ‘The death of Nancy Sykes’ the next year. Some of the later films based on novels include ‘One flew over the cuckoo’s nest’, ‘Gone with the wind’ and ‘The help’. Of course, the Harry Potter series’ adaptations into film changed the way an entire generation viewed and read books.

In fact, now, the trend has also gone in the reverse – there are films like ‘Once upon a time in Hollywood’, ‘Love story’, and ‘Omen’ which became

successful as books right after the film’s phenomenal success.

Traditionally, a book has always felt better than a film: it is more detailed, we imagine characters the way we want to and we can always come back to our favourite passages, or even skip some if desired.

Books also engage various human faculties, from developing our focus, widening vocabulary and encouraging the imagination.

But it would be wrong to dismiss films today, as was the convention earlier. Now, films are nuanced, complex and have depth in terms of plot and theme, much like books did earlier.

We often talk about a generation which is growing up with the visual medium. To discourage this is a losing battle and the most that can be done is to encourage developing the same faculties through a medium that is as attractive to the younger generations as books were to earlier groups of children and adolescents.

Think about critical analysis: Films today bring out a whole array of complex ideas, relationships and themes which go beyond the obvious. This is

BOTH ARE AN ESSENTIAL PART OF OUR LIVES AND BOTH BRING JOY WHILE HELPING US TO MAKE SENSE OF THE WORLD AROUND US

true of such blockbusters as Christopher Nolan’s ‘The dark knight’ which so creatively gave depth and psychological complexity to a cartoon character. Other science fiction like ‘Interstellar’ or dystopian works like ‘Hunger games’ question the nature of our universe and offer alternative worlds which are no better than ours.

Films can affect social change. ‘The day after tomorrow’, for example, brought out awareness on climate change, and ‘Black panther’ centred Black characters in fiction, legitimising their role in the cultural life of superheroes.

Of course, films open windows to various cultures and help to re-visit histories from other perspectives. There are many films on Palestine which show the Nakba from a much needed Palestinian perspective. More than books, these films draw a crowd that can be exposed to realities other than the ones presented in popular media.

Ultimately, the argument of books vs films is futile. Both are an essential part of our lives and both bring joy while helping us to make sense of the world around us.

Lula to host summit on saving the Amazon

EUGENIA LOGIURATTO

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will host a regional summit next week with planetary stakes, as leaders of the countries that share the Amazon seek a roadmap to save the world’s biggest rainforest.

The meeting of the eight-nation Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization on Tuesday and Wednesday in Belem, capital of the Amazon state of Para, will serve as something of a dress rehearsal for the COP30 UN climate talks, which the city will also host in 2025.

It is the 28-year-old organisation’s first summit since 2009, as Lula seeks to deliver on his pledge that “Brazil is back” in the fight against climate change after a period of surging destruction in the Amazon under his far-right predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro.

With its hundreds of billions of carbon-absorbing trees, the Amazon is a key buffer against global warming.

But scientists warn deforestation is pushing it dangerously close to a “tipping point,” beyond which trees would die off and release their carbon stores back into the atmosphere, with catastrophic consequences for the climate.

Already, carbon emissions from the Amazon increased by 117 per cent in 2020 compared to the annual average for 2010 to 2018, according to the latest figures from researchers at Brazil’s national space agency, INPE.

Veteran leftist Lula, who returned to office in January, said he planned to work together with the group’s other members — Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela — to develop the Amazon basin “without destroying” it.

Leaders are due to discuss strategies to fight deforestation and organised crime, and seek sustainable development for the region, home to 50 million people — including hundreds of Indigenous groups seen as crucial to protecting the forest. The summit will conclude with a joint declaration, expected to be “ambitious” and set out “an agenda to guide countries in the coming years,” said Brazilian foreign ministry official Gisela Padovan.

Brazil, which holds around 60 per cent of the Amazon, has pledged to eradicate illegal deforestation by 2030, and is pushing other countries to follow suit.

Deforestation is driven mainly by cattle ranching, though it is fuelled by a murky mix of corruption, land-grabbing and organised crime whose tentacles extend to the illegal traffic in drugs, arms, timber and gold. — AFP

A shrinking footprint in Africa for France, the former coloniser that stayed

ELIAN PELTIER

Senegal’s president, a trusted ally of France, was taken hostage in the presidential palace by his own guards in late July. Protesters massed at the French Embassy soon after, setting it on fire and shattering windows. A colonel in uniform appeared on Thursday on state television and announced that the military was ending its cooperation with France.

The chaos in the West African nation of Niger over the last 10 days was a repeat of earlier turmoil in nearby Burkina Faso and Mali — all three of which are former colonies of France, all struggling to put down violent insurgencies and all taken over by military juntas in recent years.

The coups have fanned the flames of popular anger against France, a former colonial power that critics say never really let go of its former possessions. Now, France has become a scapegoat of sorts in a region buckling under the forces of poverty, climate change and surging Islamic militancy.

“France did not see this coup coming, so they have not learned from Mali or Burkina Faso,” said Mujtaba Rahman, the managing director for Europe at Eurasia Group, a consultancy. “A clear domino theory for the 21st century.”

The upheaval in Niger has threatened the interests of both France and the United States, which have sent troops as well as military and economic aid to the region in an effort to assist countries fighting off insurgents. Neighbouring countries are also turning against one another: A bloc of West African countries unsettled by the coups has imposed sanctions on Niger and is threatening military intervention if coup leaders do not reinstate the president by Sunday. Mali and Burkina Faso — which are seen as aligned with Russia — have vowed to defend Niger’s coup makers.

Nearly half of the countries in Africa were at one time French colonies or protectorates. For

decades, France has kept close albeit complicated ties with many former colonies, including a military presence, economic influence and direct access to heads of state, a web often referred to as “Françafrique” that came to embody France’s obsession with keeping a foothold there.

Aware of growing resentment, President Emmanuel Macron of France vowed when he was elected in 2017 to reset the relationship with the continent. He increased development aid to African countries, championed the push to return looted artefacts to Africa and promised to downsize France’s military presence.

But in many former French colonies, little changed in practice, critics say. Detractors accuse France of a paternalistic approach in Africa, maintaining close ties with authoritarian leaders in places like Chad and Cameroon.

Under the leadership of President Mohamed Bazoum, who has been detained since July 26, Niger had been a key Western ally in a troubled region, and a favoured recipient of foreign aid.

Several thousand Western troops are stationed in the country, including 1,100 Americans and 1,500 French deployed in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel, a semi-arid region plagued by the extreme effects of climate change and armed insurgents linked to Al Qaida and the IS group.

That fragile structure of Western aid and military assistance is now in doubt, with France’s position in disarray. A departure of French troops would likely force the departure of American troops as well, analysts say, with US officials unlikely to trust Niger’s ruling generals.

“The military junta in Niger is seen as unreliable to put confidence in, because of the quick moves to get cozy with Mali’s and Burkina Faso’s leaders,” said Aneliese Bernard, a former U.S. State Department adviser who has worked in Niger. Those leaders, who also took power in coups, have moved closer to Russia in recent years, and have met with at least one coup leader in Niger.

Bernard said the recent developments in the country would likely accelerate a long-anticipated move of American troops from there to countries on the coast of West Africa.

If French troops leave Niger, Chad would remain the only country in the Sahel region known to host a French base.

This past week, France evacuated more than 550 of its nationals from Niger, citing growing insecurity following the attack on its embassy.

When France ended a nine-year military intervention in Mali last year after a major fallout with the new military rulers, its soldiers relocated to Niger to continue counterterrorism operations in the region from there. In January, Burkina Faso terminated its military agreement with France, which soon pulled out its 400 troops, including 200 special forces.

French diplomats and military officials said at the time that they had learned from their mistakes: France would stop flying its flag over military bases in this corner of Africa and would focus on supporting the needs of African militaries instead of conducting operations on its own.

It appeared to be working. In the first six months of this year, political violence and civilian casualties decreased in Niger. On a recent trip to Washington, senior Nigerien military officials boasted that levels of violence were lower than in neighbouring countries, Niger’s ambassador to the United States said in an interview this past week.

“There was a belated recognition by Macron and the French military leadership that they needed to be less condescending,” said Nathaniel Powell, a historian who has written a book on France’s military operations in Chad, Niger’s neighbour. “France had taken a back seat, and Niger was taking the lead.”

Had France adopted that approach earlier, Powell suggested, it may not face the challenges it now finds itself in. “They were winning on the operational front. But not with public opinion.”

— *The New York Times*.

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

OMAN  DAILY Observer ESTABLISHED ON 15 NOVEMBER 1981		E D I T O R I A L						ADVERTISING Tel: 24649444, 24649430, 24649437, 24649401 Fax: 24649434		PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY: Ministry of Information P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman	
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Tel: 22651222		DESK Tel: 22651209	LOCAL Tel: 22651221	BUSINESS Tel: 22651208	SPORTS Tel: 22651205	FEATURE Tel: 22651220	DISTRIBUTION AGENT Tel: 24649351/24649360 Fax: 24649379				
SECRETARY Tel: 22651200		ONLINE Tel: 22651202	DESIGN Tel: 22651210	TRANSLATION Tel: 22651204	PROOFREADING Tel: 22651206						
Website: omanobserver.om			EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili				e-mail: editor@omanobserver.om				
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Beat the heat with a local treat

Summer season is still scorching here! Families are trying their best to beat the heat and enjoy their summer holidays. Now is the perfect time for people to have a long refreshing break with family.

Undoubtedly, they all have been impatiently waiting for the summer break. A short break would always be needed to refresh the memories, recharge the body and stimulate one's spirit and interests. However, summer holidays are about to bid farewell in few weeks!

As summer is always associated with holiday and travel, people work on different world destinations to spend good time and great moments with family, friends and loved ones.

Generally, tourism and travelling or even touring around the country is being a trend that many people are experiencing nowadays during holidays.

Perhaps, it is becoming common phenomenon as another way of promoting tourism indeed.

However, out of individuals' experience and a common observation that most people prefer to spend their holiday abroad!

Although it is a burden on families, travelling during summer is becoming a priority that shouldn't be missed by them. They opt to be out of country exploring cultures and nature of other nations.

Probably, some might wonder why those people don't spend their time and money within the country instead!

As a matter of fact, it is all about finding what really entertains people and attracts their interests. However, this might not all is available in the country, so on what people spend their money and time?! Except the natural sightseeing and historical landmarks, there is nothing else that can entice people's attention. Even those attractions are not well maintained and prepared to attract tourists and visitors as they should be.

Although Oman is very rich with unique historical tourist destinations and natural attractions some of which are one of the best in the world. However, unfortunately they are not



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GENERALLY, TOURISM AND TRAVELLING OR EVEN TOURING AROUND THE COUNTRY IS BEING A TREND THAT MANY PEOPLE ARE EXPERIENCING NOWADAYS DURING HOLIDAYS

even given consideration and not a simple investment is paid to uplift the destination.

Simply, there is no proper shade or rest areas where people can spend the day out. No essential services or kids' entertainment facilities are provided.

Though what is needed is to make those places attractive tourist destinations and a little bit of thinking out of the box solutions.

Sometimes, only small ideas could change a place and make it a touristic hub not only for locals, but also for foreign tourists. Case in a point, Salalah is regarded a worldwide tourist destination for hundreds of thousands of people.

However, other than the greenery and nice refreshing weather, there is not much to entertain people there. Though, new recreations are being added gradually.

In fact, so many other popular tourist destinations within the country that are not efficiently invested to attract tourists and visitors. One just wonders what is the mysterious challenge that is obstructing the concerned from developing and investing in the tourist landmarks?!

Why private sector is not attracted to invest in tourism facilities! Is it that complicated and challenging to make more investments?! Possibly, the private sector could support in putting more efforts and investments if given a chance.

Why not letting some specialised local or international companies to gamble on tourism, and they might come up with some valuable projects. Perhaps, they could bring more investments, tourists and business opportunities to the country. Businessmen could also be given an opportunity to contribute in promoting local tourism.

In other countries, simple entertainment activities and projects have been implemented. Thinking of them as cases, with all the budgets and facilities we have on offer, we could have done far much better than what they have. Probably, we need aggressive people who could think out of the box and invest on available resources with cost affective projects.

RACE TO EAT RICE CRACKER!



Children compete in a rice cracker eating event as a pre-ceremony for the 78th anniversary of Indonesia's independence in Malang, East Java, on Sunday. – AFP

Corporate responsibility in the age of AI

In the past year, a cacophony of conversations about artificial intelligence has erupted. Depending on whom you listen to, AI is either carrying us into a shiny new world of endless possibilities or propelling us towards a grim dystopia. Call them the Barbie and Oppenheimer scenarios — as attention-grabbing and different as the Hollywood blockbusters of the summer.

But one conversation is getting far too little attention: the one about corporate responsibility.

I joined Nike as its first Vice President of Corporate Responsibility in 1998, landing right in the middle of the hyper-globalisation era's biggest corporate crisis: the iconic sports and fitness company had become the face of labour exploitation in developing countries.

In dealing with that crisis and setting up corporate responsibility for Nike, we learned hard-earned lessons, which can now help guide our efforts to navigate the AI revolution.

There is a key difference today. Taking place in the late 1990s, the Nike drama played out relatively slowly. When it comes to AI, however, we don't have the luxury of time.

This time last year, most people had not heard about generative AI. The technology entered our collective awareness like a lightning strike in late 2022, and we have been trying to make



Maria Eitel

The writer served as Nike's founding Vice President of Corporate Responsibility before founding the Nike Foundation and Girl Effect

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE HAS TURBOCHARGED THE ATTENTION ECONOMY AND UNLEASHED A NEW SET OF RISKS, THE SCOPE OF WHICH ARE FAR FROM CLEAR

sense of it ever since. As it stands, generative AI companies have no externally imposed guardrails. That makes guinea pigs of all of us. There is nothing normal about this.

If Boeing or Airbus introduced an airplane that promised to be cheaper and faster, but was potentially very dangerous, we would not accept the risk.

A pharmaceutical company that launched an untested product, while warning that it might be toxic, would be found criminally liable for the sickness or death they caused. Why, then, is it okay for technology companies to bring to market AI products that they themselves warn pose the risk of extinction?

Even before generative AI burst onto the scene, Big Tech and the attention economy were facing growing criticism for their harmful effects. Products like Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok are designed to trigger dopamine surges in the brain, making them as addictive as cigarettes.

A scientific consensus has emerged that digital media are harming users' — especially children's — mental health.

AI has turbocharged the attention economy and unleashed a new set of risks, the scope of which are far from clear.

And while calls for regulation are growing louder, when they come from the very people behind the technology, they come across largely as public-relations campaigns and corporate stall tactics. After all, regulators and governments don't fully understand how AI-based products work or the risks they create; only companies do.

It is a company's responsibility to ensure that it does not knowingly cause harm, and to fix any problems it creates. It is the government's job to hold companies accountable. But accountability tends to come after the fact — too late for a technology like AI.

If Purdue Pharma's owners, the Sackler family, had acted

responsibly once they realised the danger OxyContin posed, taking steps to stop the drug from being overprescribed, the opioid crisis that has gripped the United States in recent years could have been avoided.

By the time the government got involved, countless lives had been lost and communities ruined. No lawsuit or fine can undo that.

When it comes to AI, companies can and must do better. But they must act fast, before AI-driven tools are so entrenched in daily activities that their dangers are normalised and whatever they unleash cannot be contained.

At Nike, it was a combination of outside pressure and an internal commitment to do the right thing that led to a fundamental overhaul

of its business model. The nascent AI industry is clearly feeling external pressure: on July 21, the White House secured voluntary commitments from seven top AI companies to develop safe and trustworthy products, in line with the Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights that was introduced last year. But vague voluntary guidelines leave far too much wiggle room. Our collective future now hinges on whether companies — in the privacy of their board rooms, executive meetings, and closed-door strategy sessions — decide to do what is right.

Companies need a clear North Star to which they can always refer as they pursue innovation. Google had it right in its early days, when its corporate credo was, "Don't Be Evil." No corporation should knowingly harm people in the pursuit of profit.

It will not be enough for companies simply to say that they have hired former regulators and propose possible solutions.

Companies must devise credible and effective AI action plans that answer five key questions:

What are the potential unanticipated consequences of AI?How are you mitigating each identified risk?



AI has turbocharged the attention economy and unleashed a new set of risks.



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EGYPT DEFEAT OMAN IN CIS GAMES BEACH SOCCER

MUSCAT: Oman beach soccer team suffered their first loss at the second CIS Games against Egypt as the latter defeated Oman team 6-3 on Sunday in Belarus. With the victory, Egypt have kept themselves on track for a place in the semifinal with three points in their kitty and one match to play against Uzbekistan on Monday. Egypt suffered a 5-0 loss against Russia in the opening match on Saturday.

Despite the defeat against Egypt, Oman chances are still alive to progress into the semifinals as they will take on Russia on Monday in a crucial fixture. The national team, led by the long-serving national

head coach Talib Hilal, had commenced their campaign strongly with a 13-1 victory over Uzbekistan in the opener.

Oman's head coach began the match against the champions of 2023 Arab Beach Soccer Championship with a starting line-up featuring Younis al Owaisi as the goalkeeper. The defence line-up comprised Mashal al Araimi while Yahya al Murkhi monitored the centre. Both strikers Abdullah al Souti and Nooh al Zadjali formed the attacking line. Many substitutions were made by the coach during all the sets of the match.

The opposing Egyptian players began the match strongly and

were seeking for an early goal and they struck early to lead 1-0. Oman's Abdullah al Souti equalised after a strong shot by the goalie Younis al Owaisi was guided by Al Souti to the net. Later, the Egyptian strikers got more opportunities and they managed to have a proper finish to lead 2-1. Oman's men bounced back strongly as Sami al Balushi levelled the scores at 2-2.

Oman, who were very dominant in the 13-1 victory over Uzbekistan in the opening match, made some defensive mistakes which benefited the rivals to end the opening set at 3-1 after their Egyptian striker scored from a header.

In the following set, Oman players could not show their solid performance of the early stages while the opponents took the advantage to enforce themselves and they succeeded to strike two goals to make the result at 5-2. In the concluding set, Oman's players worked very hard to create some opportunities. After several attempts, Sami al Balushi managed to reduce the margin to 5-3. Before the end of the third set, the Egyptian forward netted their sixth goal to confirm their 6-3 triumph.

In Group A, hosts Belarus thrashed the UAE 5-2 in their opening game while Iran beat Azerbaijan 3-1 in the other match.

Oman get ready for AFC U23 Asian Cup Qualifiers

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 6

The Oman Olympic team has concluded its internal camp, which began on August 4 in preparation for the upcoming AFC U23 Asian Cup Qualifiers Qatar 2024, set to take place during the Fifa days in September. Under the guidance of national coach Akram Habreesh, the selected squad of 24 players has been trained and prepared to showcase their skills on the international stage. The talented line-up includes notable players such as Al Faraj al Kiyoumi, Khalid al Ghatrifi, Salim al Abdulsalam, Said al Salami, Abdulhafeedh al Mukhaini, Omar al Salti, Osama al Haddabi, Mohammed al Hinai, Imran al Numani, Mulhim al Sunaidy, Maytham al Ajmi, Nasser al Rawahi, Mohammed Makhloof, Mamoun al Araimi, Mohammed al Salhi, Abdullah al Fulaiti, Abdulmajeed al Balushi, Abdullah al Mukhaini, Yousef al Ghailani, Abdullah al Alawi, Salim al Dawoodi,



Nibras al Maashari, Mohammed Abdulhakim and Ali al Balushi.

The team will head to Turkey for an external camp, which will continue until August 23. The external camp aims to further hone their skills and build strong team dynamics in preparation for the challenging qualifiers.

Oman U23 squad will compete in Group A of the qualifiers, alongside Jordan, Syria and Brunei. The matches for Group A will take place at the Petra Stadium in Amman, Jordan, from September 6 to 12.

A total of 43 teams are participating in the tournament,



and are divided into 11 groups. Among them, 10 groups comprise four teams each, while the last group includes three teams. The qualifiers will adopt a round-robin format with a single round, and only the top team from each group along with the four best second-placed teams,

will secure their place in the finals.

Consequently, a total of 16 teams, including the host team Qatar, will make it to the AFC U23 Asian Cup.

Oman's Olympic team will commence their journey in the qualifiers on September 6, facing

Syria. On the same day, Jordan will take on Brunei. Oman's second match will be against Jordan on September 9, following the Syria-Brunei encounter. The group stage will culminate on September 12, with Brunei locking horns with Syria, while Jordan compete against Syria.

Sweden end US World Cup reign in shootout

MELBOURNE: Sweden beat the United States 5-4 on penalties to condemn the defending champions to their earliest Women's World Cup exit on Sunday after the teams were locked at 0-0 at the end of extra time.

Lina Hurtig struck the winning spot-kick at Melbourne Rectangular Stadium to cap a madcap shootout in the round of 16 clash, though US goalkeeper Alyssa Naeher parried the ball on the line and the result needed to be confirmed by VAR.

Sweden head into a quarter-final against Japan in Auckland on Friday but it was the first exit before the semi-finals in nine World Cups for the Americans, who were bidding for an unprecedented third consecutive title.

Gloomy US coach Vlatko Andonovski was not convinced Hurtig's spot-kick had crossed the line

"It's a tough moment, a moment where it's hard to go through," he told a press conference.

"You have hopes that the ball didn't cross the line.

"That just shows how cruel this game can be."

Sweden's Magda Eriksson said her team had shown heart if not their best game, having been dominated for much of the match.

"We're so happy right now," she said in a radio interview.

"I don't know how we managed to stay in this game.

"We didn't play our best game, but in some way we showed we're hard-headed, we showed heart, we never give up. We took it to extra time, we took it to penalties and we managed to win."

Young US forward Sophia Smith was left shattered, having had a chance to win the match for the four-times champions when she stepped up in the



Sweden's forward Lina Hurtig (C) and teammates celebrate their win during 2023 Women's World Cup round 16 – AFP

penalty shootout only to blast the ball over the bar.

She was not the first player in her team to miss.

The talismanic Megan Rapinoe, renowned for her peerless record in shootouts, thumped the US's fourth kick over the bar after Sweden's Nathalie Bjorn also fired high.

NINE MONTHS

Andonovski said the US had been practising penalties for the

last nine months.

"I know we were criticised for the way we played ... I think we came out today and were all about the grit, the resilience," he said.

Goalkeeper Zecira Musovic was Sweden's hero, having made 11 saves before the shootout to keep them in the match.

Often starved of possession, the Swedes did not have a shot on goal until the 85th minute when substitute Sofia Jakobsson

danced into the area, only to shoot straight at Naeher.

Naeher saved Rebecka Blomqvist's fourth shot for the Swedes in the shootout but Smith's miss kept the Scandinavians in it.

After Naeher and Magdalena Eriksson converted their spot-kicks, Kelley Ohara sent her effort ping-pong off the right post, allowing Hurtig to step up and send the champions out of the tournament.

The US will wonder how the match had to go to a shootout, having dominated the play and unleashed 21 shots, including 11 on target.

Trinity Rodman proved a menace down the right wing early, testing the Swedish keeper twice in the first half-hour.

Lindsey Horan thumped a header against the bar and Musovic denied her again with a low dive when the US skipper

fired a deflected cross at the far post. Musovic produced another wonderful save to stop an Alex Morgan header and see the Swedes into extra time, then foiled a Lynn Williams shot in the first period.

Rapinoe came on to replace Morgan in extra time but could not conjure the magic that helped the US to back-to-back World Cup triumphs in Canada in 2015 and France four years ago. — Reuters

Tsitsipas defeats de Minaur to capture ATP Los Cabos title



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas celebrates his victory against Australia's Alex de Minaur during their Mexico ATP Open – AFP

LOS CABOS, Mexico: Greek top seed Stefanos Tsitsipas defeated Australian fifth seed Alex de Minaur 6-3, 6-4 on Saturday to capture the ATP Mexico Open for his first title in 14 months.

Tsitsipas, this year's Australian Open runner-up, claimed his first ATP outdoor hardcourt crown in his third final of the year, having fallen to Novak Djokovic at Melbourne and top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz at Barcelona in April.

The 24-year-old Greek star captured his 10th career title and first since June of last year at Mallorca to snap a five-final win drought.

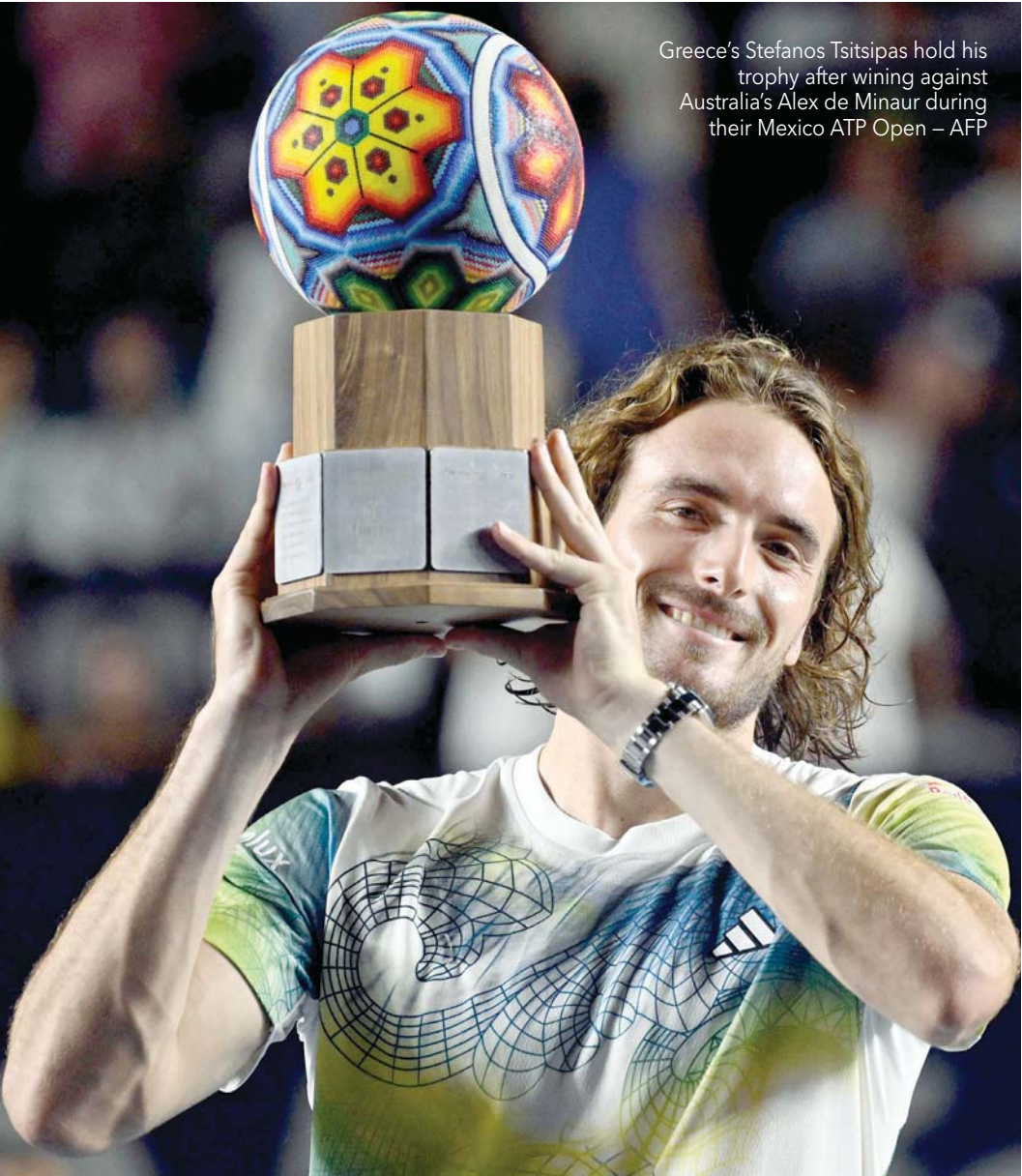
World number five Tsitsipas improved to 10-0 all-time against 19th-ranked de Minaur, who was hoping for a Mexico double after winning the title at Acapulco in February.

"It was a great match," Tsitsipas said. "I'm really happy we were able to deliver a great quality in the final match."

The 24-year-old from Sydney was denied an eighth career ATP crown in his third final of the year. He also lost to Alcaraz in June's trophy match at Queen's.

After Tsitsipas dominated the first set, de Minaur surrendered a break on a double fault to open the second set but broke back at love in the sixth game to pull level.

Tsitsipas, who won 23 of his 28 first-serve points, responded with a break in the ninth game, seizing a 5-4 edge with a blistering forehand winner, then held serve to finish off the Australian after 86 minutes when de Minaur sent a forehand long. — AFP



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas hold his trophy after winning against Australia's Alex de Minaur during their Mexico ATP Open – AFP





INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

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How Taylor Swift's Eras Tour Conquered the World

AS TAYLOR SWIFT rolled into Los Angeles this past week, the frenzy surrounding her record-breaking Eras Tour was already in high gear. Headlines gushed that she had given \$100,000 bonuses to her crew. Politicians asked her to postpone her concerts in solidarity with striking hotel workers. Scalped tickets were going for \$3,000 and up. And there were way, way too many friendship bracelets to count.

These days, the centre of an otherwise splintered music world can only be Taylor Swift.

The pop superstar's tour, which is now finishing its initial North American leg with six nights at SoFi Stadium outside Los Angeles, has been a both a business and a cultural juggernaut. Swift's catalog of generation-defining hits and canny marketing sense have helped her achieve a level of white-hot demand and media saturation not seen since the 1980s heyday of Michael Jackson and Madonna — a dominance that the entertainment business had largely accepted as impossible to replicate in the fragmented 21st century.

"The only thing I can compare it to is the phenomenon of Beatlemania," said Billy Joel, who attended Swift's show in Tampa, Florida, with his wife and young daughters.

In a summer of tours by stars like Beyoncé, Bruce Springsteen, Morgan Wallen and Drake, Swift's stands apart, in numbers and in media noise. Although Swift, 33, and her promoters do not publicly report box-office figures, trade publication Pollstar estimated that she has been selling about \$14 million in tickets each night. By the end of the full world tour, which is booked with 146 stadium dates well into 2024, Swift's sales could reach \$1.4 billion or more — exceeding Elton John's \$939 million for his multiyear farewell tour, the current record-holder.

Swift has now had more No. 1 albums on the Billboard 200 over the course of her career than any other woman, surpassing Barbra Streisand. With the tour lifting Swift's entire body of work, she has placed 10 albums on that chart this year and is the first living artist since trumpeter and bandleader Herb Alpert in 1966 to have four titles in the Top 10 at the same time.

"It's a pretty amazing feat," Alpert, 88, said in a phone interview. "With the

way radio is these days, and the way music is distributed, with streaming, I didn't think anyone in this era could do it."

But how did a concert tour become so much more: fodder for gossip columns, the subject of weather reports, a boon for friendship-bracelet beads — the unofficial currency of Swiftie fandom — and the reason nobody could get a hotel room in Cincinnati at the end of June?

"She is the best CEO, and best chief marketing officer, in the history of music," said Nathan Hubbard, a long-time music and ticketing executive who co-hosts a Swift podcast. "She is following people like Bono, Jay-Z and Madonna, who were acutely aware of their brands. But of all of them, Taylor is the first one to be natively online."

Music critics have portrayed the Eras Tour as showing Swift at the top of her game as a media-savvy, big-tent talent, a pop star with a knack for grand spectacle as well as the polished artistry of a classic songwriter.

Shania Twain, the country-pop star whose career in some ways prefigured Swift's, caught the Las Vegas stop of the Eras Tour; a 44-plus song production that goes as long as 3 1/2 hours. She praised Swift's "beautiful balance" of high-tech stagecraft and intimate performance segments. "I have to applaud her," Twain said in a telephone interview. "As a performer, I know that work that goes into it."

The power of Swift's fan army — and fear of crossing the star, or even appearing to — has kept nearly all of the press about the tour sunny. Although some fans (and parents) balked at the ticket prices and challenges of securing seats, most frustration was directed squarely at Ticketmaster, not Swift. After a few weeks of headlines romantically linking Swift with a frontman some fans considered to be problematic, reports spread in the celebrity pages that they had split. (Swift's representatives declined to comment for this article.)

For fans, the shows are a pilgrimage, and a rediscovery of the joys of mass gatherings. Flights are packed with Swifties, and travellers trade sto-



ries and compare outfits — drawn from looks associated with Swift "eras" — in stadium corridors and parking lots. In Kansas City, comedian Nikki Glaser was attending her eighth show, a commitment that she estimated has cost her \$25,000.

"This year I decided not to freeze my eggs," Glaser said. "I'm going to put that money towards the thing I love most in the world, which is Taylor Swift."

Before Eras, Swift hadn't been on tour since 2018. And her catalog has grown by seven No. 1 albums since then, fuelled in part by three re-recorded "Taylor's Versions" of her first LPs — a project hailed by Swift's fans as a crusade to regain control of her music, though it is also an act of revenge after the sale of Swift's former record label, a move that, she said, "stripped me of my life's work."

"Folklore" and "Evermore" expanded her palate into fantastical indie-folk and brought new collaborators into the fold: Aaron Dessner from the band the National and Justin Vernon, a rock-world figure who helped attract new listeners.

The other major tour this year that is enticing fans to book transcontinental flights, and to show up costumed and in rapture, is also by a woman: Beyoncé, 41, whose Renaissance tour is a fantasia of disco and retrofuturism. Like Swift, she is also a trailblazing artist-entrepreneur, maintaining tight control over her career and fostering a rich connection with fans online. Together with Greta Gerwig's "Barbie," a critique of the patriarchy told in hot pink, they are signs of powerful women ruling the discourse of pop culture.

But in music, at least, the scale and success of Swift's tour is without equal. Later this month, after completing 53 shows in the United States, she will kick off an international itinerary of at least 78 more before returning to North America next fall. Beyoncé's full tour has 56 dates; Springsteen's, 90. (Recently, Harry Styles wrapped a 173-date tour in arenas and stadiums, grossing about \$590 million.) — **NYT**

ENVIRONMENT

Italy's clam industry under threat from blue crab 'invasion'



A PARTICULARLY aggressive crab species from the western Atlantic is threatening Italy's role as one of the world's top producers of clams — as well as, potentially, one of its signature pasta dishes.

The "blue crab", originally from the coast of north and south America, has spread across several lagoon-like

locations in Italy, preying on local shellfish, fish roe and other aquatic life.

Clam aquafarms in the delta of the Po river valley in northern Italy are particularly hard hit, with a local marine biologist telling Reuters that the crabs have eaten up to 90% of young clams, decimating future production.

"Juveniles have been almost

completely preyed on, for sure we will have next year a very big crisis and shortages in the market," Emanuele Rossetti from the Fishermen's Cooperative of the Polesine, part of the Po delta area, told Reuters.

Italy is Europe's biggest producer of clams, and the third largest in the world behind China and South Korea, according to U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization data from 2021.

It is also home to "spaghetti alle vongole" (spaghetti with clams), a classic of Italian cuisine.

Sasa Raicevich, a marine aquatic resources expert from the Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA), said the blue crabs are thought to have arrived in Italy via shipping bilge water.

He said they were first detected about a decade ago, and it is still unclear why they are now multiplying with such speed. "There could be a link to climate change, but we have no evidence to say it for sure."

CRAB CULL

Fishermen in affected areas have been advised to catch as many blue crabs as possible to curb their num-

bers, but in the Po delta valley efforts have not made much of a difference.

"Today we caught about 12 (metric) tonnes... we fish these kind of amounts every day, but we don't see a fall in the (crab) population", Rossetti said, adding that their numbers started to get out of control in May.

"We are disheartened."

Only a small proportion of the crabs caught are sold for human consumption, as they are a relative novelty attracting little demand. The rest are disposed of, although there are plans to use some for animal feed purposes.

Last week, farming lobby Coldiretti said the crab "invasion" was turning into a "natural calamity" threatening the survival of 3,000 family firms in the Po delta, and called for government support.

Italy's agriculture ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Raicevich, the researcher, said the situation was very serious in terms of ecological and economic damage, and warned there was no possibility of completely eradicating the blue crabs.

"We have to contain them and find ways of coexistence ... it's going to be difficult."

—Reuters

MUSIC

Italian rapper hurt by fan blames selfie 'madness'



ITALIAN RAPPER BABY K on Wednesday railed against the "madness" of selfies and called for greater protection for artists after she was injured by a fan and forced to cancel the rest of her tour. In a video posted on TikTok, Baby K said she suffered "breast trauma" after being "charged at" by a woman at the end of a concert on Monday in Teramo, Italy, as a crowd of fans surged around her for selfies.

The 40-year-old rapper and singer said she had suffered breathing difficulties and been examined in hospital before being forced to cut short her summer tour.

"The most important thing for

people is to take a photo, but it has become very dangerous", she said. "It's madness."

"I'm not complaining about taking pictures... but it's getting out of hand. Safety must come first," she said, accusing Italian police of poor crowd management.

Baby K, whose real name is Claudia Nahum and who was born in Singapore, has sold hundreds of thousands of albums. Her most famous tracks include "Roma Bangkok" and "Killer".

She has more than 730,000 followers on Instagram, and the music video for "Roma Bangkok" has over 300 million views on her YouTube channel. — **AFP**



Omani business leaders welcome measures to combat hidden trade

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 6

A number of officials, business leaders and commentators in the Sultanate of Oman praised the Ministerial Decision No. 412/2023 on combating hidden trade activities, stressing that the measures enshrined in the Decision will have a positive impact on the wider economy.

They noted that the Decision will significantly contribute to minimising the adverse effects of hidden trade on the national economy and local markets, which include the increasing cases of commercial fraud, distortions to the labour market, unequal competition with entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises, tax evasion, and other deleterious effects.

The Decision will also strengthen the implementation of the executive regulations of the Foreign Capital Investment Law, which supports the creation of a attractive investment environment



and appropriate conditions for driving investment inflows in the country.

Dr Rajab bin Ali al Owaisi, an expert in social and educational studies at the State Council, stressed that the decision to combat hidden trade is considered as an ambitious direction that keeps pace with national policies to build a promising economy and a stable national labour market.

Issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Decision comes into force after 90 days from the date of its publishing in the Official Gazette.

It strengthens the enforcement of the provisions of the Labour Law (53/2023) and its role in stabilising the business environment in the Sultanate of Oman in creating an attractive investment environment

and appropriate conditions for it in the Omani labour market.

As the result of the Decision, efforts to localise some professions and jobs in the labour market and private sector companies will be further strengthened, he said.

Al Owaisi pointed out that the decision to combat hidden trade is in response to appeals from citizens over the past years to address the phenomenon.

TURN TO P16

Volume of investments in Khazaen Economic City stands at RO 316 million



BARKA: The volume of investments attracted by Khazaen Economic City in Barka till the end of June 2023 stood at RO 316 (\$821 million).

Statistics issued by Khazaen Economic City showed that the value of foreign investments amounted to RO 186 million, while the value of local investments amounted to RO 130 million.

Investments have come from as many as 16 countries globally, with the number of signed agreements reaching 100. Projects under construction total 23, and the number of direct job opportunities reached 300 for national cadres in various

sectors.

The most prominent investments are in the logistics with a total value of RO 60 million. As many as 20 logistics-related projects are in operation at Khazaen.

In the food sector, a total of 10 projects are in various stages of development and operation of a total value of RO 87 million.

Meanwhile, the agreements signed in the industrial sector amounted to RO 92 million for 65 investment agreements.

As for the agreements signed in the pharmaceutical sector, they amounted to 5 with an investment value of RO 77 million. — ONA

Oman chairs GOIC meeting to review strategy



QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 6

The Sultanate of Oman hosted the second regular session of the Executive Office of the Gulf Organisation for Industrial Consulting (GOIC) on Sunday, August 6, 2023.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry.

The meeting discussed a number of topics, including the review of GOIC's strategy for the period 2024-2028.

Under this strategy, GOIC is working to complete 72 industrial projects for the member states and the General Secretariat of the GCC. The meeting also approved the minutes of the first regular session of the Executive Office of GOIC in 2023, as well as the implementation of the decisions of that meeting. The report of the financial auditors for 2022 was also approved, as was the proposed estimated

budget for 2023.

GOIC's strategy reflects global and local variables, as well as the renewed strategic directions in the industrial strategies of the member countries and the General-Secretariat of the GCC.

The organisation's vision is to be a "Gulf House of Expertise" with a focus on providing high-quality consulting services in the fields of industrial development, economic information, and market requirements.

GOIC is the first Gulf expertise house specialised in providing industrial advisory services in the GCC countries. The organisation provides high-quality consulting services through distinguished competencies and expertise, as well as regional and international strategic cooperation.

GOIC also supports the activities of the targeted industrial sectors in the future for member countries, and addresses industrial and economic development issues in the GCC countries.

Oxy Oman achieves record-breaking initial production test in Block 65

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUG 6

In a major breakthrough for Oxy Oman, Vicki Hollub, President and CEO of Occidental Petroleum Corp (Oxy) announced the successful completion of a near-field exploration well in Oman's Block 65. The announcement was made during the company's Q2 2023 earnings conference call last Thursday.

Hollub said that Block 65 delivered an impressive initial production test of 6,000 barrels of oil equivalent (BOE) per day. The achievement marks the highest initial production test in Oman in the past decade, demonstrating the company's exceptional subsurface characterisation techniques and solidifying its position as the largest independent producer in the country.

"In Oman Block 65, we drilled a near-field exploration well, which delivered 6,000 BOE per day and a 24-hour initial production test, and it is now on production to sales in less than a month from completion," Hollub noted.

Under Vicki Hollub's leadership, Oxy Oman — a wholly-owned subsidiary of US-headquartered Occidental Petroleum Corp — has been driving innovation and capitalising on promising opportunities in the global energy market.

The company's collaboration with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals in Oman has yielded fruitful results, further bolstering their positive outlook for future ventures within the country.



THE ACHIEVEMENT MARKS THE HIGHEST INITIAL PRODUCTION TEST IN OMAN IN THE PAST DECADE, DEMONSTRATING THE COMPANY'S EXCEPTIONAL SUBSURFACE CHARACTERISATION TECHNIQUES AND SOLIDIFYING ITS POSITION AS THE LARGEST INDEPENDENT PRODUCER IN THE COUNTRY.

The recent success in Block 65 is a testament to Oxy Oman's unwavering commitment to exploration and production excellence. The drilling operation, which commenced after the company was awarded the block in 2019, not only achieved remarkable initial production rates but also demonstrated an impressive turnaround time, with the well progressing from completion to production and sales in less than a month.

Vicki Hollub expressed her enthusiasm for the ongoing collaboration with the Ministry

of Energy and Minerals in Oman, emphasising the immense opportunities the country presents. Oxy Oman's status as the largest independent producer in Oman reflects their deep commitment to the region and their long-term vision for sustainable growth.

"We were awarded the block in 2019 and in collaboration with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, we are positive about opportunities in the country where we are the largest independent producer," Hollub added. Oxy Oman has reported significant progress in its ongoing exploration programme, which focuses on its extensive onshore hydrocarbon assets.

Throughout 2022, the company achieved a total of 12 new oil and gas discoveries as a result of these efforts.

The majority of the new finds, accounting for six in total, were made in Block 9, a concession in north Oman where Oxy Oman

holds a majority ownership.

Block 9 is a crucial asset for the company, contributing significantly to its overall oil and gas production.

Additionally, two discoveries were made in the adjacent Block 27 concession, while two more were uncovered in Block 53, located in central Oman and featuring the Mukhaizna heavy oil field.

Furthermore, in its wholly owned and operated Block 72 in south-central Oman, Oxy Oman successfully completed the 2D seismic processing as part of its exploration programme.

Oxy Oman boasts an extensive portfolio of over 24,000 square kilometres of upstream acreage, which is distributed across eight onshore blocks.

In 2022, the gross production averaged 220,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (boed). This production figure comprises 201,000 boed of fluids and 110 million standard cubic feet of gas.

Toyota Crown: Feature-packed luxury sedan

MUSCAT: The all-new Toyota Crown with its exceptional design, stunning technology and a host of features is becoming popular with enthusiasts here in Oman.

Making a strong comeback after years, the Toyota Crown is building on its legacy and now in its new generation is even more appealing than ever.

The new Toyota Crown is built around the Toyota New Global Architecture (TNGA-K) platform. The new Crown comes exclusively with a choice of two environmentally friendly powertrains.

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

The second hybrid electric powertrain consists of two electric motors and a 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol engine, generating



a total power of 222 HP. The hybrid-electric system, paired with an Electric Continuously Variable Transmission (e-CVT), achieves the lowest fuel efficiency, with a consumption rate of 21.6 km/l. Instantly drawing attention are

the Crown's stunning Quad LED headlights, featuring three low-beam lights and an Auto high beam light. Which efficiently illuminate the roads. The Toyota Crown has been engineered for both supreme visual appeal and peerless performance.

Drivers can choose from several driving modes, including normal, eco, sport, sport+ which allows drivers to adjust system settings individually to their exact driving habits. Striking a seamless connection between stylish design, exquisite

luxury, and enhanced convenience and comfort, the new Crown's cabin is accentuated by a range of advanced features.

These include a 12.3-inch touchscreen multimedia system with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility, a 12.3-inch TFT colour meter that allows users to choose from 12 patterns to suit their tastes, a colour head-up display (HUD), a dual-zone automatic air conditioning system with rear AC vents, a 11-speaker JBL surround sound system, panoramic moon roof, multi-adjustable power and ventilated front seats, and 60/40 split and reclining rear seats.

For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman, www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, and instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/.

For any further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Saud Bahwan automotive showroom.

ahlibank offers double the cashback on international credit card transactions



MUSCAT: As part of its endeavours to enhance customer experiences with exciting offers, ahlibank has announced an offer of up to 2% cashback on international transactions for all ahlibank credit card holders. This falls in line with the bank's efforts to engage with its customers through generous rewards and innovative promotions.

Starting from August 1 until August 31, the month-long campaign will offer customers the chance to get up to 2% cashback on international transactions. A 1% cashback will be on international spending for all credit cards, in addition to the existing 1% which is already provided for the Signature and Infinite credit card holders.

This would provide signature and infinite customers double the cashback on international spending on POS or online.

This lucrative offer is part of ahlibank's initiatives to engage with its customers through meaningful rewards, thereby strengthening relationships between the bank and its new or existing customers.

By giving them a chance to earn back when spending internationally, ahlibank aims to enhance the customer's experience at all times and be a preferred partner for their daily banking needs.

Muneer al Balushi, AGM — Head of Retail Distribution at ahlibank, said, "We are always looking for new ways to keep our customer's loyalty intact. Moreover, there is no better way to do it than by offering exciting and tangible rewards and promotions to them.

Offering a cashback on international transactions is truly a value add, and we believe that our customers will receive this very well. Our goal is to improve the customer's banking experience by creating a dynamic banking environment that aligns with current trends in the global and local banking industry."

NSSG gains recognition for customised cybersecurity solutions



MUSCAT: Following a resounding win at COMEX for Excellence in Technology, National Security Services Group (NSSG) is continuing to build its reputation, garnering recognition for providing customised cybersecurity solutions.

Showcasing its innovative drive through a range of Omani-designed solutions, the company's strategic vision and commitment to the advancement of the industry secured its place alongside some of the world's biggest technology names including Microsoft and Huawei.

A homegrown group united by a drive for innovation, NSSG has invested in creating a Research and Development team of Oman's brightest talents which has resulted in the development of several in-house integrated cybersecurity solutions such as DCapsula, a trailblazing DMARC solution that represents a milestone in Omani ingenuity

and cybersecurity.

Other innovative products include HashStrike, a one-of-a-kind combination of carefully crafted software, powerful hardware, and big data analysis password auditing tool as well as PassRay, which is a solution designed to enhance an organisation's password maturity through powerful analytics and reporting.

Warith al Maawali, Acting CEO of NSSG, said: "For almost a decade, we have been using our disruptive technology and passion for innovation to create a secure and resilient digital future for the Sultanate of Oman, all the while keeping pace with the globalisation of the digital world.

As our nation works towards the goals set in Oman's Vision 2040, our vision in parallel strives to ensure this journey remains safe and secure, fortifying the nation through security, and awareness, and harnessing the brilliance of our Omani talents."

Exciting Ford campaign with attractive instalments and benefits ending soon

MUSCAT: Own a Ford now and get a chance to enjoy exclusive benefits including service 3 years / 60,000 kms, registration 1 year and attractive instalments. The campaign ends on August 9, 2023 (Conditions apply. Loan approval is based on sole discretion of finance companies/banks. EMI is calculated per month for a tenure of 8 years. For details visit a Ford showroom.)



Ford range of vehicles in Oman includes Taurus, Explorer, Mustang and Bronco.

The Ford Taurus is available with instalments starting from RO 204 per month. It blends seamless connectivity, high on-road performance, and an entirely new sleek modern design.

Boasting an all-new design, on an entirely different platform, the all-new Taurus still exudes refinement with numerous premium touches. Under the bonnet, Ford's proven 2.0-litre EcoBoost engine powers the all-new Taurus, mated to an eight-speed automatic transmission, producing 232 Hp and 388 Nm of torque. Offered with front-wheel drive and three driving modes — Normal, Sport, and Eco — the Blue Oval's flagship sedan enjoys an impressive economy of as much as 15.3 km/l.

The Ford Explorer is available with instalments starting from RO 254 per month. Equipped with 4x4 capability, impressive space, comfort and a host of features and technology, the Ford Explorer

always rises above and makes a fine mark on every terrain.

The Explorer is equipped with a revised 2.3-litre turbocharged EcoBoost engine that produces 300 horsepower and 420Nm of torque. The engine is matched to an all-new 10-speed transmission and Intelligent All-Wheel-Drive system.

The Ford Mustang is available with instalments starting from RO 321 per month. The Ford Mustang is the largest selling sport coupe in the world. The Mustang has throughout history remained an icon for those who prefer to be different.

Preferred by customers across age groups, the Mustang is loaded with interesting features and technologies that allow it to make every drive outstanding.

The Mustang is available with a more powerful, higher-revving 5.0L V8. Power output increases to 460HP and 569Nm of torque. The Mustang is available with 10-speed A/T. A new, fully customisable 12" LCD digital instrument cluster. An all-new Mustang MyMode

that allows you to save your favourite drive settings, including suspension, steering and exhaust note preferences.

The Ford Bronco WildTrak is available with instalments starting from RO 414 per month. The Ford Bronco WildTrak delivers maximum 4x4 go-anywhere, anytime capability and confidence.

The Bronco is equipped with fantastic features that elevate off-road experiences for drivers, including off-road mapping and drive technologies. Best-in-class projected gasoline-powered horsepower and torque is available with the 2.7-litre EcoBoost V6 engine, which is projected to produce 330 horsepower and 544 lb.-ft. of torque.

In Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co LLC. Please log on to www.fordoman.com, or www.facebook.com/FordOman or www.youtube.com/FordOmanChannel or www.instagram.com/ford_oman for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.

Bank Muscat receives Best Bank Award 2023 from Euromoney

MUSCAT: In recognition of its outstanding contributions to the banking sector, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has been awarded the Best Bank in Oman award by Euromoney.

Mohammed bin Sultan al Habsi, Chief Representative, UAE Representative Office, Bank Muscat, received the award on behalf of the bank. Euromoney's

decision was based on a number of different criteria including the product mix, financial performance, asset and revenue quality, customer satisfaction, and digital offerings.

It also included growth in assets, profitability, geographic reach, strategic relationships, new business development and innovation in products. The selection results came after



extensive consultations with corporate financial executives and bankers, banking consultants and analysts across the world.

The recognition further solidifies Bank Muscat's position as a leader in the banking sector in Oman and adds to the bank's long-standing success. Over the years, Bank Muscat has remained committed to its strategy of providing the best services and

banking products to suit all segments of society and meet their aspirations.

With a wide range of retail, corporate, wholesale and investment banking services as well as asset management and private banking offerings, Bank Muscat provides its customers with reliable, dynamic and innovative banking services and products, aiming to maintain market leadership.

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Observer

ESTABLISHED IN 1981 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: ABDULLAH BIN SALIM AL SHEIKH VOL. 39 NO. 239 | PAGES 16

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr Saad bin Hamoud bin Alzaidi, Chairman of the Supreme Court Deyyd Alzaidi bin Said bin Khalifa bin Alzaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court Sheikh Al Maktar bin Abdulrahman bin Alzaidi took the oath of office at Al Burak Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

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

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SAMUEL BUSTE
MUSCAT: The frequent orders and fervent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are failing on deaf ears. A drive around the downtown Ruwi and its adjoining areas reveals how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder. While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not. "In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves, and more than enough times that social distancing in the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19. While expressing his appreciation for the Ministry of Health have said it more than enough times that social distancing is not acceptable that they pave the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can ensure that other people as well," said Hamad al Khalfi, who stopped his car to and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behaviour of other people as well," said Hamad al Khalfi, who stopped his car to

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

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

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Fourth Salalah Int’l Islamic Finance Conference to address governance principles

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 6

The Fourth Salalah International Islamic Finance Conference will be held next Sunday, August 13, in a strategic partnership with the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The conference, entitled “Governance in the Islamic Finance Sector for Sustainable Development and Global Economic Prosperity,” will focus on the importance of applying governance principles in addressing contemporary and emerging issues faced by Islamic financial services institutions.

The two-day conference will host four sessions:

- The role of Sharia supervisory bodies and boards of directors of Islamic financial institutions in applying the principles of governance.
- Governance and achieving sustainability in endowment institutions and non-profit institutions.
- Applying governance in Islamic financial institutions and its impact on achieving sustainable development.
- The governance of the Takaful insurance sector: challenges and solutions.

Iman bint Yahya al Busaidiya, Director of the Corporate Communication and Marketing Department at the Muscat Stock Exchange, said, “The presence of the stock exchange as a strategic partner in the Salalah International Islamic Finance Conference comes within the framework of supporting the stock exchange to establish these conferences, which is an opportunity to meet experiences and knowledge through the exchange of ideas, research, and best practices.”

Mohammed Ayman Salmi, CEO of Tawaq Consulting (Malaysia), said, “The conference organisers were keen to choose the best names from specialists and experts in the conference axes from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman of who are distinguished in various aspects of the types of Islamic financial institutions and related activities that comply with the provisions of Islamic Sharia through their expertise and experiences in this field.”

The conference is organised by Tawkam Consulting (Malaysia) with the Integrity Centre for Governance and Compliance Consulting (Oman).

Total fish caught by artisanal fishing reached 371,647 tonnes

MUSCAT: More than 371,647 tonnes of total fish were caught by artisanal fishing in the Sultanate of Oman during the H1 of 2023, with a value of about RO 195.88 million. This is an increase of 5 per cent compared to 353,950 tonnes caught during the same period last year.

Artisanal fishing accounts for 93.9 per cent of the total quantity of fish caught in Oman.

Preliminary statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) show that commercial fishing reached 20,724 tonnes, while coastal fishing amounted to 3,059 tonnes.

The highest quantity of fish caught by artisanal fishing came from Al Wusta Governorate, with 144,707 tonnes, followed by the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate with 110,593 tonnes, then the Dhofar Governorate with 42,128 tonnes, and the governorates of Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South with 37,553 tonnes.

Fish caught by artisanal fishing in the Musandam Governorate amounted to 21,938 tonnes and in the Muscat Governorate with 14,727 tonnes.

The largest amount of fish caught by artisanal fishing came from small surface fish, with 221,234 tonnes until end-June, an increase of 17.7 per cent, compared to 187,895 tonnes in H1 2022.



PRELIMINARY STATISTICS FROM THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR STATISTICS AND INFORMATION (NCSI) SHOW THAT COMMERCIAL FISHING REACHED 20,724 TONNES, WHILE COASTAL FISHING AMOUNTED TO 3,059 TONNES.

The quantity of large surface fish caught by artisanal fishing decreased by 6.5 per cent, to

reach 83,846 tonnes until end-June, compared to 89,638 tonnes during the same period last year.

The quantity of demersal fish caught by artisanal fishing reached 57,379 tonnes, a decrease of 13.5 per cent compared to the end of June 2022 with 66,309 tonnes.

The quantity of sharks caught by artisanal fishing increased by 12.7 per cent, to reach 3,119

tonnes until end- June, compared to 2,768 tonnes by end of June 2022.

With regard to crustaceans and mollusks landed by artisanal fishing until the end of June, 4,096 tonnes were caught, compared to 4,434 tonnes by the end of June 2022, and the amount of other fish caught by artisanal fishing reached 1,973 tonnes. — ONA

Omani business leaders welcome measures to combat hidden trade

FROM PAGE 13

He welcomed the resolve of the government to fight the practice by clearly spelling out penalties, while providing specific tools to the authorities to unearth all concealed commercial activities.

According to Eng Said bin Nasser al Rashdi, CEO of Insurance House, the hidden trade is a deep-rooted phenomenon that requires serious efforts to

eradicate.

He called all on stakeholders, including local traders, particularly small shops, to blow the whistle on concealed commercial activities which negatively impact their business.

The measures, he said, will help address fight the illegal lease of CR registries for hidden trade practices, and also curb the practice of certain foreigners

who operate without a local sponsor or guarantee and then leave with sums of money, leaving behind customers who have been scammed.

Hazza bin Saleh al Balushi described the hidden trade as an incurable disease afflicting various economies globally.

It is a scourge that negatively affects the country’s economy.

The Ministerial Decision, he

said, is a bold and effective step that will contribute to fighting the practice notably through robust monitoring, evaluation of licenses and business data, better awareness, and stringent penalties.

In this regard, he called on citizens to assist the authorities in uncovering hidden trade activities, which have been taking jobs away from Omanis and

hurting entrepreneurs.

Abdullah bin Ahmed al Dhuhli, a businessman, said: “Without doubt, the hidden trade practised by some foreign individuals in cooperation with some citizens has multiple negative effects.

This phenomenon has grown in the recent period across various commercial activities and has had a clear impact on work output and quality, while competing unfairly

with businesses that operate in accordance with the law,” he said.

Al Dhuhli emphasised that it has become necessary for every individual in this society to be responsible and has an important role to play in combating such wrong practices.

He also urged citizens not to allow foreigners to use their commercial register to practice hidden trade.

Mastering the art of pitching to investors



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The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant.

As-Salaam-Alaikum. Have you ever wondered what can sway an investor to back a startup? What secrets lie behind the captivating pitches that win the faith and financial support of those with the potential to turn abstract ideas into real-world products and services?

Is it possible to hone your pitching skills to a level of efficacy

and persuasiveness that leaves a lasting impression?

The art of pitching, a skill essential for entrepreneurs, can indeed be mastered. It necessitates a deep understanding of your business, its marketplace, and, crucially, your potential investors’ mindset.

It calls for clarity, conciseness, passion, and indisputable evidence that your startup is a worthy investment.

A pitch is not merely a delivery of facts and figures; it’s a compelling narrative that strings together your business’s core elements into a story that resonates with your audience. But how can one create such a powerful narrative?

Here are some pivotal strategies that can guide you through this journey.

1. Clarity and conciseness: Your pitch should answer the basic questions any investor would have: What does your company do? Why does it matter? What sets it apart?

Craft a narrative that introduces your business, underscores its purpose, and shows what differentiates it from competitors.

But remember, brevity is equally important as clarity. You have a limited window to capture your audience’s attention, so avoid jargon and articulate your ideas plainly and persuasively.

2. Showcase market understanding: Investors need to see that you understand the landscape your business operates in. Show your knowledge of the market, its size, growth potential, trends, and competition.

This not only strengthens your credibility but also reassures investors of your business’s potential to generate substantial returns.

3. Highlight your team: Even the most groundbreaking idea can’t progress without a capable team to execute it. Investors place significant emphasis on the people behind a startup.

Highlight your team’s skills,

experiences, and passion. Illustrate their dedication and articulate why they are uniquely positioned to guide the business towards success.

4. Display traction: Prove that your business is not just an idea but has already gained momentum. Share evidence of the progress you’ve made — customer testimonials, sales figures, user engagement metrics, or strategic partnerships.

Concrete proof of your startup’s early successes helps to validate your business model and build investor confidence.

5. Presentation skills and body language: The way you say something is often as important as what you say. Deliver your pitch with confidence, enthusiasm, and professionalism.

Practice until your body language — eye contact, gestures, and posture — complements your spoken words. And remember, practice makes perfect.

6. Utilise visual aids: Visuals can powerfully reinforce your

spoken words. Slides, graphs, infographics, or prototypes can make your pitch more memorable and easy to understand, so use them effectively.

As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) wisely counselled, “Speak to everyone in accordance with their degree of understanding.” This counsel is particularly relevant to pitching.

Understand your audience and adjust your pitch to align with their interests and knowledge level.

Mastering your pitch can open doors to essential resources for your startup’s journey. But after gaining the investment, what’s next?

This brings us to our next article, “The Essential Guide to Building a Rock-Solid Startup Team.” How do you assemble a team that shares your vision and has the expertise to make it a reality?

Stay tuned for an insightful discussion on this critical topic. Ma’as salama!

MSX index decreased by 0.496 per cent

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) Index 30 closed yesterday at 4,759.65 points, down by 23.7 points, or by 0.496 per cent, compared to the last trading session, which reached 4,783.36 points.

The trading value amounted to RO 1,939,302, a decrease by 28 per cent compared to the last trading session, which amounted to RO 2,693,194.

The report issued by the MSX indicated that the market value decreased by 0.131 per cent from the last trading day, amounting to approximately RO 23.88 billion.

The value of non-Omani purchases on the stock exchange amounted to RO 13,000, representing a rate of 0.69 per cent, while the value of non-Omani selling amounted to RO 509,000, equivalent to 26.24 per cent, while the net non-Omani investment decreased by RO 496,000 or by 25.55 per cent. — ONA