

Harris and Trump deadlocked

Democratic US Vice-President Kamala Harris and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump remain closely matched among likely voters ahead of the November 5 election, a CNN/SSRS poll released on Tuesday showed. The survey, conducted September 19-22, showed Harris at 48 per cent and Trump at 47 per cent, with six weeks left in the campaign, CNN said. The poll of 2,074 registered voters has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

SUNRISE - 05:57 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:41 AM
DHUHR - 12:04 PM
ASR - 03:29 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:05 PM
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INTERNATIONAL FIRMS INK PACT TO EXPLORE OMAN'S NATURAL HYDROGEN POTENTIAL



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SWEARING, SHOEYS AND SWIFT LEGS: SINGAPORE GP TALKING POINTS



P20

REVISITING THE DISCOVERY OF OMAN'S STONEHENGE



MUSCAT

OMAN-SAUDI TRADE SURPASSES RO 1 BN

Trade between Oman and Saudi Arabia reached over RO 1.014 billion by the end of June 2024, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Mineral products topped Oman's exports to Saudi Arabia, valued at RO 160.547 million, followed by metals (RO 95.036 million), machinery and electrical equipment (RO 33.592 million), and live animals (RO 23.816 million). On the import side, mineral products led with RO 284.941 million, followed by chemical industry products (RO 137.967 million), and food, beverages and tobacco products (RO 38.882 million). Re-export items were dominated by vehicles and transport equipment (RO 11.279 million). **SEE P13**

APPLE PAY TO BOOST E-PAYMENTS

With the launch of Apple Pay service on Tuesday in Oman and the rest of the GCC, users will be able to make online and offline payments via mobile devices. According to Apple, banks offering the service in Oman include Bank Muscat, Sohar International, Sohar Islamic, BankDhofar, NBO, Dhofar Islamic and Al Muzn. Telecom providers Vodafone and Ooredoo also announced that their services can be paid for through Apple Pay. Verification of debit or credit cards was simple, although some banks differed in their methods. **DETAILS ON P3**

FOCUS ON OMAN-SYRIA TIES



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Tuesday received Dr Bouthaina Shaaban, Political and Media Adviser to the President of the Syrian Arab Republic and Chairperson of the Wathiqat Wattan Organisation. **DETAILS ON P2** (PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI)

Oman Vision 2040 boosts economy

MUSCAT: Four years ago, the Sultanate of Oman began an initiative towards its future when His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman, approved Oman Vision 2040, a strategic plan aimed at reshaping the nation's infrastructure, economy and society. On Tuesday, the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit released its latest report, building on the foundational work established since the plan's

approval in 2020. The launch took place under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit. The report aims to shed light on the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to position Oman as a leader in various international indicators, including global competitiveness, governance, government efficiency, innovation, environmental performance and more. **SEE P2**

Oman denounces Israeli air strikes on Lebanon

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman expressed its denunciation and condemnation of Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) air strikes on Lebanon's territories. Oman noted that this action constitutes a serious escalation that undermines security and stability in the region and leads to the expansion of conflict in a manner that involves the region in further violence and instability. In a statement by the Foreign Ministry, Oman urged the international community to take measures to end this Israeli aggression in accordance with international law.

The Sultanate of Oman also expressed its solidarity with the Lebanese Republic. It also expressed its condolences to the families of the victims, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. Oman emphasised its complete rejection of any violations of Lebanon's sovereignty or its territorial integrity.



A girl, wounded in an Israeli strike on his village, receives treatment in the southern Lebanese village of Saksakiyeh on Tuesday. - AFP

Meanwhile, an Israeli air strike on Beirut killed a senior Hezbollah commander on Tuesday as cross-border rocket attacks by both sides increased fears of a full-fledged war in the Middle East. Israel's military said the air strike on the Lebanese capital killed Ibrahim Qubaisi, who

it said was the commander of Hezbollah's missiles and rocket force. Two security sources in Lebanon described him as a leading figure in the group's rocket division. The Lebanese health ministry said at least six people were killed and 15 wounded in Tuesday's strike on a building in the Ghobeiry neighbourhood of Beirut. Lebanese authorities said 558 people had been killed in air strikes on Monday, including 50 children and 94 women. A further 1,835 were wounded, they said, and tens of thousands more have fled for safety. "We felt as if we were in a war, a very difficult war," said Rima Ali Chahine, 50, speaking at a makeshift shelter for displaced people at a Beirut college. "Maybe it didn't take us long on the road, but families are now arriving who have been stuck on the roads since yesterday - 15 or 16 hours on the roads." **SEE ALSO P6**



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OMAN, SYRIA REVIEW RELATIONS

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Tuesday received Dr Bouthaina Shaaban, Political and Media Adviser to the President of the Syrian Arab Republic and Chairperson of the Wathiqat Wattan Organisation. HH Sayyid Fahd expressed his best wishes to the Syrian leadership. He also wished the people of Syria further

development and growth. Further, the meeting highlighted Omani-Syrian relations and means of boosting cooperation. It also touched on the agenda of the international conference organised by the National Records and Archives Authority in cooperation with the Syrian Wathiqat Wattan Organisation. The two sides underscored the importance of joint Arab



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said on Tuesday received Dr Bouthaina Shaaban, Political and Media Adviser to the President of the Syrian Arab Republic.

action in preserving legacies and historic documents and exchanging expertise in these fields. They also discussed regional developments and matters of mutual interest. The guest and her accompanying delegation expressed their happiness in visiting the Sultanate of Oman and the developments achieved in different fields. Moreover, the Political and

Media Adviser to the President of the Syrian Arab Republic underlined the importance of the consultations she held with officials in the Sultanate of Oman. The meeting was attended by Dr Hamed bin Mohammed al Dhawyani, Chairman of the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), and Dr Idris Maya, Ambassador of Syria to Oman. — ONA

Sayyid Badr participates in Arab Ministerial Consultative Meeting

NEW YORK: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Tuesday participated in the Arab Ministerial Consultative Meeting, held on the sidelines of the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. The meeting discussed the latest regional developments and common challenges. It stressed the importance of unifying Arab ranks and enhancing joint cooperation to address current crises, notably within the context of the Palestinian cause. The ministers expressed their unwavering support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the importance of realising a just and comprehensive solution that guarantees the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, with Al Quds Al Sharqiyah (East Jerusalem) as its capital. They also reiterated their call for the international community to shoulder its responsibilities and intensify efforts to immediately implement a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and terminate the brutal Israeli aggression. Sayyid Badr also conferred with several officials.



Sayyid Badr taking part in Arab Consultative Meeting in New York. — ONA



Mohamed Moizo, President of the Republic of Maldives, received Sayyid Badr.



Sayyid Badr had a meeting with Deemah al Yahya.



Sayyid Badr with Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary.

interest. Then, Sayyid Badr met with Alice Nderitu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Prevention of Genocide. The two sides discussed the tragic situation in the Gaza Strip and expressed their deep concern over the ongoing escalation and violence against civilians at a time when the international community shows an inability to stop the aggression and violation of international law. The two sides also exchanged views on means of enhancing efforts to protect the world's peoples from serious violations. They discussed ways of providing urgently needed support to the Palestinian people, who continue to meet serious challenges. The meeting also touched on means of boosting international efforts to combat hate speech and incitement. During a meeting with Deemah al Yahya, Secretary-General of the Digital Cooperation Organization, Sayyid Badr reviewed cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the organisation. They discussed projects that support digital diplomacy, capacity, and skills development within the context of the digital economy, artificial intelligence (AI) and sustainable development.

During his meeting with Xavier Bettel, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs of Luxembourg, the Minister of Foreign Affairs reviewed bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Luxembourg and ways to enhance them in various fields, especially in the areas of economic and investment cooperation. On the other hand, the Sultanate of Oman and Hungary signed an executive programme in the field of higher education. The programme was signed by Sayyid Badr and Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary. The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Bulgaria signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to hold political consultations to advance bilateral relations and an agreement on mutual visa exemption for holders of diplomatic, special and service passports. The MoU was signed by Sayyid Badr and Ivan Kondov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria. During the meeting, the two ministers discussed regional and international developments of common interest. In another meeting, Sayyid Badr and Hans Grundberg, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, reviewed the latest developments in the Yemeni arena. They discussed international and regional efforts made to achieve peace and stability in Yemen. They stressed the need to back efforts to reach a comprehensive political solution that paves the way for a future of security, stability, and harmony for the Yemeni people. Sayyid Badr then met with Dr Badr Abdel Aati, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt. The two sides hailed the strong Omani-Egyptian relations and the two countries' keenness to keep developing and diversifying programmes of cooperation in various vital fields to achieve more benefits for the two peoples. Sayyid Badr and Dr Badr Abdel Aati reviewed topics on the agenda of the current session of the United Nations General Assembly. They exchanged views on developments in the region, most notably those related to the Palestinian issue, as well as efforts to realise justice, alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, and achieve their aspirations for independence and freedom. Sayyid Badr underlined the significance of Egypt's role and its support for the Arab cause. For his part, the Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs commended the foreign policy of the Sultanate of Oman, the country's wisdom and its peaceful and constructive positions at regional and international levels. He stressed the need to step up coordination of Arab positions, boost peaceful solutions, and stop military escalation in the region. During his meeting with Bakhtiyor Saidov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sayyid Badr discussed ways to enhance cooperation between Oman and Uzbekistan in the fields of economy, trade and culture. The two sides elaborated on prospects for cooperation in the fields of investment, notably in renewable energy and technology sectors. They also exchanged views on regional and international issues of common interest.

— ONA

Oman Vision 2040 report highlights progress on strategic pillars



The report aims to shed light on the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to position Oman as a leader in various international indicators.

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

Four years ago, the Sultanate of Oman began an initiative toward its future when His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq approved Oman Vision 2040, a strategic plan aimed at reshaping the nation's infrastructure, economy and society. On Tuesday, the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit released its latest report, building on the foundational work established since the plan's approval in 2020. The launch took place under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit. The report aims to shed light on the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to position Oman as a leader in various international indicators, including global competitiveness, governance, government efficiency, innovation, environmental performance and more. At the heart of this vision are four key pillars, each integral to the strategic direction and ongoing efforts to achieve the objectives of the initiative. These pillars—People and Society, Economy and Development, Governance and Institutional Performance, and Sustainable Environment — serve as the framework for Oman's transformation. Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, said that the improvement in the government's economic and financial performance was reflected in its ability to reduce debt and increase the gross domestic product, and the improvement in the credit rating of the Sultanate of Oman by credit rating agencies in a remarkable way for global economic and financial observers and experts.

He expressed his thanks to all workers in the various national sectors and praised their achievements in various economic, social, cultural and environmental fields, which had an impact on the progress of the Sultanate of Oman in many international indicators as it rose in the Economic Freedom Index 2024 to rank 56 globally after being ranked 95 in 2023, and in the Entrepreneurship Index, it was ranked 11 globally. In the Environmental Performance Index, it was ranked 50 after being ranked 149 in 2022. The report outlines ongoing developments in People and Society pillar, enhancing the education system at all levels to prepare graduates for the labour market with competitive skills and capabilities. Collaborative efforts among various entities — including state administrative units, private schools, colleges, universities, and private sector companies—are crucial in establishing an inclusive educational framework that fosters a knowledge-based society. The report also highlights strides made in Economy and Development pillar towards building dynamic economic leadership to achieve the development goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040. This includes enhancing investment, industry, commerce, tourism and urban development, all vital components of the national economy. The emphasis remains on cultivating capable Omani leaders equipped to steer the economy confidently, ensuring alignment with strategic directions and national priorities. In the area of Governance and Institutional Performance, the report details the strategic direction aimed at creating a flexible, innovative administrative apparatus grounded in good governance principles.



■ STATE COUNCIL DISCUSSES
CONCEPTS OF HEALTH SERVICES



MUSCAT: The State Council's sub-committee formed to study the draft version of the Public Health Law – which was referred to the State Council by the Council of Ministers – on Tuesday hosted a number of officials from the Ministry of Health. The meeting was chaired by Dr Sana bint Abdulrahman al Khanjariyah, Chairperson of the State Council's Social and Cultural Committee. The committee discussed basic elements and concepts related to public health services in the Sultanate of Oman, the role of the Ministry of Health in supervising popular medicine and alternative medicine and means of regulating blood services. It also studied methods of food manufacturing. – **ONA**

MoH to keep a tab on misuse of medical leave

KABEER YOUSUF
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Dr Muhanna bin Nasser al Maslahi

The Ministry of Health is planning to crack down on individuals who misuse the sick leave, as reported by the Department of Private Health Institutions.

Efforts are currently underway to closely monitor all sick leave permissions, assess the nature of the sick leave, verify the reasons for which the leave is approved, and review other details to ensure that only deserving individuals receive sick leave.

During the 10th anniversary celebration of Al Salama Hospitals and Polyclinic, Dr Muhanna bin Nasser al Maslahi, Director-General of Private Health Institutions at the Ministry of Health (MoH), emphasised the crucial role of private hospitals in appropriately granting sick leave.

"Misuse of medical leave is a significant issue for companies, both private and government institutions, and we are committed to addressing this issue through audits," Dr Muhanna told the Observer.

In light of recent findings

that revealed over 500,000 sick leaves were granted in the private sector in the past 8 months, monitoring efforts have been intensified to ensure that only deserving individuals receive sick leave.

Individuals in need of medical leave will now be required to register on the MoH website before being granted sick leave.

Dr Muhanna also mentioned plans to establish an insurance committee to enhance the insurance system in Oman and an advisory committee with members from various sectors, including the government, to address challenges faced by the private sector and improve their services to society.

Apple Pay to boost cashless, cardless transactions

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With the launch of Apple Pay service on Tuesday in the Sultanate of Oman and the rest of the GCC, users will be able to make online and offline payments via mobile devices.

According to Apple, banks offering the service in Oman include Bank Muscat, Sohar International, Sohar Islamic, BankDhofar, NBO, Dhofar Islamic and Al Muzn. Telecom providers Vodafone and Ooredoo also announced that their services can be paid through Apple Pay.

Verification of debit or credit cards was simple, although some banks differed in their methods.

Mohammed bin Saif al Manji of TechOneFive, an initiative group promoting awareness of new technologies, stated, "Digital payments in Oman have been growing, with the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) promoting cashless transactions through initiatives like mobile wallets and QR code payments. Apple Pay's



According to Apple, banks offering the service in Oman include Bank Muscat, Sohar International, Sohar Islamic, BankDhofar, NBO, Dhofar Islamic and Al Muzn

launch in Oman will enhance this trend, alongside Samsung Pay, offering users a secure and seamless way to make contactless payments via their iPhones and Apple Watches. Many banks have integrated Apple Pay, allowing customers to link their bank cards for effortless digital transactions.

This aligns with Oman Vision

2040, supporting the country's transition towards a cashless society." According to CBO's Financial Stability Report, there has been a broader adoption of e-payment methods and a shift away from cash usage. CBO's guidelines for Card Tokenization services have been instrumental in enabling domestic and international electronic payment

Al Dakhiliyah unveils digital platforms to boost services

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, SEP 24

In line with the rapid technological advancements in the Sultanate of Oman, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate has taken a significant step towards enhancing the quality of services for citizens and residents through its digital transformation initiatives.

The governorate celebrated the launch of innovative digital platforms on Tuesday with an event held under the auspices of Shaikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah. Senior officials from the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, along with the governorate's general managers, also attended the ceremony.

Among the key projects unveiled is the "Al Dakhiliyah Explorer," an interactive platform designed to provide easy access to geographical data within the governorate. This platform allows users to virtually visit Al Dakhiliyah Governorate's tourist



This platform allows users to virtually visit Al Dakhiliyah Governorate's tourist spots, schools and hospitals with just a click.

spots, schools and hospitals with just a click. It caters to both specialists and the general public, including tourists eager to explore the governorate's rich historical and natural heritage.

The "Al Dakhiliyah Explorer" offers detailed maps of the governorate's borders and administrative divisions, alongside accurate information on various locations. Users can discover tourist attractions such as parks, gardens, recreational areas, as well as historical and archaeological sites. The platform also covers

essential services such as hotels, banks, gas stations, post offices and government institutions. Additionally, it pinpoints the locations of schools, universities, hospitals, clinics, mosques and even playgrounds—transforming it into a comprehensive digital gateway that enhances the visitor and resident experience.

Another cornerstone of this digital transformation is the "customer service" system, which streamlines communication between citizens and government entities. Through this system,

individuals can submit electronic requests to various government agencies, including the Interior Municipality and governors' offices. The system enables real-time tracking of requests and allows users to provide feedback on service quality upon completion.

This system not only saves time and effort but also significantly increases the efficiency of government services by eliminating the delays associated with paper-based processes. It has garnered widespread praise from residents for its effectiveness in handling electronic transactions.

Al Dakhiliyah Governorate's leap into digital transformation reflects its commitment to improving living standards, fostering sustainable development and making services more accessible and efficient. These newly launched systems underscore the governorate's efforts to enhance public engagement by offering interactive tools that enable greater citizen participation in governance.

'Perfume in Oman' exhibition — a celebration of art, culture, fragrance

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

'Perfume in Oman' exhibition opened at the Cultural Club on Tuesday under the auspices of Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture. This event focuses on creativity and artistic expression, featuring contributions from a diverse group of Omani artists.

The two-day cultural event, 'Perfume in Oman', offers an array of enriching activities, including seminars, poetry evenings, workshops, and exhibitions.

The Fine Arts Exhibition, which will run from September 24 to October 9, is a key highlight, bringing together artists and attendees for a sensory and visual

experience.

The first symposium, coinciding with the Fine Arts Exhibition, presented four academic papers. Dr Mohammed al Balushi shared insights in his paper 'Perfume in the Omani Archaeological Heritage', while Dr Hussein al Mashhour explored 'The Frankincense Trade and its Impact on the Civilisation of the Sultanate of Oman'. Dr Jamal al Sabahi discussed 'Aromatic Plants in Oman', and Dr Fatima al Raei presented 'The Journey of Incense Manufacturing'. This session was moderated by Qais al Siyabi.

The second symposium on Wednesday will also feature four academic papers. The poet Sama Issa will discuss 'Perfume in Omani Myths and Folk Tales', followed by Dr Fatima al Shaidi's paper



The two-day cultural event, 'Perfume in Oman', offers an array of enriching activities, including seminars, poetry evenings, workshops and exhibitions.

on 'Perfume in Modern Omani Poetry'. Writer Mohammed al Shahri delves into 'Perfume in the Omani Novel', while poet Younis al Busaidi explores 'Perfume in Ancient Omani Literature'. Sundus al Badri will moderate the session.

In addition to the academic discussions, the event includes

poetry evenings accompanied by musical performances, featuring notable poets such as Dr Saeeda Khater, Hassan al Matroushi, Abdul Razzaq al Rubaie, Hisham al Saqri, SaId al Saqlawi, Badriya al Badri, Zahrán al Qasimi and Ishaq al Khanjari. Musician Youssef al Foori will also perform, enriching the

poetic and cultural atmosphere.

Several interactive workshops will take place, including sessions on incense making led by Afnan al Amri and Mawia al Jabri, and a perfume making workshop presented by Ahmed al Saqri. Additionally, a live drawing session will be conducted by artists Said al



Ruwaidi and Afrah al Maamari.

Professor Dr Fakhriya al Yahyaei, of Sultan Qaboos University, emphasised the importance of such events in nurturing artistic talent and fostering a connection between artists and the wider public. "These exhibitions encourage the community to engage with artists' works, learn about their roles and goals, and understand how art can serve and interact with different segments of society," she noted.

Participating artist Dalila al Harthi shared her perspective on her contributions to the exhibition. "I participated with various artistic pieces that reimagined the iconic frankincense tree in wood, showcasing its significance throughout Omani history," she said.

Nakhla

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

The Wilayat of Nakhla, located in Al Batinah South Governorate, stands as a unique blend of natural beauty and rich history. Just 120 kilometres from Muscat, this picturesque area offers a perfect destination for short trips and daylong adventures, attracting visitors from all around the world.

The Wilayat of Nakhla boasts of many tourist destinations. Notable among them are: Ain Al Thawarah, Nakhla Fort, Wakan Village and Wadi Mistal.

Ain Al Thawarah is known for its hot spring, which is located 15 kilometres from the town. Surrounded by rugged rocky mountains and lush palm trees, this spring emerges from the ground at temperatures between 35-40°C, making it ideal for swimming and mineral water baths. Visitors often seek the therapeutic benefits of the water, believed to relieve joint pain and skin conditions. The site also features picnic areas, perfect for families to relax amidst nature's splendour.

Nakhla Fort is a must-visit landmark of the wilayat. The fort is situated on a rocky hill overlooking Wadi Nakhla. Originally built before the Islamic era, this fortress has been expanded and renovated over the centuries to serve as a powerful defence against invaders. Its military architecture — complete with defensive towers, thick walls and ancient weapons — offers a fascinating glimpse into Oman's past. The fort provides stunning panoramic views of the surrounding valley, adding to the allure of the visit.

For those seeking tranquillity, Wakan Village, situated 2,000 metres above sea level, offers an escape into Oman's serene mountain life. Located 40 kilometres from Nakhla, this village is accessible via a scenic mountain road that reveals breathtaking views of the surrounding valleys. Known for its mild climate, Wakan is a paradise for nature lovers. Visitors can wander through green farms, explore traditional village life, or enjoy winter scenes of clouds blanketing the mountain peaks.

Nakhla is also a gateway to adventure lovers. Wadi Mistal, with its scenic landscapes and hiking trails, and Jabal Nakhla are ideal for climbers and explorers. They offer endless opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts. The region's natural water ponds and ancient mountain villages, such as Al Qura, further enrich the visitor experience with history, culture and breathtaking views.

With its perfect mix of natural beauty and historical significance, Nakhla promises unforgettable experiences to every traveller.

A BLEND OF NATURE, HISTORY AND ADVENTURE

NAKHAL IS A GATEWAY TO ADVENTURE LOVERS AND PROMISES AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES TO EVERY TRAVELLER



AIN AL THAWARAH

KNOWN FOR ITS HOT SPRING, WHICH IS LOCATED

15 km

FROM THE TOWN. SURROUNDED BY RUGGED ROCKY MOUNTAINS AND LUSH PALM TREES, THIS SPRING EMERGES FROM THE GROUND AT TEMPERATURES BETWEEN 35-40°C, MAKING IT IDEAL FOR SWIMMING AND MINERAL WATER BATHS



PHOTOS BY
MAHMOOD AL JABRI



AIRLINES SUSPEND FLIGHTS TO BEIRUT

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

The budget, airline, SalamAir, announced the suspension of flights to Beirut accessing the current political situation due to the escalation of violence. The airline did not specify the duration of the suspension.

Qatar Airways also said on Tuesday it had suspended flights to Beirut until Wednesday as tensions escalated between Israel and Hezbollah in the deadliest bombardment in nearly a year of cross-border clashes. “Due to the ongoing situation in Lebanon, Qatar



Airways has temporarily suspended flights to and from Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport until September 25,” the Qatari national carrier said in a statement. “The safety of our passengers remains our highest priority,” it added. Israeli air strikes on

Lebanon killed at least 492 people on Monday, including 35 children, Germany’s Lufthansa, Air France and Delta Air Lines of the United States have also suspended flights to Beirut in recent days. Flydubai and Etihad have also Etihad Airways also cancelled their services to and from Beirut.

Supreme Judicial Council discusses ways to boost quality of services



The meeting was chaired by Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council. – ONA

MUSCAT: The Supreme Judicial Council today held its 4th meeting of 2024 during which its discussed topics related to judicial action, including the development of laws and the improvement of the quality of judicial services over the new Judicial Year (2024-2025). The meeting was chaired by Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan

al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council. It reviewed decisions related to administrative and functional affairs of the Supreme Judicial Council. Sayyid Mohammed called for enhanced efforts during the new judicial year (2024-2025) to achieve prompt justice that consolidates the rule of law. — ONA

Bima platform celebrates half a million customers

MUSCAT: Bima, the leading e-insurance platform, celebrated a milestone by providing its services to half a million customers. Musab al Badi, head of operations at Bima, said: “We are proud to achieve this achievement, as we were able to provide electronic insurance services to half a million customers. We are delighted that Bima has been selected as the best startup in the GCC for 2024 by the GCC Secretary-General in Doha.” Al Badi added: “The Bima platform allows customers to easily compare offers from various insurance companies and complete the insurance process within minutes, as they enter the draw for Jetour cars. The insurance offerings include vehicle insurance, health insurance, travel insurance, and other types of insurance, making Bima the ideal destination for integrated insurance services. The draw for three Jetour cars is

eligible for everyone who insures a vehicle or benefits from other insurance services through the Bima platform. The car draws will be held on November 1, 2024, and January 1, 2025. Qusai al Rashdi, Head of Administration at the company, pointed out that the Bima platform is designed to meet the growing needs for fast digital services, and that Bima’s team of more than 60 specialised employees has the highest customer satisfaction rate in the Sultanate according to Google ratings, as many drivers faced challenges in renewing their car insurance in traditional ways. He added: “Through Bima, we offer an integrated digital experience that enables customers to complete all insurance procedures at any time and around the clock.” Al Rashdi confirmed that the Bima call centre operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including public holidays.

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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The Embassy of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Muscat hosted a seminar focusing collaboration boost between the United Arab Emirates and Oman in the field of technology, specifically in policing and cybersecurity. The event brought together key stakeholders from both nations to explore the latest technological developments in Dubai Police projects, with an aim to strengthen bilateral relations and foster mutual growth in technological innovation. In his opening remarks, Dr Ali al Shamili, Deputy Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates, expressed the embassy’s appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman’s Foreign Ministry. He acknowledged their efforts in deepening the partnership between the two countries, particularly in areas such as scientific and security advancements. Dr Al Shamili emphasised the importance of utilising cutting-edge technology to ensure the safety and security of citizens and residents, underscoring the



The event brought together key stakeholders from both nations to explore the latest technological developments

shared commitment of both nations to pursue innovative solutions in these fields. The seminar served as a platform for knowledge exchange, particularly in the domain of cybersecurity, while highlighting opportunities for collaboration in leveraging new technologies. Attendees discussed the joint efforts of Oman and the UAE to enhance security through artificial intelligence (AI), data analysis, and other advanced technologies. It also underscored the shared goal of aligning their strategies with future technological advancements. Among the key speakers, Ahmed bin Abdullah al Nahdi,

Director of the Technology Office at the Department of International Trade, Knowledge Economy, and Technology, highlighted the UAE’s achievements in deploying technology for public service. He pointed out the potential for similar applications within the GCC system, enhancing citizen services and fostering regional cooperation. Dubai Police’s initiatives, including the Smart Police Station (SPS) and the Efaad platform, were major topics of discussion. The SPS, an innovative project offering self-service police stations without human intervention, provides a wide

range of services, from filing criminal reports to issuing permits. These smart stations are aligned with the UAE’s vision for a technologically advanced service system, utilising AI and robotics to reduce reliance on traditional service centres. Similarly, the Efaad platform aims to integrate youth into the national strategy through smart services, supporting their capabilities in technology-driven projects. The event concluded with an interactive discussion that explored challenges faced by the region, the governance of new technologies, and the significance of continuous knowledge sharing to address these challenges.

Al Wusta Governor’s Office, Marafiq honour outstanding students

STAFF REPORTER
DUQM, SEPT 24

The Wilayat of Al Duqm recently celebrated the recognition of top-performing students from local schools for the 2023/2024 academic year. The event also included the provision of interactive screens to enhance educational resources, facilitated through a collaboration between the Al Wusta Governor’s Office and Marafiq. The ceremony was presided



The ceremony was presided over by Shaikh Bader al Farsi, Wali of Al Duqm.

over by Shaikh Bader bin Nasser al Farsi, Wali of Al Duqm, and attended by several senior officials from Al Wusta Governorate, alongside members of Marafiq’s Board of Directors

and executive leadership. This initiative underscores the joint efforts of the Al Wusta Governor’s Office, the General Directorate of Education in Al Wusta Governorate, and Marafiq

to promote academic excellence and encourage students to strive for higher educational achievement. In his remarks, Shaikh Bader bin Nasser al Farsi congratulated the distinguished students, saying, “We offer our sincere congratulations to the students for their outstanding academic achievements, which reflect the dedication of both the teaching and administrative staff in fostering a supportive learning environment.

Students showcase innovative skills at hackathon

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

A hackathon aimed at fostering overall technological advancement among students and academics concluded recently in Salalah. The 48-hour event attracted wide participation from universities, colleges, community members and innovators, with 25 teams competing in the final stages across a variety of technological challenges. The hackathon officially kicked off under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim

al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The event featured a distinguished assembly of academics and industry experts, reinforcing its focus on cultivating innovation and technological progress. The event, hosted by Dhofar University (DU), featured a distinguished assembly of academics and industry experts, reinforcing its focus on cultivating innovation and technological progress. As the academic partner, DU played an instrumental role



The event, hosted by Dhofar University (DU), featured a distinguished assembly of academics and industry experts

in supporting and mentoring the teams, helping to shape the collaborative and competitive atmosphere. The university’s contributions were not limited to logistical support; its students also excelled in the competition.

The ‘23 Irth al Dahariz’ team from the College of Engineering took first place in the Dhofar Governor’s Office Challenge. This team, comprised of Lina Mujahid, Abdullah bin Ahmed Bait Othman, Nour el Din Mamdouh,

Ahmed bin Khalid Bamkhalef, and Hassan Jamal Ali, emerged victorious after tackling complex engineering problems. Meanwhile, the “Ma’een” team, which included Amin bin Ahmed al Maashani, graduate Ali bin Ahmed al Mujibi and Shihab bin Ahmed al Jabri, secured third place overall. DU academics played pivotal roles as mentors, including Dr Lamia Mostafa from the College of Engineering and Nasser Tabouk from the College of Arts and Applied Sciences, providing guidance and expertise to

participating teams. By focusing on fostering technological innovation, this hackathon underscores the importance of such events in preparing students and academics to lead in the rapidly evolving tech landscape. “Events like the OQ Hackathon serve as crucial platforms for developing future talent and encouraging collaborative problem-solving, thus contributing significantly to the governorate’s broader technological advancement,” said a participant.



UN says tens of thousands flee Lebanon strikes

GENEVA: Tens of thousands of people have fled their homes in Lebanon as Israeli strikes pummelled the country, the UN said on Tuesday, calling events “extremely alarming”.
“We are gravely concerned about the serious escalation in the attacks that we saw yesterday,” UN refugee agency spokesman Matthew Saltmarsh told reporters in Geneva. “Tens of thousands of people were forced from their homes yesterday and overnight, and the numbers continue to grow,” he said.
Israeli air strikes killed at least 558 people on Monday, including 50 children and 94 women, according to Lebanon’s health ministry. At least four healthcare workers were killed and 16 paramedics injured, the World Health Organization said.
Lebanese Hezbollah and Israel have been locked in near-daily cross-border exchanges of fire since October 7. Monday’s bombardment of Lebanon was by far the largest since 2006.
Several UN agencies said they were ramping up their aid in Lebanon to address a situation that was already dire before the



A residential building hit by an Israeli strike in the Ghobeiri area of Beirut’s southern suburbs. — AFP

escalation.
“This is a region that has already been devastated by war and a country that knows suffering all too well,” Saltmarsh said. He pointed out that even before the air strikes, there had been

significant displacement from southern Lebanon. “The situation is extremely alarming. It is very chaotic,” he said. “The toll on civilians is unacceptable.”
Monday’s attacks came after an Israeli strike on southern

Beirut on Friday killed dozens, including two senior Hezbollah commanders. Days earlier, coordinated communications device blasts that Hezbollah blamed on Israel killed 39 people and wounded almost 3,000.

Since last week, nearly 6,400 people had been injured in Lebanon, according to the WHO. “The hospitals have been crazy challenged in managing the number of injuries since last week,” WHO’s representative in

Several UN agencies said they were ramping up their aid in Lebanon to address a situation that was already dire before the escalation
Lebanon, Abdinasir Abubakar, told reporters. He said more than 90 per cent of the wounds suffered last week when pagers exploded across Lebanon “are on the face and limbs, especially hands”.
“Many people had both eye and hand injuries, which required two different sets of operations,” he said. “This is not normal,” insisted Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the UN rights office. “When you have people losing their eyes and when you have hospitals not able to cope with the amount of amputations that they need to carry out ... (it) is extremely abnormal.”
She said the rights office was “extremely alarmed by the sharp escalation of hostilities”, calling on “all parties to immediately cease the violence and to ensure the protection of civilians”. The UN children’s agency decried the impact on young people in Lebanon. — AFP

Sri Lanka’s new leader appoints govt cabinet

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka’s new president appointed his cabinet on Tuesday ahead of an expected snap parliamentary election as he prepares to renegotiate the bankrupt island nation’s International Monetary Fund bailout programme.
Dissanayake of the People’s Liberation Front (JVP) was sworn into office on Monday after a landslide win in weekend presidential polls. His once-marginal party currently has just three lawmakers in Sri Lanka’s 225-member parliament. But support for the 55-year-old surged after a 2022 economic meltdown that immiserated millions of ordinary Sri Lankans and the painful implementation of the IMF rescue plan. On Tuesday, his office announced the appointment of lawmaker Harini Amarasuriya, 54, as premier with the additional portfolios of justice, education, health and labour.
The sociology lecturer, who was first elected to parliament four years ago, is known for her activism on gender equality and minority rights issues.
She and the remaining two JVP-aligned lawmakers will share all ministerial responsibilities between them, and also act



A supporter of Sri Lanka’s newly elected President Anura Kumara Dissanayake waves the country’s national flag, in Colombo. — AFP

as caretaker ministers after parliament is dissolved.
“We will have the smallest cabinet in the history of Sri Lanka,” party member Namal Karunaratne told reporters on Tuesday. “Parliament dissolution will happen thereafter.”
Sri Lanka’s crisis proved an opportunity for Dissanayake, who saw his popularity rise after pledging to change the island’s “corrupt” political culture. He beat 38 other candidates to win Saturday’s presidential vote, taking more than 1.2 million more votes than his nearest rival. His predecessor Ranil Wickremesinghe, who had imposed steep tax hikes and other unpopular austerity measures under the terms of the \$2.9 billion IMF bailout, came a distant third.— AFP

PM Kishida vows to defend Japan airspace after Russian ‘violation’

TOKYO: Prime Minister Fumio Kishida vowed to “resolutely defend Japan’s territory” as Tokyo lodged a protest with Moscow after a Russian patrol plane entered its airspace.
The military responded by scrambling fighter jets and issuing radio and flare warnings, Defence Minister Minoru Kihara told reporters, calling it the first confirmed incursion since 2019.
“We confirmed today that a Russian Il-38 patrol aircraft has violated our airspace over our territorial waters north of Rebun Island, Hokkaido, on three occasions,” Kihara said. “Today we lodged a very serious protest with the Russian government via diplomatic channels and strongly urged them to prevent a recurrence.”
Kishida, speaking to Japanese media in New York, called the incident “extremely regrettable”. “We will resolutely defend Japan’s territory, territorial waters and airspace,” the prime minister said.
Japan has supported the Western position on Ukraine, providing Kyiv with financial and material support and sanctioning Russian individuals



Prime Minister of Japan Fumio Kishida speaks during the high-level meeting at UN headquarters in New York City. — AFP

and organisations after Moscow’s war of its neighbour.
Kishida met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Monday on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Zelensky thanked Kishida for his support since Russia’s war and conferred upon him a top Ukrainian order of merit, Japan’s foreign ministry said. In 2023, an aircraft believed but not confirmed to be Russian entered Japanese airspace. Kihara said the new incident was “the

first publicly announced airspace incursion by a Russian aircraft since June 2019”, when a Tu-95 bomber entered Japanese airspace in southern Okinawa and around the Izu Islands south of Tokyo.
Earlier this month, Japan had to scramble fighter jets when Russian aircraft flew around the archipelago for the first time since 2019. The Tu-142 planes did not enter Japanese airspace but flew over an area subject to a territorial dispute between

The military responded by scrambling fighter jets and issuing radio and flare warnings, calling it the first confirmed incursion since 2019
Japan and Russia, Tokyo said. Russian and Chinese warships recently held joint drills in the Sea of Japan, part of a major naval exercise that Russian President Vladimir Putin said was the largest of its kind for three decades.
Japan scrambled fighter jets in August after the first confirmed incursion by a Chinese military aircraft into its airspace, with Tokyo calling it a “serious violation” of its sovereignty. Then last week, a Chinese aircraft carrier sailed between two Japanese islands. Japan called that incident “totally unacceptable from the perspective of the security environment of Japan and the region.” — AFP

SHORT TAKES

SINGAPORE

Singapore ex-minister convicted in rare graft trial

A Singaporean former minister was convicted on Tuesday of obstruction of justice and accepting illegal gifts, the public prosecutor said, in the city-state’s first political graft trial for nearly half a century.
Ex-transport minister S. Iswaran was earlier this year hit with 35 charges mostly related to graft in a nation often cited as one of the world’s least corrupt.
“S. Iswaran pleaded guilty to and was convicted... of four charges for obtaining gifts from



two local businessmen. He also pleaded guilty to and was convicted of one charge for obstruction of justice,” the attorney general’s office said on Tuesday. — AFP

HANOI

3 killed, thousands evacuated in Vietnam floods

Serious flooding in central Vietnam has killed three people and forced more than 10,000 residents to evacuate their homes. Yagi floodwaters began to recede in the north, central Vietnam was last week struck by another severe storm which brought heavy rain and sent river levels dangerously high.
Officials in Thanh Hoa province said that over the past three days more than 11,700 people had left their homes for higher ground. Since Saturday, around



320 houses have been damaged while more than 6,300 hectares of crops were destroyed with at least 40 school buildings in the area were flooded or damaged. — AFP

BAMAKO

Mali junta chief reviews strategy after massacre

Mali’s junta chief met top military officials to “adjust strategy”, the presidency said on Tuesday, after audacious attacks in the capital killed scores of people. Meeting “provided an opportunity for an exhaustive review of security arrangements, a reassessment of the threat and the provision of additional guidelines”, the presidency said.
In his first speech since the attacks, Mali’s military leader Colonel Assimi Goita on Saturday paid tribute to the victims and



reiterated “the imperative need to remain vigilant and maintain an exemplary operational stance in all circumstances”. Experts say the twin attacks dealt a forceful blow to the junta. — AFP



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In brief

ROME



ITALY OPENS WAY FOR REFERENDUM ON EASING CITIZENSHIP

Pro-migrant groups and opposition parties have collected enough signatures to trigger a referendum on easing Italy's stringent citizenship laws for foreigners, government data showed on Tuesday. The promoters of the cause want to reduce to five years from 10 the period of residence required to apply for citizenship by naturalisation, and to allow beneficiaries to pass on their new nationality immediately to their children.

The referendum request must now be reviewed by both the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court. If, as expected, it overcomes these hurdles. — Reuters

QUITO



DAMS IN ECUADOR OFFLINE UNTIL WATER LEVELS RECOVER

Three hydroelectric dams in Ecuador have ceased operating due to low water levels amid the country's worst drought in over 60 years, Energy Minister Antonio Goncalves said on Tuesday. The dams, known collectively as the Paute Integral, include the major Mazar power plant. "The strategy now is to conserve Mazar for as long as possible to buy us time so that everything starts arriving," he said, referring to generators and other measures.

On Monday, authorities said power cuts nationwide would run for up to 12 hours a day. Goncalves had said dry season in Ecuador had started two months early. — Reuters

PRAGUE



CZECH PM TO DISMISS PARTY JUNIOR CHIEF FROM CABINET

Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said he would propose to the president the dismissal of Development Minister Ivan Bartos, a surprising step that may weaken the centre-right coalition. Fiala said the dismissal of Bartos, the outgoing head of a junior ruling party, was due to problems in digitalising the state system of issuing building permits. President Petr Pavel will officially need to fire Bartos.

The planned dismissal, which Fiala said would take effect as of September 30, came after Bartos said he would resign as chief of the Pirate party after their poor showing in regional elections over the weekend. — Reuters

Russian forces storm east Ukrainian town

MOSCOW: Russian forces have begun storming the eastern Ukrainian town of Vuhledar, a stronghold that has resisted Russian attack since the beginning of the 2022 war, according to Russian war bloggers and state media.

Russian forces in eastern Ukraine advanced at their fastest rate in two years in August, according to multiple open source maps, even though a Ukrainian incursion into Russia's Kursk region sought to force Moscow to divert troops.

President Vladimir Putin has said Russia's primary tactical goal is currently to take the whole of the Donbas region in south-eastern Ukraine. Russia controls just under a fifth of Ukraine, including about 80 per cent of the Donbas.

Russian forces have been pushing westwards at key points along some 150 km of the front in the Donetsk region, with the logistics hub of Pokrovsk a key target. They captured nearby Ukrainsk on Sept. 17 and were now entering the hilltop town of Vuhledar, about 80 km (50 miles) south of Pokrovsk.

"Russian units have entered Vuhledar - the storm of the town has begun," said Yuri Podolyaka, a Ukrainian-born, pro-Russian



Firefighters and rescuers work at the site of an apartment building hit by a Russian air strike, in Kharkiv. — Reuters

Russian forces have been pushing westwards at key points along some 150 km of the front in the Donetsk region, with the logistics hub of Pokrovsk

military blogger. Multiple pro-Russian war bloggers confirmed the attack.

Russia's defence ministry said its forces had defeated Ukrainian units at a series of settlements

including Vuhledar, which Russians call Ugledar, and that the Eastern Grouping of Russian forces had improved their tactical positions. It gave no further details on Vuhledar.

Unverified video on Russian state media showed Vuhledar, which had a population of over 14,000 before the war, under heavy artillery and aerial bombardment. Vuhledar's military administration did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Andriy Kovalenko,

head of the Ukrainian Security Council's Centre for Countering Disinformation, said Russia's use of guided aerial bombs had helped it to advance in the area.

"(Vuhledar) used to be easy to defend, it is on high ground. But with the active arrival of guided aerial bombs at the front, the enemy managed to destroy it and move to the flank," Kovalenko said. "Guided aerial bombs and aviation are the only things that allow the enemy infantry to move."

Meanwhile, Russia hit a high-rise apartment block in Ukraine's northeastern city of Kharkiv during an attack with guided bombs on Tuesday, killing at least three people and injuring 22 more, with others feared trapped under rubble, local authorities said.

"Russia is terrorising the Kharkiv region with impunity... A direct strike on a residential building," Ukraine's ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets said on the Telegram messenger. — Reuters

France's interior minister vows immigration curbs

PARIS: France is likely to see much tougher immigration and security measures to reflect a broad rightward shift in society, its new interior minister said in remarks hinting at the minority government's dependence on the tacit support of the far right.

Bruno Retailleau's calls for a harsher line on asylum claims, violence against police, prison sentences, and drug trafficking underline the sway of Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) on the newly installed government.

After a June election in which President Emmanuel Macron's centrist government suffered heavy losses, the ascendant RN gained kingmaker status, signalling tacit support for Michel Barnier's new coalition

between centrists and conservatives.

But the RN reserved the right to withdraw its backing for Barnier's government if its concerns over immigration, security and other issues were not addressed.

Retailleau, 63, a veteran of the mainstream conservative Republicans (LR) party and a longtime sceptic of

immigration, gave few details of his vision for the powerful interior ministry during Barnier's first cabinet meeting on Monday.

But he has since been more explicit in a series of press interviews, telling Le Figaro daily that he would unveil new measures within weeks, and that France "must not refrain from strengthening our legislative arsenal".

"My objective is to put a stop to illegal entries and to increase exits, particularly for illegal immigrants, because one should not stay in France when one has broken in," he was quoted as saying by Le Figaro. "I will have the opportunity, in the coming weeks, to make specific proposals," he said, while also leaving open the possibility of using decrees.

Echoing comments by RN officials, Retailleau told CNews on Tuesday that France and other like-minded European nations should join forces to compel the European Union to toughen its immigration laws.

He said neighbouring Germany's decision to impose temporary border checks, suspending decades of largely free movement within the EU's Schengen travel zone, underscored how European views on immigration were shifting rightward.

Speaking to TF1 television, Retailleau said he would summon prefects - regional representatives of the interior ministry - from the 10 regions with the highest immigration numbers to tell them "to expel more, to regularise less".

— Reuters

Tropical storm John hits Mexico's coast

MEXICO CITY: A tropical storm slammed into Mexico's southern Pacific coast as a major hurricane weakened on Tuesday, but forecasters warned of strong rains and flash floods inundating the coast for the next few days.

"Slow-moving John will bring very heavy rainfall to coastal portions of southwest Mexico through the upcoming week," the US-based National Hurricane Center (NHC) said. "This heavy rainfall will likely cause significant and possibly catastrophic, life-threatening flash flooding and mudslides" in the southern states of Chiapas, Oaxaca and Guerrero.

Authorities had warned residents to seek shelter as strong winds and rain battered beaches ahead of John making landfall near Marquelia in Guerrero.

The NHC said maximum sustained winds weakened to around 110 kilometres per hour, according to an 0900 GMT update.

A tropical storm warning was in effect from east of Acapulco to Lagunas de Chacahua on the Pacific coast, it added. "Additional rapid weakening is anticipated, and John is expected to become a tropical depression later today," the NHC said.

Through Thursday, John

was forecast to produce up to 15 inches of rain in parts of Chiapas, and nearly double that in areas of Oaxaca and Guerrero, it said.

"John is producing extraordinary rains greater than 250 mm in Oaxaca and Guerrero; torrential rains in Chiapas," the National Civil Protection agency said in a post on X early Tuesday.

The agency had issued a red alert on Monday, telling people to stay indoors and keep away from windows.

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador also warned people living along the affected coastline to be prepared. "Seek higher ground, protect yourselves and do not forget that the most important thing is life; material things are replaceable," he wrote on X.

Authorities in Oaxaca said Monday that they were opening temporary shelters, suspending school classes, closing beaches and mobilising machinery.

School classes in Guerrero were also cancelled on Tuesday. The international airport in the tourist resort of Puerto Escondido suspended all flights. In Guerrero, authorities said around 300 temporary shelters were ready if needed.

— AFP



The Salina Cruz Port is seen closed ahead of the arrival of Hurricane John in Salina Cruz, Oaxaca State, Mexico. — AFP



Newly-appointed French Minister of the Interior Bruno Retailleau (R) holds a press conference during a visit of a Police station in La Courneuve. — AFP

The responsibility of being a good ancestor



Rumaitha Al Busaidi

The writer is an Omani climate change activist, women's rights activist, radio presenter, marine scientist, entrepreneur and a footballer

As someone deeply entrenched in the world of investments, I've spent a considerable part of my career focusing on economic growth and how the returns will help us in our world today. Yet, I've often found myself grappling with a profound question: Are we being good ancestors? In our relentless pursuit of progress, we tend to overlook the most important stakeholders we serve — future generations who are not yet born and have no voice in the decisions we make today.

Recent global events, particularly those unfolding at the United Nations General Assembly's Summit of the Future, have intensified this introspection. The summit was a pivotal moment for global leaders serving as a global mirror, that revealed the collective state of our world and the urgent need to recalibrate our priorities to safeguard the well-being of those who will inherit it long after we are gone.

One of the most significant developments was the adoption of the Pact for the Future, which includes the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations. These documents symbolise a collective commitment to tackle challenges that transcend national

borders- issues that demand unified global action rather than isolated efforts.

The Declaration on Future Generations struck a particularly resonant chord with me. It emphasises intergenerational solidarity and calls for inclusive governance and sustainable development. The proposal to appoint a Special Envoy for Future Generations is a ground-breaking step toward ensuring that the interests of the unborn are considered in today's policy-making processes. It is a formal acknowledgment that our actions today have far-reaching consequences, and we must be accountable to those who will walk this earth after us.

In the realm of technology, the Global Digital Compact seeks to harness the benefits of digital advancements while mitigating their risks. It underscores the importance of human oversight in emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, emphasising that such tools should enhance human capabilities without compromising our values or security. The compact also addresses the pressing issue of the digital divide, particularly the barriers women and girls face in accessing technology. By advocating for gender equality in the digital sphere, it aims to create a

ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS WAS THE ADOPTION OF THE PACT FOR THE FUTURE, WHICH INCLUDES THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT AND THE DECLARATION ON FUTURE GENERATIONS

more inclusive technological landscape that benefits all of humanity.

The summit also highlighted the indispensable role of youth as agents of positive change. Investing in young people, especially those in vulnerable situations, is not just a moral imperative but a strategic necessity for sustainable peace and development. Equitable access to education, healthcare, and opportunities empowers the next generation to tackle the challenges we bequeath to them. This aligns closely with my ongoing efforts to empower young individuals, particularly women, through initiatives that provide education and workforce opportunities.

However, the path forward is fraught with challenges. The discussions around international peace and security were particularly contentious, reflecting the complex geopolitical tensions of our time. A last-minute amendment proposed by Russia threatened to derail consensus but was overwhelmingly dismissed. This incident underscores both the difficulties and the possibilities inherent in international cooperation. It serves as a stark reminder that while progress is possible, it requires persistent effort and a willingness to navigate the intricate web of global politics.

Belgian climate scientists grow pears of future

KATE ABNETT AND BART BIESEMANS

In the Belgian province of Limburg, one of the orchards in the country's pear-growing heartland stands out as unusual: a cluster of 12 transparent domes, perched high by a mirrored wall above the surrounding nature park.

Inside the domes, researchers are growing pears in a controlled environment that simulates how climate change will affect the region in 2040. Their aim is to see what global warming has in store for Europe's fruit growers.

"We expect more heatwaves and less even precipitation, so more droughts and floods as well. And overall, slightly higher temperatures," Francois Rineau, associate professor at the University of Hasselt, said of the simulated climate inside the domes.

Early results from the scientists' first harvest in 2023 suggest Belgian pears may be spared some of the worst impacts of climate change — which scientists expect to cut some crop yields and hike growers' costs for irrigation to combat drought.

"The effect of climate change at the 2040 horizon on the quality of pears was very minor. However, we found a difference in how the ecosystem was functioning," Rineau said, noting that an earlier growing season in the 2040 simulation appeared to result in the ecosystem absorbing more CO2.

Year-to-year variability means that one year alone cannot capture intermittent extreme weather and other changes in the climate which can wreak havoc on crops. The three-year experiment will cover three harvests.

This year's harvest of 2040-era pears is being studied at the Flanders Centre of Postharvest Technology (VCBT), to check the fruits' size, firmness and sugar content — and compare them to pears grown in domes simulating today's climate.

"If we have a higher temperature on the trees, pears tend to be less firm and have more sugar," VCBT researcher Dorien Vanhees said.

That's bad news for growers. Less-firm fruit survives a shorter period in storage, reducing the quantity of pears growers can sell.

Floods, hail and drought have already affected European pear growers in recent years, as climate change begins to leave fingerprints on growing patterns.

Belgium's pear production is expected to plunge by 27 per cent this year, according to the World Apple and Pear Association, owing to factors including an unusually early bloom and unusually late frost. — Reuters



Aurelia End

The writer is White House correspondent for AFP



Danny Kemp

The writer is White House correspondent for AFP

Biden bids farewell with UN speech

Behind the smiles, as Joe Biden bids farewell to world leaders at the UN General Assembly this week, will be one goal — shoring up his legacy against a possible White House comeback by Donald Trump.

Countries around the world are nervously watching November's US presidential election amid fears that a Trump victory over Kamala Harris would bring back his hardline, isolationist foreign policy.

And as Biden makes his final appearance at the UN General Assembly in New York, after dropping out of the race in July and endorsing his vice president as the Democratic nominee, the 81-year-old is not taking any chances.

Viewing his presidency as a return from the brink after Republican Trump's four years in the Oval Office, Biden will be trying to make sure his achievements are, in the words of one adviser, "irreversible."

From his keynote address to the United Nations and a major climate speech on Tuesday, to talks on the wars in Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan, Biden will be trying to lay the ground for US alliances and leadership that could outlast Trump.

"When President Biden came to office nearly four years ago he pledged to restore American leadership on the world stage," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters travelling with him to New York.

Biden would now use his UN address to outline his "vision" for how that should continue — and to "reaffirm how this approach has produced results for the American people and for the world," she added.

His UN swan song is part of a wider attempt to burnish his legacy at home and abroad after a one-term presidency cut short when a disastrous debate against Trump fuelled concerns about his age.

In an emotional moment on Sunday, on the eve of the assembly, former president Bill Clinton presented Biden with the "Clinton Global Citizen Award" at a surprise ceremony in New York.

Biden held a cabinet meeting last week to urge a "sprint to the finish"



US President Joe Biden accepts the Clinton Global Citizen Award during the Clinton Global Initiative annual meeting in New York on Tuesday. — AFP

FROM HIS KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE UN AND A MAJOR CLIMATE SPEECH, TO TALKS ON THE WARS IN GAZA, UKRAINE AND SUDAN, BIDEN WILL BE TRYING TO LAY THE GROUND FOR US ALLIANCES AND LEADERSHIP THAT COULD OUTLAST TRUMP

to promote his policies — and to give any reflected glory to Harris in an agonizingly close election.

His director of communications Ben LaBolt said in a memo to White House staff that the administration should "put a stake in the ground for the future" — and, in a clear swipe at Trump, spoke of how Biden had restored "decency and dignity to the White House."

With an eye on the history books, Biden is seeking to put his stamp on policy across the board.

On international alliances — where Trump threatened to drop Western allies if they did not spend more money on defence and held summits with Russia's Vladimir Putin and North Korea's Kim Jong-un — Biden hosted the leaders of Japan, India and Australia for a

Saturday. On climate — where Trump pulled the United States out of the Paris accords — Biden wanted to build an "irreversible momentum behind climate action," his National Climate Adviser Ali Zaidi said on Monday.

And on Ukraine — where Trump praised Putin and has been distinctly cool in supporting Kyiv — Biden is hosting a farewell meeting with President Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House on Thursday to discuss more US support.

"The fact that we do have Gaza, the fact that we do have Ukraine and Sudan issues in our world, just underscores the need for that kind of cooperation," a senior US official told reporters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Yet the greatest prize of all — the Gaza ceasefire that Biden set his sights on before he leaves office in January 2025 — seems further away than ever.

Instead, the situation in the Middle East is becoming ever more dangerous, with the UN General Assembly likely to be dominated by recent Israeli attacks on Hezbollah strongholds in Lebanon which have killed at least 500 people.

Biden "will address the Middle East, especially this very difficult year that we have all gone through" in his speech, the senior US official said.

Daily food is still a dream for many!

For millions in the world today, eating the minimum amount of food every day is a dream! Several of them have already joined the ranks of that chronically undernourished group.

According to the 2024 edition of the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report published by five UN agencies, between 713 and 757 million people, corresponding to 8.9 and 9.4 per cent of the global population, respectively, may have faced hunger in 2023.

In the foreword note of the report, the heads of the five agencies warn that those years after the world leaders committed to end hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition, the world is still off the track to achieve this objective.

“Despite some progress, an alarming number of people continue to face food insecurity and malnutrition as global hunger levels plateau for three consecutive years, with approximately 152 million more hungry people than 733 million in 2019,” the report says.

According to the report, in 2023, an estimated 2.33 billion people, equalling 28.9 per cent of the global population, were moderately or severely food insecure.

This means they did not have regular access to adequate food for the entire day or more at times.

Adult obesity has registered a steady increase over the last decade, from 12.1 per cent in 2012 to 15.8 per cent in 2022. Projections indicate that by 2030, the world will have more than 1.2 billion obese adults.

Though hunger affects everyone in the world, children and women are the worst hit of this food crisis that is mainly driven by armed conflicts. We know that when children do not get enough food, their brains and bodies suffer badly.

It finally stops them from growing and learning and prevents them from reaching their full potential.

“We must urgently step up financing to end child malnutrition.



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyyp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

ARMED CONFLICTS NOT ONLY DISRUPT INCOME SOURCES, BUT ALSO HINDER FOOD ACCESS DUE TO MARKET INTERRUPTIONS, LEADING TO PRICE SPIKES AND FOOD SHORTAGES

The world can and must do it. It is not only a moral imperative but also a sound investment in the future,” Catherine Russell, Executive Director, Unicef, one of the agencies of the report, wrote in the forward.

Globally, one in four children under the age of five suffers from undernutrition, which can lead to long-term damage. Malnourished children are up to 12 times more likely to die than a healthy child.

Since the end of 2019, a devastating combination of factors, including the global pandemic, armed geopolitical conflicts, climate extremes and economic shocks like soaring food prices, have together driven the food crisis to unprecedented proportions in the world.

History shows that conflict always played in tandem with the history of hunger in many parts of the world.

Conflict not only disrupts income sources, but also hinders food access due to market disruptions, leading to price spikes and food shortages.

Hunger hotspots include Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Yemen and Ukraine.

Look at the war-hit Gaza Strip of Palestine where the UN’s Integrated Food Security Phase Classification system projected in June this year that a high risk of famine will persist as long as conflict continues.

The hunger system report found that 96 per cent of the population, equivalent to 2.15 million people, face acute food insecurity, with 495,000 individuals experiencing catastrophic levels of food insecurity through September 2024. Famine is the most severe form of food insecurity!

The gravity of the situation is a reminder of the urgent need to make sure food and other supplies reach all people in Gaza.

As Matthew Hollingworth, World Food Programme Country Director for Palestine, pointed out, “Famine is a reality. It’s all manmade. It’s shocking to see how this devastating situation has gotten so quickly.”

SYMBOLISING GAZA KIDS!



Artist Bachir Mohamad looks on as he displays for sale teddy bears, symbolising Gazan children who lost their lives since October 7, 2023, at an exhibition organised by Qatar Charity, with proceeds donated to the people of Gaza in an act of solidarity, in Doha, Qatar, on Tuesday. – Reuters

The case for a global climate assembly

It has been nearly ten years since countries came together in Paris and agreed finally to get serious about averting a climate disaster. But while there is an emerging consensus on the structural economic reforms needed to transform sectors such as energy, transportation and agriculture, the necessary investments are not being made fast enough.

Instead, our governance systems are struggling to muster an adequate response to what is an increasingly obvious and severe climate and ecological crisis. Although many governments have proposed robust climate measures, these often trigger a social backlash, because they are perceived as unjust and inequitable. Many see policies that pit the old against the young, the city against the country, or the Global North against the Global South. Such controversies are tailor-made for social media, where they ripen and then rot in a hothouse of misinformation, incendiary rhetoric and polarisation.

Although the argument for the necessity of major reform has been won, the argument for how to do it fairly has not. This challenge will become only more difficult the deeper we get into the net-zero transition. Most people care deeply about addressing the climate crisis: in a survey conducted across 18 G20 countries, 71 per cent of respondents agreed that major action is needed



Laurence Tubiana

The writer is a former French ambassador to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, is CEO of the European Climate Foundation and a professor at Sciences Po, Paris



Ana Toni

The writer is National Secretary for Climate Change at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change of Brazil

immediately to reduce carbon emissions. But trust in government action is lacking, with only 39 per cent believing that their own government will act effectively.

One way to address this gap is to allow citizens participation in the elaboration and implementation of climate policies and measures designed by governments. Instead of having climate policies imposed by technocrats from above, governments should embrace approaches that combine “top-down” with “bottom-up” methods, with the latter bringing together ordinary people who are tasked with shaping a shared vision of the future.

Successful examples of those participatory methods already exist. Citizens’ assemblies in France are decision-making bodies composed of randomly selected, demographically representative individuals who deliberate on a specific issue of public concern and provide policy recommendations.

In addition to fostering consensus on divisive topics, citizens’ assemblies educate the public about complex policy issues and give citizens a direct role in decisions that affect their lives. These elements are especially important for issues like the net-zero transition, which entails

major economic changes that can leave communities feeling divided. Unlike politicians, assembly members make decisions free from electoral pressures and lobbying. Notable examples include Ireland’s assemblies on marriage equality and abortion, which led to national referenda and breakthrough legislation; and France’s climate assembly, which helped shape its most ambitious climate bill to date.

Brazil’s long standing participatory approach to policymaking has also proved successful. For example, its Climate Plan is being developed through a governance structure that includes several ministries of the federal government together with representatives from the

scientific community, subnational governments, the private sector, and civil society.

Moreover, a climate participatory platform (involving both digital and in-person exchanges) has been launched to invite all Brazilian citizens to propose solutions. The National Environmental Conference and the National Social and Economic Development Council, by prioritising the Climate Plan, have further contributed to strengthening this bottom-up process.

Such methods can steer climate policy proposals away from sources of polarisation, and towards opportunities for collaboration and deliberation. Among G20 countries, 62 per cent

of people favour using citizens’ assemblies for decision-making, and that number has risen above 70 per cent in countries like Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa, and to over 80 per cent in Kenya. More than 170 citizens’ assemblies have been held in more than 30 countries, each with the goal of accelerating climate action in ways that support a fair and just transition for all.

Drawing on the model of the World Social Forum, what we need now is a Global Social-Climate Forum, or a Global Citizens’ Assembly for People and Planet, to bring citizens together from every country, not just to chart a collective path forward, but to reimagine our politics and encourage a global ethical stock-take. This would be an opportunity for humanity to come together, to understand each other’s aspirations and anxieties, and to co-create a green transition that benefits everyone. Rather than leaving anyone behind, we can forge a new social contract rooted in solidarity, equity and fairness.

In 2015, France and Peru established a new mechanism, the Action Agenda, because they recognised that the scale of change needed to tackle the climate crisis requires more than just government action.

@Project Syndicate, 2024



Most people care deeply about addressing the climate crisis.

SPORTS

DAVIS CUP TEAM



Jannik Sinner, Olympic ambassador for the Milano-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, poses for a picture with the mascots of the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games. — Reuters

NADAL, ALCARAZ AND SINNER IN FINALS TEAMS

BARCELONA: Spain named 22-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz in a five-man Davis Cup team on Monday, while Italian world number one Jannik Sinner will also compete in the final eight in Malaga.

Nadal, 38, pulled out of the US Open and Laver Cup in recent months and has only taken part in one of the last seven Grand Slams because of injury and fitness struggles.

French Open and Wimbledon winner Alcaraz will be Spain's key figure as they bid to win the competition dubbed the World Cup of tennis for the first time since 2019, starting with a clash against the Netherlands.

Alcaraz inspired Team Europe to Laver Cup victory over Team World last weekend in Berlin.

US Open and Australian Open champion Sinner is part of Italy's squad for the finals, which start on November 19.

The 23-year-old was crucial as Italy triumphed last year, beating Serbian superstar Novak Djokovic twice in one day, first in singles and then in doubles, in the semifinals.

Italy, who face Argentina in their quarterfinal clash, beat Australia in the 2023 final to win the competition for the first time since 1976. — AFP

TEENAGER SHANG CHINA'S SECOND WINNER IN HISTORY

CHENGDU, China: Teenager Shang Juncheng became only the second player from China to win an ATP Tour singles title when he beat Lorenzo Musetti at the Chengdu Open final on Tuesday.

Shang, 19, defeated the Wimbledon semifinalist from Italy 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 to thrill the home crowd and join Wu Yibing as the only winners on the ATP Tour from China.

Wu triumphed at Dallas last year.

Shang's victory over the top seed and Paris Olympics bronze medallist makes him the first player born in 2005 or later to win an ATP Tour title. "I'm really delighted to have lifted the trophy here in front of my home crowd," said Shang, who is ranked 55 in the world.

"While I felt some pressure to perform, the crowd really encouraged and supported me to play my best tennis throughout the week.

"It's been amazing."

There was to be no repeat for China however at the Hangzhou Open final, where home hope Zhang Zhizhen went down 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/5) to Croatia's Marin Cilic. It was Cilic's first ATP Tour triumph since 2021. — AFP



China's Shang Juncheng plays a return against Italy's Lorenzo Musetti in the final match. — AFP



McLaren's British driver Lando Norris celebrates winning on the podium after the Formula One Singapore Grand Prix night race at the Marina Bay Street Circuit in Singapore. — AFP

Swearing, shoeys and swift legs: Talking points at Singapore GP

MCLAREN'S Lando Norris won the Singapore Grand Prix to close the gap on Max Verstappen in the Formula One world championship. The Englishman took the chequered flag more than 20 seconds ahead of Verstappen after the only safety-car-free race ever on the notoriously difficult Marina Bay Street Circuit.

Three talking points to emerge from Sunday's night race:

Verstappen 'pushing FIA limits'

Three-time world champion Verstappen appears to be on a collision course with F1's governing body, the FIA, after his extraordinary behaviour in prickly press conferences.

First, the Red Bull driver used an inappropriate word in a live broadcast of the pre-race drivers' session with the media on Thursday, despite an FIA directive for drivers to cut out foul language. After being slapped with what amounts to an F1 "community service order", the Dutchman then staged a protest by restricting his answers in the official FIA media conferences after Saturday's qualifying and Sunday's race.

"It's very easy to get a fine... so I prefer then not to speak a lot," said the 26-year-old.

He opted to talk to reporters outside the official interview room, labelling the FIA's stance "silly" and threatening that the row could hasten his exit from Formula One.

Former world champion Nico Rosberg, in Singapore as a TV pundit, warned that

Verstappen was "pushing the limits" of the FIA's patience.

"Max is really going for it now, not even speaking in the FIA press conference," Rosberg said on Sky Sports F1.

"You're contractually obliged to answer the questions. It's a fine line. He's pushing the limits there."

Most drivers are on Verstappen's side and with four weeks until the next race in Austin, there is time for everyone to calm down.

"It'll be interesting to watch that play out," said Rosberg.

RICCIARDO 'AT PEACE

Daniel Ricciardo may well have raced for the final time on Sunday, finishing 18th but managing to set the fastest lap in the last hurrah of 13 years on the Formula One grid.

His contract with RB expires after Singapore, with all indications that the 35-year-old is to be replaced by Liam Lawson for the next race in the United States.

If, as expected, the curtain falls, Ricciardo walks away with 258 grands prix starts, 32 podiums and eight victories in a career that many drivers would covet.

The Australian is widely loved as one of the most affable drivers in the paddock, with an infectious smile and wicked sense of humour.

He brought Aussie "culture" to the podium in the form of the so-called "Shoey", which involves guzzling champagne from a sweaty, stinky racing boot.

The self-styled "honey badger" debuted in 2011 with the HRT team and also drove for Toro Rosso — which later became AlphaTauri and then RB — Red Bull, Renault and McLaren, scoring 1,329 points.

"I have to be prepared for this maybe being it," admitted the Australian after the race.

"Let's say I'm at peace with it."

LIZARD WINS SPRINT

The Marina Bay circuit not only cuts through the city centre but also across the paths of its numerous reptilian residents who inhabit Singapore's verdant waterfront.

The first sessions on Friday and Saturday take place just before sunset when Singapore's giant monitor lizards emerge from the heat of the day.

Max Verstappen was startled by one such "Godzilla" on the track in 2017 and a year ago Fernando Alonso accidentally hit and killed one in his Aston Martin.

On Saturday the Spaniard was on track again when another scaly resident decided to bask on the warm tarmac.

This time Alonso avoided a collision, prompting a red flag as the lizard showed little inclination to move.

When marshals confronted the reptile it took off like Usain Bolt with two tabard-adorned chasers in pursuit, to the amusement of everyone watching.

Suffice to say the lizard easily won the only sprint in Singapore race week and scuttled away to safety. — AFP

KEYROLE



Barcelona's Inaki Pena during the warm-up before the match. — Reuters

FLICK BACKS KEEPER PENA TO COVER FOR INJURED TER STEGEN

BARCELONA: Barcelona will be without injured goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen for months but coach Hansi Flick said on Tuesday that Inaki Pena was a capable replacement.

Germany international Ter Stegen underwent a successful operation on Monday after suffering a complete rupture of the patella tendon in his right knee.

The 32-year-old was injured in Barca's 5-1 LaLiga win at Villarreal on Sunday and is expected to be out for at least eight months, Spanish media reported.

"Inaki is doing very well, in pre-season too. He has worked very hard to be here. He is focused and ready to play," Flick told reporters ahead of Wednesday's home game with Getafe.

"We are confident but we also have to look at what we do because the players at the back are very young. For the moment, we don't feel under pressure and we trust in Inaki."

Having joined Barcelona's La Masia academy aged 13, the 25-year-old Pena has made 23 first-team appearances, conceding 39 goals and keeping five clean sheets.

"We will see what happens. We will talk to (Spain manager) Luis de la Fuente, who has coached world-class goalkeepers for many years. He will be the first person I will talk to," Flick added.

The Catalans were already without new signing Dani Olmo and fellow midfielders Gavi, Frenkie de Jong, Marc Bernal and Fermin Lopez plus defenders Ronald Araujo and Andreas Christensen.

Barca have made a perfect start to the season in LaLiga under Flick, with six straight wins putting them top of the table, four points ahead of champions Real Madrid in second.

But the former Bayern Munich boss is striving for more.

"We analysed the game against Villarreal and we saw a lot of things that can be improved. We haven't reached the end of the road. You can always do more. We are moving forward step by step," Flick added. — Reuters

Oman look to revive hopes against Sri Lanka

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

OMAN WILL aim to revive their hopes when they take on Sri Lanka on Wednesday in the third round of the Group E at the AFC U20 Asian Cup 2025 Qualifiers. In the same group, hosts Tajikistan will meet North Korea. Oman's match against Sri Lanka will start at 16:00 (Oman time) at the Republican Central Stadium in Dushanbe while the following game will be held at 19:00 (Oman time).

Oman suffered a 2-1 defeat against Malaysia in the opening match on last Saturday while Sri Lanka received a 4-0 defeat from North Korea on the same day. In the second round matches of the group, the hosts Tajikistan secured a 3-0 win over Sri Lanka and the clash between Malaysia and North Korea ended in a goalless draw. By the conclusion of second round matches, North Korea are leading the group standings by four points in goal difference to Malaysia who are placed in second position. The hosts Tajikistan are in third place with three points while Oman and Sri Lanka are at the group bottom with no points.

Oman boys led by national head coach Ahmed al Alawi are aiming to register victories in the forthcoming matches against Sri Lanka, North Korea and Tajikistan. The winning results will raise Oman's chances to secure a direct spot or at least to snatch a spot from the best five second placed teams. Among the total 10 groups, the top winners from each group and five best second-placed teams will advance to the finals as China will host the tournament from February 6-23, 2025.

The junior Red Warriors completed their readiness for Wednesday's clash and they will look to show a different performance that will ensure Oman's hopes are still alive in the qualifiers. The coaching staff worked very hard during the last couple of days, taking benefit of rest days during the second round games to focus on the areas that require to strengthen the defending and attacking lines. It is expected that the starting line-up will remain the same including some of the key players who are expected to join in Wednesday's game including Faisal al Hadidi, Yassar al Balushi, Muhannad al Saadi and others.



Oman Under 20 players during training at the Republican Central Stadium in Dushanbe.

Mehlah team launched in Al Sharqiyah as Oman's first touch rugby club

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

The Mehlah team was launched as the first club to introduce touch rugby in the Sultanate of Oman, in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, under the auspices of Shaikh Mohammed bin Salim al Maashani, Wali of Dima W'attayeen, and Abdullah al Humhami, a member of the Majlis Ash'shura in the wilayat, with the attendance of members of the Municipal Council and the Oman Rugby Associations.

Mohammed al Hashami, the national rugby team's president, welcomed the idea of launching the first rugby club in the Sultanate of Oman, expressing his great joy at this historic step. He said: "The establishment of the first touch rugby club is an important achievement for sports in Oman, and we are proud to see this development happening in our region. Rugby is a sport that needs more support and attention, and we hope this step will motivate other clubs in different governorates to adopt this game. Our vision is for rugby to become part of the recognised sports activities at the national level, and for us to see an Omani league with many teams regularly practicing this sport. We hope to see more clubs join this field, as rugby is not just a sport but a means of developing players' physical and tactical fitness."

For his part, the national team's coach, Brian Hopkins, expressed his great enthusiasm for forming the first touch rugby team in the Sultanate of Oman, stressing the importance of this step in spreading the game more widely.



For his part, the national team's coach, Brian Hopkins, expressed his great enthusiasm for forming the first touch rugby team in the Sultanate of Oman, stressing the importance of this step in spreading the game more widely. He said: "We are very happy to form the first official touch rugby team in Oman. This step marks the beginning of the game's wider spread, which

we have been aiming for some time. Sports, in general, require continuity and development, and rugby is no exception.

Our goal is to make it a popular sport starting with the younger age groups. Our focus now will be on schools and universities, as we believe these stages have the greatest impact on building a new generation of play-

ers. We are looking for talented players of all ages to be the core of the national team in the future."

At the end of the event, the national team's coach conducted a practical training session for the new team members at the club's headquarters, focusing on the basics of the game and the essential tactics the team needs for future success.

SPORTS/FOOTBALL



Manchester United’s Harry Maguire during training. — **REUTERS**



Tottenham Hotspur manager Ange Postecoglou reacts after the match. — **Reuters**



Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag during training. — **Reuters**



Manchester United’s Marcus Rashford and Harry Maguire Mount during training. — **Reuters**

MANCHESTER UNITED and Tottenham kick off their Europa League campaigns this week, hoping to put disappointing starts to the Premier League season behind them.

Erik ten Hag’s United have failed to show any real improvement from a miserable season last term, sitting outside the top 10 already domestically with just seven points from five matches.

The Dutch manager narrowly clung on to his job despite leading the Old Trafford giants to their worst-ever Premier League finish of eighth last term, largely thanks to a surprise FA Cup final victory over Manchester City.

United spent heavily in the

transfer market, but the expected upturn in fortunes on the pitch are yet to materialise ahead of their Europa League opener at home to Twente on Wednesday.

A goalless draw at Crystal Palace last weekend snuffed out some of the positivity garnered from the 3-0 win over Southampton and League Cup thrashing of Barnsley, but Ten Hag insists his team are progressing.

“The performance is good, but we are not happy with the score. We are disappointed with the score, it’s clear,” he said after the stalemate at Selhurst Park.

“But I know one thing for sure in football, it’s a long way to go and when you play in the quality we now deliver the points will come,

MAN UTD, SPURS EYE RESPITE FROM DOMESTIC WOES IN EUROPA LEAGUE

the goals will come.

“Now we can work on the team, we can build structures, we can also bring out some consistency in selection, and that helps, of course, to bring the patterns and routines in, and then you play better.”

Man United are back in the revamped Europa League after a disastrous Champions League performance last season that saw the three-time European champions finish bottom of their group.

Anything other than a victory against Dutch club Twente, back in the competition proper for the first time since 2012, in the first of their eight league-phase matches would pile the pressure on Ten Hag and his players.

SPURS SEEK SOLACE

Discontent has also started to grow among Tottenham fans for the first time since their blistering start to life under Ange Postecoglou 12 months ago.

A 3-1 victory over Brentford at the weekend at least helped them bounce back from successive Premier League defeats at the hands of Newcastle and local rivals Arsenal.

But Spurs will be desperate to end their 17-year wait for a major trophy and will see the new Europa League, which will not feature any teams dropping down from the Champions League like in previous seasons, as a golden

opportunity.

They host Azeri club Qarabag on Thursday.

“I keep saying to people, ‘Show me a success story and I’ll show you a struggle’. People forget the struggle and look at the end bit,” Postecoglou said last week.

Elsewhere, crisis-hit Roma welcome Athletic Bilbao to the Stadio Olimpico, hoping to continue their strong recent form in Europe.

The Serie A club have reached at least the Europa League semifinals in three of the past four seasons — the exception their 2022 Conference League triumph under Jose Mourinho.

However, Roma supporters were left furious by the sacking of coach Daniele De Rossi, venting their fury at management and players they consider responsible during Sunday’s win over Udinese.

The anger at De Rossi’s dismissal has been such that CEO Lina Souleoukou, who was previously CEO of Olympiakos, as “evil”.

Other Europa League fixtures include 2022 winners Eintracht Frankfurt hosting Viktoria Plzen, while four-time European champions Ajax take on Besiktas in Amsterdam. — **AFP**

BUSINESS

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TRADE UPDATE

OMAN-SAUDI TRADE SURPASSES RO 1 BILLION IN H1 2024



Mineral products topped Oman’s exports to Saudi Arabia, valued at RO 160.547 million.

MUSCAT: Trade between Oman and Saudi Arabia reached over RO 1.014 billion by the end of June 2024, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Mineral products topped Oman’s exports to Saudi Arabia, valued at RO 160.547 million, followed by metals (RO 95.036 million), machinery and electrical equipment (RO 33.592 million), and live animals (RO 23.816 million). On the import side, mineral products led with RO 284.941 million, followed by chemical industry products (RO 137.967 million), and food, beverages and tobacco products (RO 38.882 million).

Re-export items were dominated by vehicles and transport equipment (RO 11.279 million).

The Rub al Khali port played a key role, with imports reaching RO 159.678 million by June 2024, up from RO 118.724 million a year earlier. Direct Saudi investments in Oman rose to RO 121.1 million, a 50.2 per cent increase since 2021, while Omani investments in Saudi Arabia stood at RO 129.1 million by the end of 2022.

Saudi Arabia remains a significant tourism partner, with 87,710 Saudi visitors to Oman by August 2024. The number of Saudis residing in Oman was 1,517 by June 2024, including 341 Saudi students in Omani government schools and 103 in higher education institutions. — ONA

SMEs in Oman reach over 141,000 by June-end

MUSCAT: The small and medium enterprise (SME) sector in Oman continues to grow, with the number of SMEs registered with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development reaching 141,126 by the end of June 2024.

The latest Entrepreneurial Indicators Bulletin shows that of these, over 120,000 are small enterprises, about 19,000 are micro-enterprises, and more than 1,100 are medium enterprises, highlighting the increasing entrepreneurial activity in Oman.

Supporting this growth, the government has launched several initiatives, including the Entrepreneurship Card, which provides SMEs access to benefits and services from both government and private sectors.

By mid-2024, more than 28,000 SMEs had an active Entrepreneurship Card, with over 10,388 new cards issued in the first half of the year. These cards offer privileges like training, financing, and priority in public contracts, helping SMEs overcome market challenges and promote sustainable business practices.

Oman’s network of business incubators also plays a critical role in fostering new ventures. With 18 incubators operating across the Sultanate of Oman, they currently support 85 enterprises, creating 198 job opportunities for Omani youth and generating revenues of over RO 800,000 in the first half of 2024.

The incubators provide a supportive environment that includes technical support, legal and financial advice, and assistance in



Oman’s network of business incubators also plays a critical role in fostering new ventures.

Highlights

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marketing, helping entrepreneurs turn innovative ideas into successful businesses.

The Authority’s land usufruct programme has further boosted industrial SMEs by providing access to land at nominal fees, with exemptions for the first two years.

In the first half of 2024, 44 land approvals were granted through the Tatweer platform, enabling SMEs to set up operations with reduced costs.

This programme is designed to localise industries and create a supportive ecosystem across various governorates.

The Entrepreneur Readiness Programme is another key initiative aimed at enhancing the skills of Omani entrepreneurs. From January to June 2024, 830 beneficiaries participated in the programme, which offers training in areas such as financial management, marketing, and crisis management.

Since its inception, the programme has trained 3,555 participants, providing them with the tools to navigate the business world effectively.

Additionally, the Authority’s consulting services have been instrumental in addressing the challenges faced by SMEs. In the first half of 2024, 2,336 SME owners benefited from legal, marketing, and financial advice designed to enhance business capabilities.

Financial support has also been crucial, with the Authority approving 312 financing requests through the (Azm) lending portfolio, totalling over RO 30.7 million by mid-2024. — ONA

International firms ink pact to explore Oman’s natural hydrogen potential

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

EUROPE’S LEADING natural hydrogen company Helios Aragon together with Singapore-based multinational energy firm Rex International Holding have announced the signing of a joint partnership to explore natural hydrogen in the Sultanate of Oman.

The initiative – the latest in a succession of nascent studies – underscore Oman’s significance as a potential powerhouse of natural hydrogen. Also known as geologic hydrogen (and even gold or white hydrogen), natural hydrogen is produced when water reacts with iron-rich rocks deep in the Earth’s crust.

In Oman, peridotite rocks found in the Samail Ophiolite are thought to be an abundant source of natural hydrogen, often found seeping through springs and water pools.

A Joint Study Agreement signed



Natural hydrogen bubbling up from springs in peridotite rich rocks in the Samail Ophiolite in Oman.

by Rex International and the co-founders of Helios Aragon is aimed at unlocking Oman’s promising natural hydrogen potential to complement other low- and zero-carbon hydrogen fuels, colour-coded as Green and Blue mainly.

Rex International, an oil exploration and production (E&P) company listed on the Singapore Exchange Securities bourse, already has a long-standing presence in Oman’s upstream hydrocarbon sector.

It has a majority interest in Masirah Oil Limited (MOL), the owner and operator of the offshore Block 50 – currently the only producing block off the country’s east coast.

Spanish-based Helios Aragon is the operator of the Monzon Natural Hydrogen Project in Spain, the first such development in Europe. Discovered in the 1960s, the field of pure hydrogen at a depth of 3,500m in a good quality sandstone reservoir overlain by a thick salt section.

Exploration activities are also underway in Poland and the UK by the Helios group of companies.

Helios Aragon says the Oman initiative is aimed at growing a quality global portfolio of natural hydrogen and helium projects.

“Oman is widely regarded as one of the more prospective countries for the near-term discovery of commercial quantities of natural hydrogen. The geology is considered optimal for large-scale hydrogen generation, which is evidenced by the multiple surface seeps, some of which are almost pure hydrogen,” commented Ian Munro, CEO of Helios Aragon, in a statement.

“We plan to leverage exploration learnings from Spain and elsewhere in Europe together with Rex’s local operational expertise to develop a thorough understanding of the hydrogen play system in Oman. The goal is to produce the cleanest and lowest cost hydrogen, which can enhance energy security and sup-

port the transition to a lower carbon future,” he added. John d’Abo, Executive Chairman of Rex, stated, “The Rex Group has been operating in Oman for a decade now, and the prospect of delving into a new form of energy in a geographical area that we are familiar with, is an exciting one.

The joint study will allow us to evaluate further if there are synergies to be reaped and for Rex to contribute towards action against climate change in the future.”

Other international players are also seeking to unlock Oman’s natural hydrogen potential. In September 2023, US geotechnical firm Eden GeoPower signed an agreement with Ministry of Energy and Minerals to study natural (geologic) hydrogen at peridotite-rich sites in the country.

GeoPower went on to secure funding assistance from the US Department of Energy (DOE) to help advance the initiative in the Samail Ophiolite.

BUSINESS/ADVERTORIAL

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MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman’s best bank, today brings its customers Apple Pay, a safer, more secure and private way to pay that helps customers avoid handing their payment card to someone else, touching physical buttons or exchanging cash — and uses the power of iPhone to protect every transaction.

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Apple Pay is accepted in grocery stores, pharmacies, restaurants, coffee shops, retail stores, and many more places.

Customers can also use Apple Pay on iPhone, iPad, and Mac to make faster and more convenient purchases in apps or on the web in Safari without having to create accounts or repeatedly type in shipping and billing information.

Highlights

Customers simply double-click the side button and hold their iPhone or Apple Watch near a payment terminal to make a contactless payment. Every Apple Pay purchase is secure because it is authenticated with Face ID, Touch ID, or device passcode, as well as a one-time unique dynamic security code

Apple Pay makes it easier to pay for food and grocery deliveries, online shopping, transportation, and parking, among other things. Apple Pay can also be used to make payments in apps on Apple Watch.

Security and privacy are at the core of Apple Pay. When customers use a credit or debit card with Apple Pay, the actual card numbers are not stored on the device, nor on Apple servers.

Instead, a unique Device Account Number is assigned, encrypted, and securely stored in the Secure Element, an industry-standard, certified chip designed to store the payment information safely on the device.

Apple Pay is easy to set up. On iPhone, simply open the Wallet app, tap +, and follow the steps to add Sohar International’s credit, debit or prepaid cards.

Once a customer adds a card to iPhone, Apple Watch, iPad, and Mac, they can start using Apple Pay on that device right away. Customers will continue to receive all of the rewards and benefits offered by Sohar International’s cards.

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cityscapes with unmatched luxury offered by Lexus’ crossover SUV, the NX. Boasting world-class comfort and sublime details, this Lexus offers unprecedented experiences. Upgrade your lifestyle this season and take control of the roads.

At first look, donning the F sport badge, the Lexus NX features a gorgeous subtle chrome-plated exterior with bold contours and Lexus’ hallmark spindle grille. Enhancing the outer appearance, the front design features 3-eye LED headlights incorporating Lexus’ first slim Adaptive High-beam System (AHS). The L-shaped daytime running lights feature a fade-in function when the driver activates the indicators.

Under the hood, the NX is equipped with two powertrain options. The 4-cylinder, 2.4 L turbocharged engine produces 275 hp and 430 nm torque and is mated to a new 8-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission (8AT).

Experience the thrilling new hybrid-electric trim consisting of a 2.5-litre petrol engine and two electric motors producing 240 hp.

The hybrid-electric system is also mated to a Direct Shift Continuously Variable



At first look, donning the F sport badge, the Lexus NX features a gorgeous subtle chrome-plated exterior with bold contours and Lexus’ hallmark spindle grille

Transmission (CVT).

Based on the Tazuna concept for the driver’s cockpit, the NX is a perfect blend of tradition and modernity. Gain intuitive control of your journey with Lexus’ ‘hands on the wheel, eyes on the road’ philosophy.

Feel welcomed inside with the crisp 14-inch touchscreen multimedia system that is compatible with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, a 7-inch colour multi-information display (MID), a wireless charging system for smartphones and adjust the inside temperature with Climate Concierge to experience a smooth ride.

For an added experience, the NX also offers SmartAccess with a push-button start, a 10-speaker premium surround sound system, a panoramic roof and a power

tailgate option for easy luggage storage.

Safety is Lexus’ top priority, thanks to the innovative Lexus Safety System+, the advanced technologies give drivers immense control over various aspects of driving.

The system includes a new Pre-Collision System (PCS) with an expanded detection range, Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB), Emergency Steering Assist (ESA), and Daytime Pedestrian Detection (DPD), the new Dynamic Radar Cruise Control (DRCC) and the Curve Speed Reduction (CSR).

Drivers also benefit from Lane Tracing Alert (LTA), Lane Departure Alert (LDA), Advanced Driver Assistance (ADAS), and Adaptive High-beam System (AHB) among others.

‘TEA & TILES’ BRINGS TOGETHER INTERIOR DESIGNERS, CONTRACTORS

MUSCAT: On Wednesday, September 18, Blue Starz Enterprises SPC hosted the highly anticipated ‘Tea & Tiles’ event at the RAK Ceramics showroom in Mabellah, Muscat.

The evening gathered an exclusive group of 40-50 interior designers, architects and contractors for a memorable experience filled with insightful conversations, industry knowledge exchange, and valuable networking opportunities.

The event offered guests a unique chance to explore RAK Ceramics’ wide range of pre-



mium products, large formats slabs in particular, ideal for upcoming design projects.

Attendees were treated to an immersive experience that showcased the latest in ceramic tiles and sanitary ware solutions, further strengthening connections within Muscat’s design and contracting community.

In addition to the product showcase, a real-time printing photo booth captured and eternalised the evening’s best moments, while the refreshment station delighted guests

with a selection of delectable snacks.

Special appreciation goes to 11:11 Café, located in Qurum, for sponsoring the event’s hot and cold beverages, providing exceptional tea and coffee to keep the conversations flowing.

The ‘Tea & Tiles’ event was a success, offering a blend of inspiration, education, and collaboration for all attendees, solidifying RAK Ceramics and Blue Starz Enterprises SPC as key partners in Oman’s design and construction landscape.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds launches gold chains & bangles

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 355 showrooms across 13 countries, have unveiled a range of gold chains & bangles with making charges starting from 2.5%, guaranteeing customers of the lowest making charges on their favourite jewellery.

Available across all Malabar Gold & Diamonds showrooms in Oman, the selected range of designs is guaranteed with the lowest making charges & comes with the assurance of the Malabar Promise, which includes 100% value on gold exchange, Assured lifetime maintenance, Guaranteed buyback, responsible sourcing, complete transparency and more.

“At Malabar Gold & Diamonds, we are committed to offering our customers high-quality craftsmanship at the best possible value.

Price-conscious buyers make up a significant portion of our customer base and by launching collections

Highlights

With making charges starting at

2.5%, we are proud to offer a unique opportunity for customers to indulge in their favourite designs without compromising on quality or price



that offer the most value for money while also being superior in design and craftsmanship, we are reiterating our position as a jeweller for everyone.

With making charges starting at 2.5%, we are proud to offer a unique opportunity for customers to indulge in their favourite designs

without compromising on quality or price”, commented Shamlal Ahamed, MD-International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

With festive season around the corner, Malabar Gold & Diamonds has made waves in the market with their 10% advance facility, offering customers the opportunity to leverage the increase gold rates to make incredible savings.

With the offer, customers can block the gold rate till October 29 by paying just 10% as an advance. If gold rate increases at the time of purchase, customers can avail the blocked rate and if it reduces, they can still draw mileage of the reduced rate.

Customers can also avail a complimentary diamond voucher for first advance bookings made on or before October 10, 024. The offer will be valid across all Malabar Gold & Diamonds showrooms.

Oman targets 5.5% loan allocation for SMEs

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

OMAN Vision 2040's September report emphasises the financial sector development initiatives aimed at achieving a target of 5.5 per cent for the proportion of loans to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) from the total banking loan portfolio by 2025.

This initiative focuses on providing diverse financing options for SMEs, which are crucial for driving economic growth. Currently, the programme is actively working on implementing numerous initiatives in collaboration with relevant entities to enhance the financial landscape for these businesses.

Among the key initiatives is the enhancement of the role of the Development Bank in financing SMEs, which aims to empower these enterprises with greater access to funding.

Additionally, the initiative involves the development of a financial sufficiency system that enables financial institutions to offer various financing tools tailored to targeted groups based on their creditworthiness.

Furthermore, establishing a venture capital fund with contributions from banks is being prioritised to support various segments of the SME sector. Efforts are also underway to create a market maker and liquidity provider, alongside the establishment of a market for promising companies on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

This will facilitate the listing of companies on the capital market, providing them with vital financial resources.

The establishment of the National Financial Sustainability Programme and the Financial Sector Development Programme, named Sustainability, is a continuation of the national programme's efforts to achieve financial balance, named Balance, with the goal of transitioning from financial balance to achieving financial sustainability.

The Sustainability programme works on two main tracks to be a key enabler for investment and economic growth: the track of completing general financial sustainability initiatives and the track of developing the financial sector.



Under the new initiative, banks are mandated to allocate up to 5.5 per cent of their total loan portfolio to Omani SMEs.

This initiative focuses on providing diverse financing options for SMEs, which are crucial for driving economic growth. Currently, the programme is actively working on implementing numerous initiatives in collaboration with relevant entities to enhance the financial landscape for these businesses.

Regarding the financial sustainability track, many efforts have been made, and a set of initiatives have been implemented by the Sustainability programme, including enhancing the efficiency of development spending, preparing and applying a government service pricing guide, restructuring the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, unified strategic government procurement, and implementing a social protection system.

Additionally, the initiative aims to redirect subsidies for electricity and water to target households with a monthly income below RO 1,250.

In addition, the initiative aims to develop the local debt instruments market, establish a national financial technology incubator and prepare a sustainable sovereign financing framework.

Collectively, these measures seek to bolster the financial sector and ensure that SMEs have the necessary resources to thrive and contribute to the economy.

The results achieved in the financial sector development pathway include the launch of the financial sector development plan, the signing of a memorandum of cooperation with the British Embassy to study the idea of establishing a Growth Fund for Omani Assets with the participation of several commercial banks operating in the Sultanate of Oman, and the preparation of the preliminary draft of the Bankruptcy Law along

with its executive regulations as a systematic regulatory framework for cases of individual insolvency.

There is also centralised supervision over initiatives related to the sustainable green financing ecosystem.

Financial sustainability is considered one of the national priorities that the government seeks to achieve to reach financial stability, ensuring economic stability and sustainable growth.

Financial sustainability in the Sultanate of Oman aims to manage financial resources efficiently and effectively to achieve a balance between revenues and public spending, reduce reliance on oil resources through economic diversification, enhance investment, improve the efficiency of government spending and manage public debt.

The efforts of the national programme for financial balance have resulted in improved financial indicators, as the ratio of public debt to gross domestic product (GDP) decreased from 62.3 per cent in 2021 to 35 per cent in mid-2024.

The surplus/deficit indicator improved from a deficit of 3.5 per cent in 2021 to surpluses of 2.7 per cent and 2.2 per cent for 2022 and 2023, respectively. The programme's efforts to enhance spending efficiency have improved the indicator of government spending to gross domestic product according to the targets of Oman Vision 2040.

QUICK TAKES

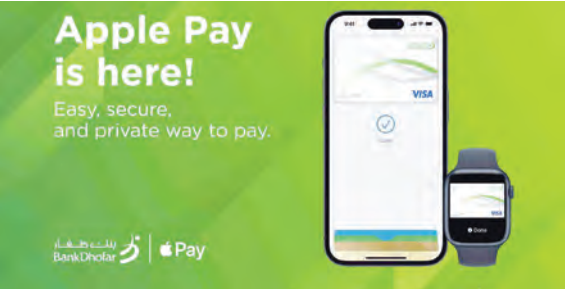


OQEP LAUNCHES IPO ROADSHOW ACROSS OMAN

MUSCAT: OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP), in collaboration with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, is hosting a series of nine introductory meetings on its upcoming share subscription, which will run until October 7. The company plans to offer up to 25 per cent of its shares, inviting investors, citizens and residents to learn about the subscription process and the targeted investor groups.

The roadshow begins today in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate (Sept 25), with subsequent meetings in Al Batinah North (Sept 26), Dhofar (Sept 29), Al Dhahirah (Sept 30), Al Dakhiliyah (Oct 1), Al Sharqiyah South (Oct 2), Al Rustaq (Oct 3), Khasab (Oct 6) and Muscat (Oct 7). These sessions aim to engage and inform potential investors across the Sultanate of Oman.

BANKDHOFAR BRINGS APPLE PAY TO CUSTOMERS



MUSCAT: BankDhofar launched Apple Pay, a safer, more secure and private way to pay that helps customers avoid handing their payment card to someone else, touching physical buttons or exchanging cash — and uses the power of iPhone to protect every transaction.

Customers simply hold their iPhone or Apple Watch near a payment terminal to make a contactless payment. Every Apple Pay purchase is secure because it is authenticated with Face ID, Touch ID, or device passcode, as well as a one-time unique dynamic security code. Apple Pay is accepted in grocery stores, pharmacies, restaurants, coffee shops, retail stores and many more places.

Customers can also use Apple Pay on iPhone, iPad, and Mac to make faster and more convenient purchases in apps or on the web in Safari without having to create accounts or repeatedly type in shipping and billing information.

Apple Pay makes it easier to pay for food and grocery deliveries, online shopping, transportation, and parking, among other things. Apple Pay can also be used to make payments in apps on Apple Watch.

SOHAR Port invites investors for petrochemical bunkering terminal

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

SOHAR PORT and Freezone is seeking experienced investors for an upcoming petrochemical bunkering terminal project, reflecting its continued commitment to expanding Oman's role in the global logistics and petrochemical sectors.

As a key player in international trade, SOHAR Port and Freezone offers strategic access to markets across the Middle East, Europe, Asia and Africa, making it an attractive investment destination.

The new bunkering terminal aims to enhance SOHAR Port's service offerings, providing specialised fuel supplies for ships transporting petrochemical products, which is essential for supporting maritime operations and ensuring efficient trade flows.

A petrochemical bunkering terminal is a specialised facility that supplies fuel specifically tailored

for vessels carrying petrochemical cargoes.

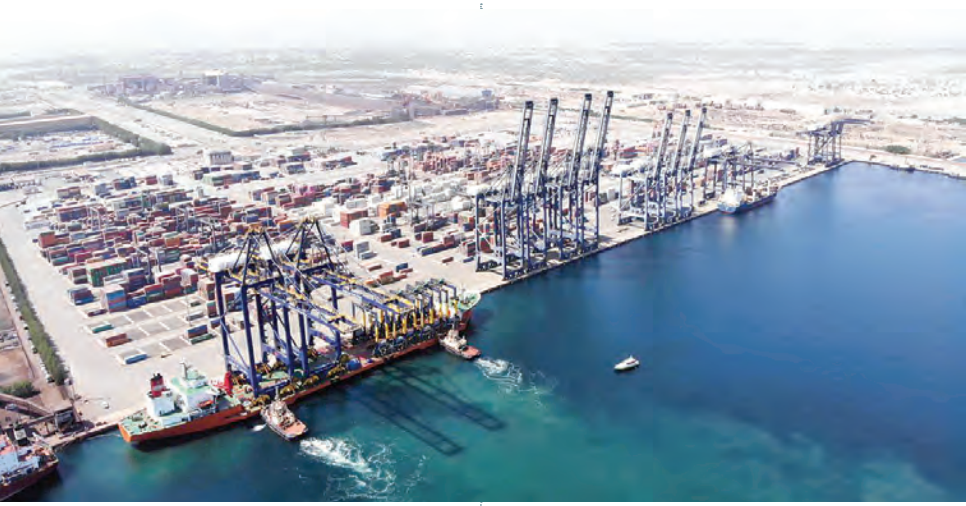
Unlike conventional bunkering, which provides general fuel for ships, petrochemical bunkering caters to the specific requirements of the petrochemical shipping industry, enhancing operational safety and efficiency.

This new terminal at SOHAR Port will not only meet the rising demand for such specialised services, but also further establish the port as a critical logistics hub in the region.

SOHAR Port and Freezone's call for investment represents a significant opportunity for qualified entities to participate in this strategic development.

Interested companies must comply with a series of steps outlined by the port's management.

Initially, companies are required to send an official letter to the Procurement and Contracts Department at SOHAR Port and Freezone, indicating their interest in participating in the investment



SOHAR Port and Freezone offers strategic access to markets across the Middle East, Europe, Asia and Africa, making it an attractive investment destination.

opportunity.

Upon receiving the letter, the department will send a standard Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) to the interested parties, which must be signed and returned within two working days.

Once the NDA is completed,

companies will be granted access to investment opportunity documents, which include a brief overview of the project and a summary of its technical requirements. At this stage, companies are expected to submit non-binding technical proposals by October 15, 2024,

without including financial proposals.

As one of Oman's most prominent logistics and industrial hubs, SOHAR Port and Freezone continues to attract global investments through its state-of-the-art facilities and strategic initiatives.

Jointly developed by the Sultanate of Oman and the Port of Rotterdam, SOHAR Port benefits from world-class operational standards and a deep-water port capable of accommodating large vessels.

Its ongoing expansion, including the introduction of the petrochemical bunkering terminal, aligns with the port's broader vision to enhance its service capabilities, making it a competitive player in the international maritime market.

For further inquiries about the investment process, SOHAR Port and Freezone has provided an official contact point via e-mail at sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com.

OPINION

UK right to reject UK-EU youth’s mobility scheme



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The author is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

WHILE prime minister Keir Starmer is keen on improved relations with the European Union – after Brexit – “on a number of fronts, including the economy, defence, exchanges, but we do not have plans for a youth mobility scheme”, he said during his recent visit to Germany.

Youth mobility schemes are common across the world with countries providing a streamlined approach for young people to travel overseas for a strictly limited time and purpose. They are essentially ‘backpacker visas’, wit the young person getting to move to a foreign country to do some casual work or study providing they don’t get into trouble, cost the host government anything or over-stay their welcome.

The scheme are typically on the basis of mutual recognition, giving young people from both countries the same rights. Britain currently has such a scheme with several countries, most notably Anglophone countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, plus long-standing Asian allies including Japan and South Korea.

Following Britain leaving the EU and the end of free movement, there had been interest from some European countries in securing similar arrangements. This would have allowed Britain to pick and choose the countries that it wished to work with and risked

looking like the richer EU member states were collaborating with British attempts to discriminate against countries less affluent.

So, the European Commission suggested that it would deal with negotiations with Britain over a youth mobility scheme instead of leaving it to the member states.

It should be noted that this is unusual, given each individual member state is responsible for non-EU immigration into their own country, and even close trading partners of the EU such as Canada technically have individual arrangements with each member state.

However, it is understandable why EU want one negotiation rather than from 26 member states. But the terms that the European Commission is asking for, which go far beyond what youth mobility scheme typically cover, are not reasonable.

Not only do they want the visas to last for four years, whereas for most countries Britain offers a maximum two years. It also wants Britain to waive the healthcare surcharge, and for people travelling on the visa to have the same access to public-funded higher education courses as local residents.

This would break the clear principle that such schemes do not entitle the recipient of the visa to access public funds during their stay. This principle is so important that Brit-

Highlights

Youth mobility schemes are common across the world with countries providing a streamlined approach for young people to travel overseas for a strictly limited time and purpose

ain currently requires people to have over £2,000 in savings before they can enter the country to prove they can support themselves.

And given the high tuition fees Britain charges compared to other countries, and the much greater demand for British higher education compared to European universities, it is a clear attempt to resume a one-sided subsidy.

And above all, the Commission would also want people travelling to be able to bring family members with them and for Britain to charge EU citizens less for the visas than it does those of other countries.

This would not be considered a youth mobility scheme by any account. Its terms are totally different to what Britain has with other countries around the world and are also different from what European nations have with other non-EU nations.

It is simply an attempt to bring back freedom of movement somewhat sneakily in another way.

The Commission’s proposal, as it stood, for the UK-EU youth mobility would be hugely favourable and advantageous to the EU and it is of little surprise that the UK is unable to accept it despite the newly elected prime minister’s wishes for closer relations with the European Union.

MURDOCH’S UK PROPERTY BID MAY YET GET EVEN SWEETER

Rupert Murdoch is in a similar position to a London buyer trying to get on the housing ladder. The tycoon’s online property listing company REA Group on Monday outlined a third attempt to buy Rightmove valuing the UK’s largest online real estate listing portal at 6.1 billion pounds (\$8.1 billion).

As with property transactions in the UK capital, an offer can simultaneously be generous and not a done deal.

It’s hardly surprising Rightmove’s board have finally deigned to “carefully consider” REA’s latest bid which sports a premium over its undisturbed price of 39%. Other recent UK takeover targets like John Wood Group and Direct Line earlier this year saw their shares fall back to pre-bid levels after foreign buyers walked away.

On the face of it, Murdoch’s group is already offering a rich price: assuming a modest 10 million pounds in synergies, a 25% tax rate and that Rightmove makes 300 million pounds of operating profit in 2025 – as per LSEG-compiled analyst estimates - REA’s return on invested capital would be just 4%. Still, the latest offer, over half of which is shares, suggests a willingness from Murdoch to bust

through some assumed red lines to seize control of the key player in a much bigger market.

His News Corp which currently owns about 62% of REA and counts the latter as a big part of the group’s valuation, would be diluted to around 49%.

The rationale may be that the tycoon could regain control by repurchasing shares from UK institutional investors after a successful bid. More importantly,

the Rightmove board may also think REA has more scope to up the cash proportion of the deal from its current 44%. The latest bid would see the combined entity’s net debt rise to about 3.3 times their combined 2025 EBITDA, according to Breakingviews calculations based on LSEG estimates.

But REA expects to target a leverage ratio for the combined group of less than 3 times within 18 months after the deal is closed, and JPMorgan analysts expect that metric to fall below 2.5 times. Rightmove’s share price remains tangibly below the offer level.

But given REA’s paper has fallen 11% in value since the offer first emerged, Rightmove investors may still need convincing. And the example of fellow UK group Currys may provide encouragement for Rightmove’s board to play hardball: despite an aborted foreign bid earlier this year, its shares are well above what was offered. As with London property, Murdoch may just have to close his eyes and pay more. — **Reuters**



KEITH BRADSHER

The author is a business and economics reporter and the Beijing bureau chief of The New York Times.



A man fishes along the river, with mountains in North Korea visible in the background, in Hunchun, China. — **The New York Times**

CHINA has made several moves in recent months to advance its ambitious aim to become the trade and transportation hub of Asia.

To its west, China has agreed to build a rail line across Central Asia. Beijing also said it would help Vietnam plan three rail lines leading to the countries’ shared border. And China is trying to persuade Russia and North Korea to let it reopen a long-closed port on the Sea of Japan.

If successful, the plans would give China closer ties to the economies of Northeast and Southeast Asia, the Mideast and even the Arctic, the latest steps in its 11-year-old Belt and Road Initiative to create a more China-centred global order.

Each of the efforts, in varying ways, faces obstacles. The nation’s top leader, Xi Jinping, will need close cooperation from border countries, some of which are politically volatile, like Kyrgyzstan, or internationally isolated, like North Korea. Neighbouring countries that have long been wary of China, like Vietnam, will need to be reassured.

A similar venture, a 3-year-old rail line that China has forged into landlocked Laos in Southeast Asia, has been welcomed by some there for bringing an influx of Chinese mining investments and tourism to the country. But others have warned of Chinese domination of the Laotian economy.

“They ended up owning a lot of the land,

or at least using a lot of the land, and squeezing out some of the locals,” said Ja Ian Chong, a professor at the National University of Singapore.

The new initiatives would also be expensive, and China has begun emphasising smaller Belt and Road projects elsewhere. A central factor in the country’s moves is its geopolitical relationship with Russia, whose attack on Ukraine in 2022 has both helped and hurt China’s effort to build regional transport links.

Russia now depends on China for trucks, drones and other supplies for the war, and has become less of a counterweight to China in struggles for regional influence. As ties have warmed between the two countries, even including many joint military exercises lately in the Sea of Japan and elsewhere, Moscow has been giving more diplomatic support to Chinese projects, notably on the short Russian border with North Korea.

Yet the war in Ukraine has produced a severe labour shortage in Russia, drawing workers in from Central Asia.

Kyrgyzstan, in particular, has been left with too few skilled workers to construct the rail line that China wants to build across its mountains toward Afghanistan and Iran.

“The problem is not just having enough engineers and workers, but enough with the right technical training and background to stay and work in Kyrgyzstan,” said Niva Yau, a specialist on the country

at the Atlantic Council, a research group in Washington. But the collective scope of the projects shows how Xi is wielding infrastructure to cement China’s role as the trade and geopolitical centre of Asia

China agreed June 6 to a pact that gave it 51% ownership of the planned rail line, with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan splitting the rest.

But while Kyrgyzstan said construction would start in August, it has already been delayed.

The rail line would start in Kashgar, in an impoverished corner of China’s far western Xinjiang region. It would then traverse the nearly roadless mountains of southern Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan.

The line’s terminus in Uzbekistan, Samarkand, is the hub of a Soviet-era rail network that crosses Central Asia to link Russia to Afghanistan and Iran, and beyond Iran to Europe.

The planned line from Kashgar to Samarkand would give China easier access to Afghanistan and its copper and iron ore reserves. The line would also help China sell cars and other manufactured goods to Iran by rail in exchange for oil, which is shipped to China by sea.

China now consistently buys 90% or more of Iran’s oil exports each month, said Andon Pavlov, senior refining and oil products analyst at Kpler, a firm in Vienna that specialises in tracking Iran’s oil shipments. Most other nations refuse to buy Iranian oil because of international sanctions related to the country’s nuclear weapons programme, with the result that Iranian oil sells at a considerable discount to world prices. More than 2,000 miles away from the planned Central Asian rail line in Kyrgyzstan, three more rail lines are planned to extend from China’s southeastern border deep into Vietnam. They could also produce economic gains.

Multinational corporations and Chinese companies have shifted the final assembly of many products, including solar panels and smartphones, to Vietnam to bypass trade barriers against Chinese goods erected by the United States and other countries. But the chemicals, components and engineering for many of these products still come from China.

That has created demand for closer transportation links between China and Vietnam, beyond the highways and shipping lanes that already connect them. For now, China’s involvement in helping Vietnam construct its train lines is expected to be limited. In a joint statement after Vietnam’s new leader, To Lam, visited Beijing last month, the countries said China would assist in planning for the lines. — **The New York Times**

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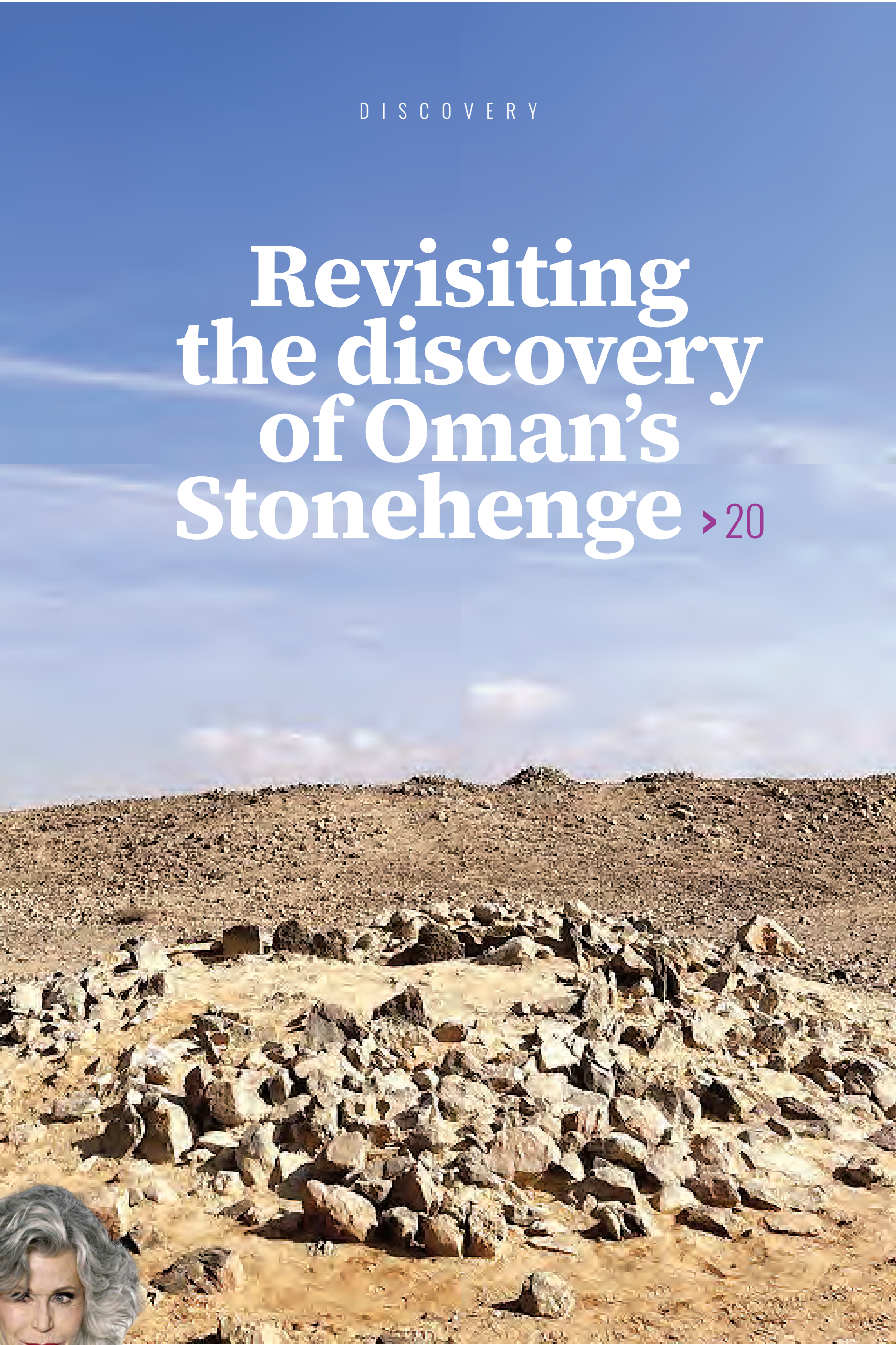
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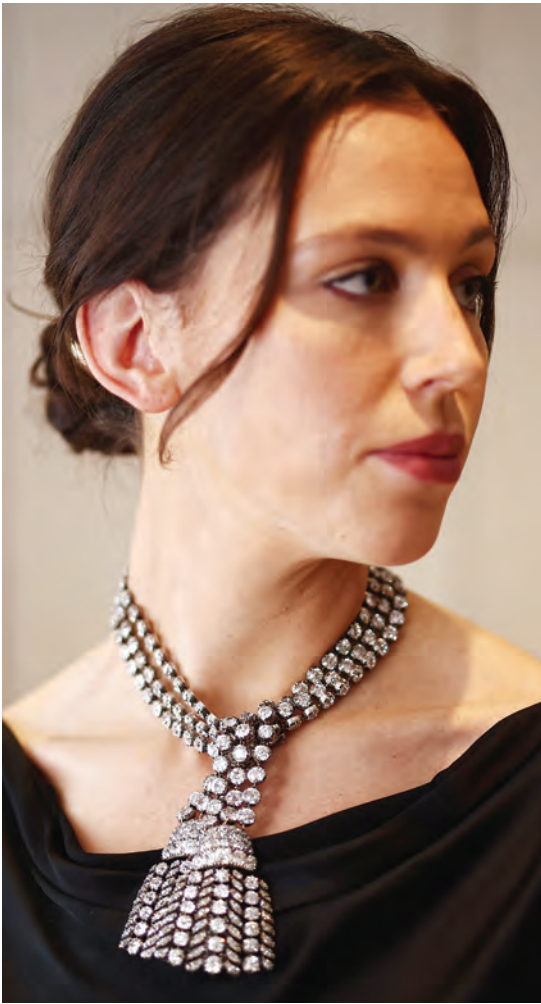
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Diamond necklace valued at up to \$2.8 million heads to auction

A rare diamond necklace with possible links to former French queen consort Marie Antoinette is to be auctioned in November with a price estimate of up to \$2.8 million.

The 18th century jewel, weighing 300 carats, was made in the decade before the 1789 French Revolution and was last seen in public in 1973 before being sold into a private collection.

Made up of three rows of diamonds with diamond tassels at each end, the piece went on public display for the first time in 50 years on Monday at Sotheby’s London showrooms.

“Diamonds were always repurposed and because the mines of Golconda in India went extinct at the end of the 18th century, most of the 18th century jewels, in order to keep with fashion, were broken up,” Andres White Correal, Chairman and Head of the Royal and Noble Sales at Sotheby’s for Europe and the Middle East, said.

“So to have an 18th century jewel intact of this magnitude, size and the importance of the diamonds, is exceptionally rare.”

It is thought some of its diamonds may have come from the infamous “Affair of the Diamond Necklace” piece that tarnished the reputation of Marie Antoinette, the unpopular last queen consort of France before the French Revolution.

The necklace did belong to the Marquesses of Anglesey, an Anglo-Welsh aristocratic family, with members wearing it to the coronations of King George VI in 1937 and Queen Elizabeth in 1953.

The necklace will be offered for sale at Sotheby’s “Royal & Noble Jewels” sale in Geneva on November 11. — Reuters

INDUSTRY HIGHLIGHTS

FASHION

US actress Jane Fonda presents a creation for L’Oreal Paris show “Walk Your Worth” as part of the Paris Fashion Week Women Ready-to-wear Spring-Summer 2025 collection at Palais Garnier (Opera national de Paris) opera house, in Paris. — AFP



CULTURE

An Iranian expert inspecting a stone at the ruins of ancient Persepolis, which served as the capital of the Achaemenid Persian Empire (550-330 BC), in southern Iran. — AFP



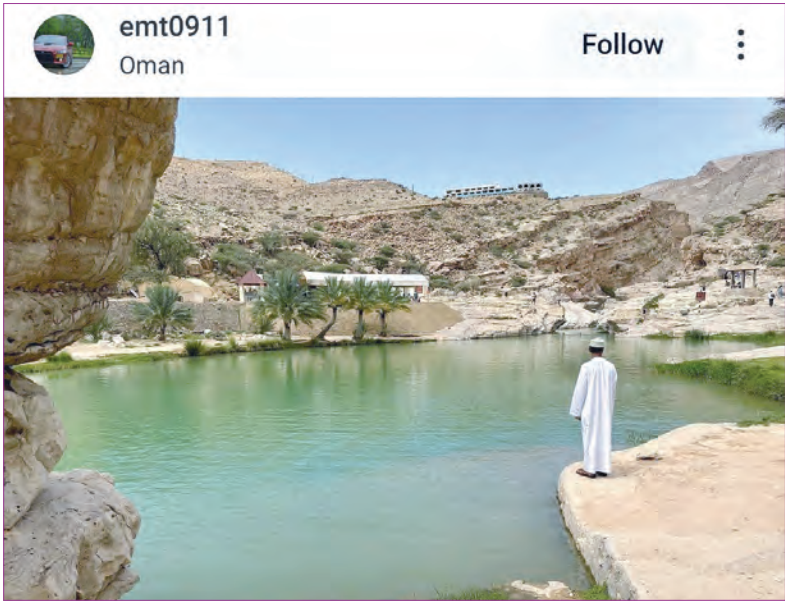
LIFESTYLE

Customers eat a meal as portrait paintings of Italy’s Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni adorn the walls of “Trattoria Meloni” restaurant in Shengjin, some 60 km northwest of Tirana, Albania. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



The Fields of Camels



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Italian designer Alberta Ferretti stepping down as creative director of her brand

Italian designer Alberta Ferretti is stepping down as creative director of her eponymous brand after 43 years, fashion group Aeffe said on Tuesday.

The new creative director for the Alberta Ferretti brand will be announced in the next few months, the group said, adding that Ferretti will retain her role as vice-president of Aeffe.

“I believe that at this point of my career it is a right and conscious choice to pave the way for a new creative chapter for the brand I founded and which will continue to bear my name,” Ferretti said in a statement.

The spring summer collection that the brand presented last week during the Milan fashion week was the last one carrying her signature.

In the first half of the year, the Alberta Ferretti brand accounted for roughly 7 per cent of total revenues of the group.

Aeffe, which also owns brands Philosophy di Lorenzo Serafini, Moschino and Pollini, is struggling to revive its sales and profitability.

The family-owned group posted a net loss of 20 million euros (\$22.27 million) in the first six months of the year and its revenues were down 15 per cent year-on-year.

“Aeffe will proceed with a careful and in-depth analysis of the roles and functions of the various departments, with the aim of internally reorganising its human resources in order to guarantee ever greater efficiency”, the group added.

Aeffe’s shares were up 3.4 per cent at 08:00 GMT. —Reuters

World’s oceans near critical acidification level: report

The world’s oceans are close to becoming too acidic to properly sustain marine life or help stabilise the climate, a new report said on Monday.

The report by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) details nine factors that are crucial for regulating the planet’s ability to sustain life.

In six of these areas, the safe limit has already been exceeded in recent years as a result of human activity. The crucial threshold for ocean acidification could soon become the seventh to be breached, according to the PIK’s first Planetary Health Check.

The safe boundaries that have already been crossed concern crucial — and related — factors including climate change; the loss of natural species, natural habitat and freshwater; and a rise in pollutants, including plastics and chemical fertilisers used in agri-

The only

ONE OF THE NINE

planetary boundaries that is not close to being crossed concerns the state of the planet’s protective ozone layer. Man-made chemicals have damaged this shield, causing

ACID RAIN,

but it has started recovering since a number of these chemicals were banned in 1987



culture.

The sustainable level of ocean acidification is now also set to be exceeded, largely as a result of ever-increasing emissions of carbon dioxide (CO2) created by burning fossil fuels like oil, coal and gas.

“As CO2 emissions increase, more of it dissolves in sea water... making the oceans more acidic,” Boris Sakschewski, one of the lead authors, told reporters.

“Even with rapid emission cuts, some level of continued acidification may be unavoidable due to the CO2 already emitted and the time it takes for the ocean system to respond,” he explained.

“Therefore, breaching the ocean acidification boundary appears inevitable within the coming years.”

TIPPING POINTS

Acidic water damages corals, shellfish and the phytoplankton that feeds a host of marine species.

This means it also disrupts food supplies for billions of people, as well as limiting the oceans’ capacity to absorb more CO2 and thus help limit global warming.

The only one of the nine planetary boundaries that is not close to being crossed concerns the state of the planet’s protective ozone layer.

Man-made chemicals have damaged this shield, causing acid rain, but it has started recovering since a number of these chemicals were banned in 1987.

A ninth threshold — concerning concentrations of minute particles in the atmosphere that can cause heart and lung diseases — is close to the danger limit.

But the researchers said the risk showed signs of receding slightly due to efforts by several countries to improve air quality, such as banning the most pollutant petrol and diesel cars.

They warned, however, that con-

centrations of fine particles could still soar in countries that are rapidly industrialising.

The PIK set these nine planetary danger levels to warn humans against tipping Earth’s natural systems past points of no return.

“These tipping points... if crossed, would lead to irreversible and catastrophic outcomes for billions of people and many future generations on Earth,” they said.

All nine planetary boundaries are “interconnected” so breaching one crucial limit can destabilise Earth’s entire life system, Sakschewski said.

But that also presents an opportunity because addressing one problem — such as preventing the Earth’s average temperature rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels — “can lead to significant benefits across different issues”, the report said. —**AFP**

Oman, often viewed as a bridge between Africa and Eurasia, has become a hotspot for archaeological discoveries, offering rare insights into early human migration and settlement patterns. The “Stonehenge of Oman” is part of a broader excavation led by an international team of archaeologists, who have been studying ancient sites in both Dhofar and Duqm, central Oman.



FROM P18

Revisiting the discovery of Oman’s Stonehenge

BY YERU EBUEN

IN A REMOTE corner of Oman’s southern desert, archaeologists have made an extraordinary discovery in 2023 — a mysterious monument dubbed the “Stonehenge of Oman.” Resembling the iconic British structure, this ancient relic, known as a trilith, stands as a testament to the region’s hidden history, shrouded in mystery and intrigue. Unearthed at the Dhofar site near the border with Yemen, this trilith is part of a cluster of three large standing stones, dating back approximately 2,000 years.

Though smaller in scale, the Arabian trilith has sparked global curiosity, with researchers drawing comparisons to its famous counterpart, Stonehenge, in England. The monument’s purpose remains a puzzle, yet its symbolic and ritualistic significance cannot be denied.

These stone arrangements, scattered across southern Arabia, are believed to have been used in ceremonies or as markers for unknown cultural practices.

“The triliths are one of the great mysteries of Arab archaeology,” Roman Garba from the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences explained in earlier interviews. “Like Stonehenge, they likely held ritual significance, but were constructed in a different era and with different cultural motives.”

Oman, often viewed as a bridge between Africa and Eurasia, has become a hotspot for archaeological discoveries, offering rare insights into early human migration and settlement patterns. The “Stonehenge of Oman” is part of a broader excavation led by an international team of archaeologists, who have been studying ancient sites in both Dhofar and Duqm, central Oman.

Using satellite technology to identify these stone formations, the team has uncovered hundreds of triliths, raising new questions about the people who built them and their way of life.

Although the site now sits in a dry, unforgiving landscape, millennia ago, the region experienced occasional “green windows”—periods of wetter climates that made the area hospitable for human habitation. It was during one of these eras that the triliths were likely constructed, providing an enduring link to an ancient civilisation that once thrived here. Researchers are currently employing radiocarbon dating techniques to pinpoint the precise age of the monuments and uncover more about the enigmatic builders behind these structures.

Beyond their architectural curiosity, these triliths are part of a larger narrative that connects Oman to the rest of the ancient world. Situated at the crossroads of major migration routes, Oman was not just a geographical link between continents but also a cultural hub where people, ideas and traditions flowed. The discovery of these structures has global implications, offering scholars valuable clues about human adaptability to climate change, ritual practices and prehistoric social systems.

While much remains to be uncovered about the “Stonehenge of Oman,” this find is already being hailed as one of the most significant archaeological discoveries in the region. It further solidifies Oman’s reputation as a treasure trove for historians and archaeologists alike, eager to piece together the untold stories of early human history. As the research continues and the layers of mystery slowly unravel, the “Stonehenge of Oman” promises to shed light not only on the ancient past but also on how humanity itself has navigated the changing landscapes of time.

WHAT MORE IS THERE?

The international team behind these discoveries, led by the Institute of Archeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic was composed of 21 archaeologists and geologists from 10 countries.

In addition to the trilith, Oman’s recent archaeological efforts have yielded several other significant finds. Excavations in Duqm uncovered a wealth of burial sites, rock engravings and inscriptions, offering a glimpse into the spiritual and cultural lives of ancient Omanis. The use of luminescence dating on stone tools, along with radiocarbon dating of the triliths, promises to deliver critical information on how these prehistoric communities adapted to changing environments.

These discoveries follow a series of significant archaeological breakthroughs in Oman over recent years. From the ancient tombs of Bat to the bronze artefacts of Ibri, Oman continues to reveal its rich and layered history. The ongoing work of international teams, such as the one involved in this recent expedition, highlights Oman’s crucial role as a hub for understanding ancient human civilisations and their migrations. With further excavations planned, including a return to Dhofar and Duqm in 2024, the region is poised to offer even more insights into the ancient world, cementing its place as a treasure trove for archaeologists worldwide.

Understanding these archaeological discoveries is crucial because they offer profound insights into the history of humanity and the civilisations that shaped the world we know today.

The uncovering of ancient artefacts, such as the “Stonehenge of Oman” and other relics, helps humanity to piece together the story of early human migration, cultural development and adaptation to environmental changes. These findings don’t just inform about the past — they also provide valuable lessons for the present and future, particularly regarding human resilience, the impacts of climate change and cultural interconnectedness across continents.

Shining a spotlight on these discoveries elevates the significance of Oman as a key historical site and highlights the importance of preserving archaeological treasures. It brings global awareness to the rich heritage of the Arabian Peninsula, often overshadowed by other regions, and showcases its role in early human history.

PHOTOS BY ROMAN GARBA, INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CZECH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

