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Oman and Solomon Islands
establish diplomatic relations

The Sultanate of Oman and Solomon Islands on Wednesday signed a statement establishing diplomatic relations. The signing ceremony took place at the headquarters of the Permanent Mission of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations in New York. The statement was signed by Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy and Jeremiah Manelli, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade in Solomon Islands. — ONA

P13
OMAN TACKLES
WATER SCARCITY WITH
INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES

P12
ALVAREZ SAVES
MAN CITY
BLUSHES

P18
THE ENCHANTING
DAMANİYAT
ISLANDS

MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO
PRESIDENT OF MALTA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr George Vella of the Republic of Malta, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Vella and the people of Malta further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM GREET'S GOVERNOR
GENERAL OF BELIZE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Froyla Tzalam, Governor General of Belize, on her country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to the Governor General and the people of Belize further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO
ARMENIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Vahagn Khachaturyan of the Republic of Armenia, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Khachaturyan. His Majesty also wished the people of Armenia further progress and prosperity. — ONA

OPINION

P9

Krisztina Than
Slovakia struggles with
illegal migrants

P16

Muhanna al Zuheimi
Intellectual property
rights valuation

17% RISE IN VISITORS TO KHAREEF DHOFAR

The number of visitors to Khareef Dhofar season (monsoon) since the beginning of the season till August 31 stood at 924,127 visitors, up by 17 per cent compared to the corresponding period in 2022 when the number stood at 792,980, according to the data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The data indicate that the number of Omani visitors increased by 16.4 per cent to reach 656,119. GCC visitors at 156,953 compared to 134,309 during the same period in 2022. **DETAILS ON P2**

Saudi Arabia hails Oman's role in Yemen roadmap talks

RIYADH: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has expressed its warm welcome for the positive outcome of discussions to reach a road map Yemen, in which the Sultanate of Oman participated. The talks, held in Riyadh, support the peace path in Yemen.

In a statement issued by the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday, Saudi Press Agency (SPA) outlined details of a meeting held by Saudi Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman with the Sanaa delegation.

The meeting underscored Saudi Arabia's constant keenness to encourage the Yemeni parties to engage in dialogue to hammer out a comprehensive and lasting political solution in Yemen under the auspices of the United Nations.

The Yemeni envoys left Riyadh on Tuesday after a five-day round of talks with Saudi officials on



Saudi Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman with Yemeni delegation in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday. — Reuters

ending the eight-year-old conflict in Yemen, sources familiar with the meeting said.

The kingdom reaffirmed its commitment to promoting dialogue among all warring parties in Yemen, the Saudi defence minister said on Wednesday after meeting with the delegation.

"I emphasised the Kingdom's support for Yemen and reaffirmed our commitment to promoting dialogue among all parties to reach a comprehensive political solution under UN supervision," Prince Khalid bin Salman said in a post on messaging platform X.

Some progress has been made on the main sticking points, including a timeline for foreign troops exiting Yemen and a mechanism for paying public wages, two sources said, adding the sides would meet for more talks after consultations "soon." — Agencies

Oman vows to combat NCDs

UN award for plain packaging initiative

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The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health (MoH), has received the United Nations 2022 Award for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), a recognition for the nation's relentless efforts to combat NCDs resulting from tobacco use.

It was unveiled on the sidelines of the 78th United Nations General Assembly meetings being held in New York. The international award caps up the ministry's commitment to multi-sectoral action to prevent and control NCDs, for example, through implementation of plain packaging for tobacco products at the national level.

Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the award ceremony in New York, Dr Abdullah bin Hamoud al Harthy, Senior Consultant in Trauma and Intensive Care Surgery at the Ministry of Health, who received the award at the UN headquarters on behalf of the Minister of Health, said the award is an accomplishment to be added to the chain of achievements of the ministry in various health fields which continue with the renewed renaissance.

"The UN recognition for the health sector is the manifestation of the relentless efforts of the nation in the health sector which continue to yield greater results regionally as well as internationally," Dr Al Harthy said.

The ministry's approach fits with sustainable development goals vis-à-vis the control of NCDs in Oman.

Dr Jumana al Abduwani,

The UN recognition for the health sector is the manifestation of the relentless efforts of the nation in the health sector which continue to yield greater results regionally as well as internationally

DR ABDULLAH
AL HARTHY
Senior Consultant,
Ministry of Health

Director of international affairs at the ministry, felt that this coveted award from the UN in particular comes as an outcome of hard work and efforts for many years.

"Although Oman is a relatively low tobacco-use prevalence country according to WHO databases, we view this risk factor as a significant public health threat that requires sustained attention to reduce its consumption," she said.

Oman became a party to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) on March 9, 2005, making it obligatory for the government to implement and enforce the convention's tobacco control measures and guidelines. This led to implementing plain packaging of all tobacco products sold in Oman, with the aim of stripping the tobacco industry of its last platform to advertise their lethal products.

TURN TO P5

Motorists feel the pinch of Al Amerat-Bausher road closure

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

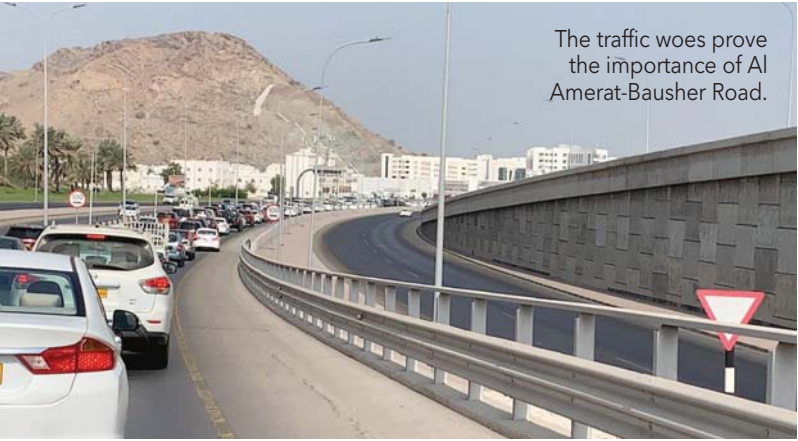
After years of smooth drive to work, it is almost a déjà vu of yesteryears to be around Wadi Adai, where motorists from Muscat, Muttrah, Al Wadi al Kabir and Ruwi line up with those coming from Al Amerat.

One of the concerns due to the situation has been an increase in accidents. This time around, the

motorists are urging everyone to drive safely to save time.

The experience from the first working week has made people come up with solutions to tackle the traffic congestion on Sultan Qaboos Road during peak hours.

The office-goers and school children tackle it during the early morning hours. One of the best solutions would be for most of the commuters from Muscat, Muttrah, Ruwi and Wadi Kabir to



The traffic woes prove the importance of Al Amerat-Bausher Road.

use the Darsait flyover, which was one of the popular suggestions. The congestion at the Qurum roundabout eases as many cars turn towards the Express Highway.

Al Amerat's residents genuinely feel the pinch, as Al Amerat is one of the fastest-growing towns. The traffic jam starts from there, said one road user. "Earlier, the travelling time from Al Amerat to Qurum used

to take around 15 to 20 minutes, and now it is more than an hour. I left my house at 8 am and reached my office at 9.15 am. I also noticed that there is an increase in accidents. Even the smallest of accidents cause further delays," said Huwaida al Balushi.

The traffic is bearable and mostly smooth during the afternoon and evening sessions, said road users. If there is a block, it is at Wadi Adai.

TURN TO P5



Foreign Minister meets Iranian counterpart, several officials

NEW YORK: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met on Wednesday with Dr Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The meeting was held in New York on the sidelines of the 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

During the meeting, the two ministers discussed several matters and reviewed developments on the regional and international arenas.

The two ministers also underscored the keenness of both countries to enhance relations and cooperation in all fields of mutual interest.

Sayyid Badr also met with Zbigniew Rau, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.

The meeting, held in the headquarters of Oman's permanent



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met on Wednesday with Dr Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran. — ONA

mission to the United Nations (UN), comes on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, which is held in New York.

Sayyid Badr underscored the two countries keenness to enhance the existing relations and cooperation in various fields of interest. The two sides also

exchanged views on various regional and international matters of mutual interest.

Moreover, Sayyid Badr also met here today with Geir Pedersen, UN Special Envoy for Syria.

During this meeting, the two sides exchanged views on efforts exerted to reach consensus

regarding the Syrian crisis and to achieve aspirations of the people of Syria.

Further, the Foreign Minister met here today with Zambry Abdul Kadir, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia.

The two ministers reviewed the relations and cooperation between the two countries and means of enhancing them in various fields. They also touched on developments on the regional and international arenas.

Meanwhile, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister met with Fuad Hussein, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Iraq.

During this meeting, the two sides exchanged views on regional matters. They also highlighted priorities in the international sphere. — ONA

GCC labour ministers discuss strategy of joint action



The 9th meeting of GCC Ministers of Labour under way.

MUSCAT: The 9th meeting of GCC Ministers of Labour, held in Muscat on Wednesday, elaborated on a strategy for joint GCC action in the fields of labour, manpower and international cooperation.

The meeting, chaired by the Sultanate of Oman, looked into ways of developing systems of the end-of-service gratuity for expatriate workers in GCC states, as well as the GCC Secretariat General's proposal

for on-the-job training.

The meeting recommended the formation of a team of representatives of GCC ministries of labour (on one hand) and representatives of retirement and insurance funds (on the other hand) to study technical and administrative procedures to integrate the "end-of-service gratuity for the expatriate workforce" into the Social Protection System in each GCC states. —ONA

Oman's tourism sector urged to adopt EVs

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@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has invited partners and stakeholders in the tourism sector to support the initiatives launched by the Ministry of Transport and Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) to switch to environmentally friendly electric vehicles (EV).

The Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MoTCIT) launched a special programme to reduce carbon emissions in the transportation sector and communications, and information technology sectors, which are responsible for nearly 20 per cent of the total carbon emissions in the Sultanate of Oman.

The ministry divided its plan for zero



Photo for illustrative purpose only

carbon neutrality into three stages — the first stage (reducing emissions by three per cent by 2030), the second stage (reducing emissions by 34 per cent by 2040), and the third stage (reducing emissions by 100 per cent by 2050).

In the first stage, the ministry seeks to reach 7,000 electric cars, or 35 per cent of the new

light vehicles, and reduce emissions by 40 per cent from heavy equipment using dual combustion technology, which was developed locally by 100 per cent, in addition to the use of biofuels in public transport.

A study published by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), UNEP, and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) in 2008 indicated that Travel and tourism-associated greenhouse gas emissions were estimated to be around 5 per cent (1304 Mt) of global emissions in 2005.

This figure included the emissions of three industries, namely transportation, accommodation, and other Travel and tourism activities, with transport generating 75 per cent and accommodations generating 21 per cent of the overall emissions of the sector. This is in addition, transport-related GHG emissions.

GCC info under-secretaries hold meeting



MUSCAT: The GCC under-secretaries of the ministries of information and their equivalents on Wednesday held the first meeting of advisory committee via video conferencing to thrash out matters pertaining to the GCC Radio and Television Authority approved by the GCC ministers of information in their 25th meeting held on November 24, 2022.

The meeting was aimed at providing technical advice and enabling the Authority to achieve its objectives as well as providing financial support to the Authority.

The meeting was chaired by Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information. He hailed the cooperation of the official media of the GCC countries. . — ONA

Over 924,000 visitors to Khareef Dhofar by end of August: NCSI



57 per cent of Dhofar Khareef season's visitors arrived during the month of August

DHOFAR: The number of visitors to Khareef Dhofar season (monsoon) since the beginning of the season till 31 August 2023 reached 924,127 visitors, up by 17 per cent compared to the corresponding period in 2022 when the number stood at 792,980, according to the data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data indicate that the number of Omani visitors increased by 16.4 per cent to reach 656,119. GCC visitors reached



156,953 compared to 134,309 during the same period in 2022. Meanwhile, visitors from other nationalities stood at 111,055,

constituting a rise when compared to 95,017 visitors in the previous year.

As many as 714,520 visitors arrived to the Governorate of Dhofar through land port, while 209,607 visitors arrived through air flights, which comprised a rise by 36 per cent to the number of arrivals through air flights during the corresponding period in 2022.

Moreover, 57 per cent of Khareef Dhofar season's visitors arrived during the month of August. —ONA

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GCC ministers meeting endorses social development strategy initiative

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, on Wednesday chaired the 9th meeting of the Ministerial Committee of GCC Ministers of Social Development and Social Affairs, in Muscat.

The meeting discussed four main topics: The decision of the GCC Supreme Council on the Unified Law for Empowering Persons with Disabilities; the Unified Law

for Volunteering Action; the decision of the Ministerial Council on protecting moral, religious and family values in Gulf societies; and the decision of the Ministerial Council on endorsing the tasks and responsibilities of the GCC Joint Charitable Action Committee.

The meeting discussed the GCC joint strategy on women's affairs, the dissemination of a Privilege Card for persons with disabilities in GCC states



Dr Laila Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development. – ONA

and the State of Kuwait's proposal to dedicate an award for outstanding people with disabilities in member states.

The meeting also endorsed the first initiative that stems from the GCC social development strategy aimed at devising

unified policies on securing the stability of Gulf societies and instilling a spirit of Gulf citizenship and Arab and Islamic identity.

Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, who chaired the meeting, gave a speech in which she said, "The current circumstances and rapid trends in daily life around the world produce many social issues and pose challenges that require our attention. This is

because such developments have direct and indirect impacts that may lead to radical and profound phenomena that affect the social system and challenge social values, family cohesion and the unity of the Gulf society." Dr Laila stressed the keenness of GCC states to address these challenges, provide social protection for various segments of society and ensure a decent living for Gulf citizens.

— ONA

Youngsters struggle to find affordable housing

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The college and university students in the capital, Muscat, are facing difficulties in finding suitable and affordable accommodation. The matter is not limited to students but also unmarried single men and women who stay away from their home towns for work.

It has been noted that generally a student has to shell out RO 60 and above per person for a modest apartment on a sharing basis in places such as Al Khoudh and it may go up in more convenient and upmarket locations.

Most youngsters rent out a full flat and share the rent with their friends or flatmates.

"I have a friend who has a room with friends in a villa with limited kitchen facilities and he has to shell out around RO 50 from his side. Even this



Most youngsters in Muscat rent out a full flat and share the rent with their friends

accommodation, he found it difficult to get as the owner had some reservations giving out to students," said one tenant.

Speaking to the Observer, an executive of a property brokerage firm admitted difficulties in renting out flats to youngsters as it generally drives away our clients with families. "Due to these factors, there is limited space available for students,

especially near workplaces and educational institutions, which leads to an unjustified rate surge."

Saif al Kaabi, a student, spoke about the importance of having organisations or groups to protect the rights of students. He suggested that universities or local authorities should assist students in finding affordable housing by setting a maximum

rent limit. This is because students often have limited income that cannot cover high housing costs.

"Such services would be beneficial for students. Another problem faced by students or single working youngsters is the unwillingness of the owners to rent it out to them for some obvious reasons," he said.

Salim, a building owner in Al Khuwair, said, "The youth have their own lifestyle such as bringing friends to homes, entertainment, and moving around in crowds, which sometimes can disturb or cause inconvenience to their neighbours. We cannot blame them, but we have to take into account the concerns of our clients."

According to industry sources, the most viable option will be to develop decent hostels, for students near their educational institutions.



As purple is the official colour designated for Alzheimer's, the Royal Opera House Muscat will sport the campaign, giving importance to the awareness for a disease.

ROHM marks Alzheimer's Day

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

With the theme, 'Never too early, never too late', Oman celebrates International Alzheimer's Day (September 21) on Thursday.

Purple is the official colour designated for Alzheimer's, and the Royal Opera House Muscat will sport the colour, giving importance to the awareness campaign for a disease that has affected almost 12,000 people in the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Chairman of Oman Alzheimer's Society, said dementia risk reduction can prevent or delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

Adopting a healthy lifestyle can prevent the onset of dementia, and it's never too early or too late to reduce your risk of developing dementia, he pointed out.

"Tackling dementia risk factors for individuals before and after a diagnosis could reduce or slow down the oncoming 124,800 projected dementia cases by 2050," Dr Hamed noted.

To mark the occasion, Al Harub Medical Centre has been lit up in purple throughout September.

"We hope people will talk more about the issue that is quite prevalent in Oman. Having purple light on our building brings awareness to this issue,

which is very close to us because we see it often in our practice. We are trying to implement an intervention. We are trying to implement Cognitive Stimulation Therapy for people with early Alzheimer's. We want to do something more preventative and have research," said Nutaila al Kharousi, Psychologist and Managing Director of Al Harub Medical Centre.

According to Alzheimer's Disease International, the World Alzheimer's Report 2023, released on Wednesday, will focus on reducing the risk of dementia. The report examines the drivers behind risk reduction, including lifelong risk reduction, the steps that individuals can take to reduce their risk, the role of government in providing population-based systematic changes to promote risk reduction and the importance of dementia research.

According to Alzheimer's Disease International, the ten warning signs of dementia are memory loss, difficulty in performing familiar tasks, problems with language, disorientation to time and place, poor or decreased judgment, problems keeping track of things, misplacing things, changes in mood and behaviour, trouble with images and spatial relationships and withdrawal from work or social activities.

RNO conducts naval drill 'Sea Lion 2/2023'



MUSCAT: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) began on Wednesday the naval drill 'Sea Lion 2/2023' in Al Batinah Naval Zone. The naval drill, conducted with the support of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) and the Royal Oman Police (ROP), concludes on 21 September 2023. Many joint naval military activities between the participating ships and crews are conducted according to the set plan of the exercise. Conducting this naval drill comes within the framework of the RNO training plans aimed at sustaining readiness of its fleet and personnel. - ONA

Schengen visa processing time to be improved

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

Affirming the fact that a large number of people have been travelling to the EU, the Schengen consulates in the Sultanate of Oman received around 30,885 visa applications in 2022, of which 23,430 visas were approved.

A total of 2,287 applications were denied visas, according to SchengenVisaInfo.com.

Taking into account the long wait to get appointments for visa submission, the Commission

of the European Union has said that the digitalisation of the visa application procedure will have a significant impact on the Schengen visa processing time.

The decision will benefit a large number of applications from the Sultanate.

The European Commission Spokesperson for Home Affairs, Anitta Hipper, told SchengenVisaInfo.com that the digitalisation of the visa procedure will contribute to improving the processing time, suggesting that there will no



longer be long waiting periods to receive a decision.

According to her, when the application procedure for

Schengen visas goes fully online, applicants will not be required to submit physical copies of their documents, reducing the administrative burden associated with handling paper applications and putting the visa sticker.

The rules on the digitalisation of the visa procedure were agreed upon by the European Parliament and the Council in an attempt to modernise, simplify and harmonise the visa procedures for nationals of third countries applying for a visa and for the EU Member States who need to grant

the visas.

As Hipper said for SchengenVisaInfo.com, digitalisation will modernise two main aspects of the visa procedure.

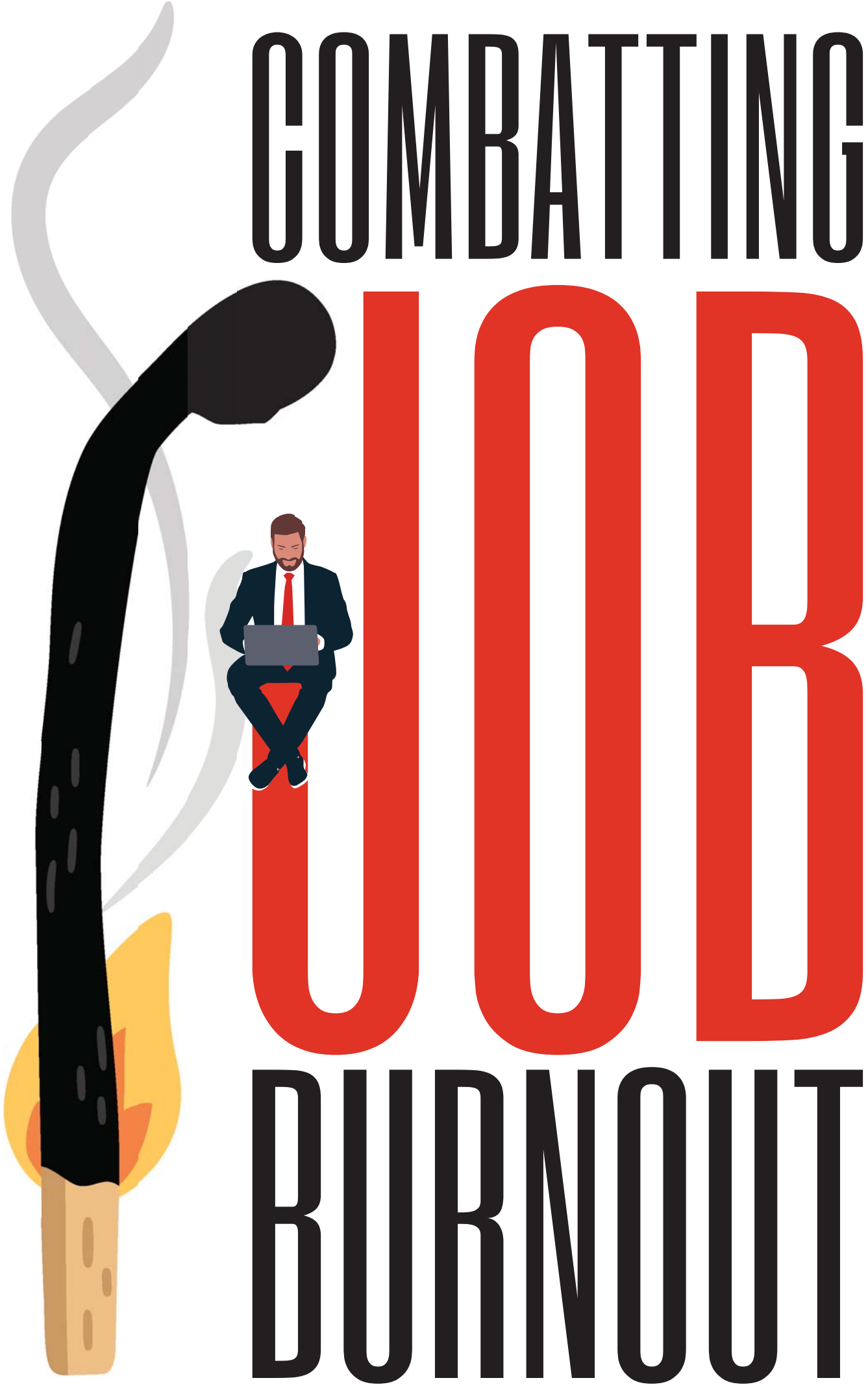
Firstly, the EU Visa Application platform will provide applicants with a harmonised and seamless procedure, saving costs to travel to the consulate or any visa application centre.

Secondly, the visa will be issued in a digital format, and it will be digitally linked to the travel document.

The Schengen Member States have been receiving a high number of visa applications post-pandemic, and the high demand has had an impact on the procedures.

Hipper said that the Commission had already called all the Member States to improve their operational capacities and address the issue by releasing more appointments.

Some Member States have said that they update the system regularly to ensure application process goes smoothly.



COMBATTING JOB BURNOUT

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One of the major issues raised by the experts at the recently convened Gulf Cooperation Council Health Council was the pressing issue of job burnout. The issue demands attention due to its profound psychological and physical repercussions on employees.

Job burnout manifests itself in various ways, including forgetfulness and even oesophageal reflux, a physical symptom associated with its chronic presence. To avoid the perilous path of job burnout, characterised by exhaustion, perpetual fatigue, and intense psychological strain stemming from relentless work pressure, avoiding overburdening oneself and working excessive hours is essential. Succumbing to this syndrome can lead individuals to withdraw from their social circles, leaving them with an overwhelming sense of emptiness. This internal void inevitably seeps into their behaviour and actions, resulting in a loss of joy in all aspects of life.

A recent awareness campaign initiated by the Gulf Health Council, titled 'Draw a line between you and job burnout,' shed light on a concerning statistic: One in three employees exhibits signs of job burnout. Forgetfulness, a common marker of this condition, often goes unnoticed until it becomes a significant issue.

In 1974, Herbert Freudenberger, a physician and psychotherapist, conducted pioneering research on burnout, defining it as the steep cost of high achievement—a depletion of the motivation that propels us forward in life and work. Burnout typically arises when one's efforts fail to yield the desired results.

Burnout is a response to chronic, unmanaged workplace stress. Recognising its prevalence and profound impact on productivity and well-being, the World Health Organisation officially classified burnout as an "occupational phenomenon" in the eleventh

edition of the International Classification of Diseases. It occurs when chronic workplace stress is not effectively addressed.

Beyond workplace stress, the rigours of daily life can hasten burnout. Personality traits and thought patterns, such as an unrelenting pursuit of perfection or a pessimistic outlook, can also contribute to its development. In severe cases, burnout may lead to chronic physical and mental health disorders.

The intricate connection between mind and body means stress can trigger various digestive problems. Psychological stress can impede proper digestion, leading to the retention of stomach acid and subsequent heartburn.

Effective communication and support from managers act as a protective shield against psychological stress. Employees who feel well-supported by their managers are 70 per cent less likely to experience burnout.

For some, taking time off from work is the initial response to combat job burnout—a chance to temporarily detach from the work environment. This doesn't necessitate an extended vacation, as studies have demonstrated that even short breaks can reduce stress, lower the risk of heart disease, improve overall outlook, and boost motivation upon return to work. During such breaks, reflecting on the aspects of your job for which you are grateful can have tangible benefits. Cultivating gratitude, even during short respites, can shift your thinking from negative to positive, enhancing your perspective on work and life.

Minimising contact with negative colleagues is also crucial, as their negative energy can affect your mood adversely.

Job burnout isn't confined to the workplace; it can infiltrate all aspects of life if boundaries, organisation, and balance aren't established. In a rapidly changing world, succumbing to internal combustion without even realising it is easy. Therefore, setting clear boundaries for all life's demands is essential.

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Al Mouj Sarai Wins Luxury Residential Development of the Year at Prestigious Asia 2023 Awards

Oman's premium lifestyle destination has earned regional real estate recognition for its super elite collection of opulent ocean and marina-facing palaces

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Sarai, the ultra-elite collection of 28 sea-facing palaces launched by Al Mouj Muscat at the start of the year, has been crowned *Luxury Residential Development of the Year – Oman Award* at the celebrated Real Estate Asia Awards 2023.

Set at the westernmost crest of Al Mouj, the win affirms Al Mouj Sarai's status as the most desirable and glamorous address in the Sultanate, and arguably in the region, which set within the exclusive and gated Sarai neighbourhood, takes oceanfront majesty and seclusion to an unsurpassed level.

This is the second consecutive year that Oman's premium lifestyle destination has earned regional recognition in the prestigious awards program that celebrate the most innovative real estate developments and companies across the Asia Pacific region, with the awards presented at a glittering ceremony in Singapore.

Overlooking both the Sea of Oman and Al Mouj's Gold Anchor marina with mesmerising views, Al Mouj Sarai are lavish six-bedroomed mansions set over three and four floors that through high-end design features and opulent interiors combined with bespoke amenities and an outstanding location, have redefined the meaning of luxury.



Designed by award-winning international architects, each is a private sanctuary of wellness and tranquillity offering buyers a holistic living experience at the heart of the premium lifestyle destination where an abundance of world-class leisure, retail, entertainment and community amenities are close by.

The annual awards programme recognises major breakthroughs, innovations as well as key players across the real estate industry and

says Al Mouj Muscat's CEO Nasser bin Masoud Al Sheibani: "It is a great honour to once again be recognised in these awards, and evidence that Al Mouj Sarai is truly remarkable. The response from the market has been overwhelmingly positive, demonstrating how we continue to design products that not only meet buyers' aspirations but consistently surpass them."

There are two styles of Al Mouj Sarai palaces, Ocean Sarai and Marina Sarai and a choice

of plots of between 2076 sqm to 3079 sqm. Ocean Sarai boasts uninterrupted views of the glistening sea and Marina Sarai offers the exhilaration of living at the tip of Al Mouj Marina complete with private jetty and superyacht mooring.

Adds Nasser bin Masoud Al Sheibani: "Without question, Al Mouj Sarai is the shimmering jewel in Al Mouj Muscat's crown, offering the region's influencers and most eminent elite with incomparable homes to enjoy life without compromise. Inspired by their beautiful surroundings, they are the perfect example of self-expression as owners are free to customise wellness and lifestyle elements, and tailor façades, colour schemes and finishes, to create a liveable work of art that is distinctive as they are."

Al Mouj Muscat is a dynamic and diverse luxury lifestyle community, a joint venture between Majid Al Futtaim Properties, OMRAN, and Tanmia. Set along 6km of beautiful coastline, it offers a superb mix of apartments, townhouses, villas and sea-facing mansions that are home to 8,000 residents from 85 nationalities. Every year it attracts 4.9 million visitors and tourists to its coastal setting, boulevard style retail and dining experiences, luxury hotels, 400-berth marina and multi award-winning Al Mouj golf course.



Oman vows to combat NCDs

FROM PAGE 1
“The UN’s NCD Taskforce Award will definitely motivate all stakeholders to further improve the implementation of voluntary NCD target as well as target Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by strengthening the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control,” she added.

The achievement further highlights the progress made by Oman and underscores the government’s aspiration to be within the ranks of advanced countries in public health.

The UN awards are aimed at recognising outstanding commitment and action to prevent and control NCDs, and deliver integrated people-centred primary care which will be made in ‘Ministries of health and government health agencies’, and ‘Ministries and government agencies outside health’.

Earlier, a study conducted as part of the unyielding efforts of the ministry, it was found that NCDs were a major threat to Oman’s public health and about 80 per cent of deaths in Oman were attributed to NCDs.

The systematic review on NCDs and health equity in the EMR by the MoH further indicated that NCDs is a major public health issue that NCDs currently cause 185.75 deaths per 100,000 population in Oman and sedentary lifestyle, consumption of junk foods and oily foods, and other factors have been known to be contributing to the NCDs including heart disease, cancer, chronic respiratory disease, and diabetes.

Oman has formed National Committee for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases by a decision of the Council of Ministers in February of 2018, comprising members from several sectors concerned with planning in the field of prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, and proposal of draft laws, regulations and decisions related to safety.



Winners of Falling Walls Lab Oman 2023 contest

Winners of Falling Walls Lab Oman 2023 contest

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in collaboration with the Falling Walls Foundation in Germany announced the winners of the Falling Walls Lab Oman 2023 competition at Innovation Park Muscat on Wednesday.

The 21 finalists of the Falling Walls Lab Oman competition, who have been selected out of the 95 projects that applied to the competition this year, presented their research projects and business models, covering different disciplines, in a duration of three minutes each in front of a high-level competition jury for the final evaluation round.

Out of the 21 projects, the best three projects were announced as winners.

The winning projects went to ‘Breaking the Wall of Methane Biosynthesis’ by Shabib al Rashdi (National University of Science and Technology), ‘Breaking the Wall of Lost Heat in Solar

Cells’ by Anfal al Busaidy (Sultan Qaboos University), and ‘Breaking the Wall of Aging Minds: AI-Enhanced Diagnostics’ by Abdullah al Ghailani (Oman Medical Speciality Board).

The winners will participate in the global Falling Walls Lab Finale as a representative of the Sultanate of Oman on November 7 and attend the Falling Walls Science Summit on November 7-9 in Berlin, Germany.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has participated annually in the Falling Walls Lab competition since 2016.

The Falling Walls Lab competition aims at boosting innovative ideas and business models among researchers and entrepreneurs across different fields.

The competition also provides a platform for up-and-coming researchers to meet up with some of the best accomplished scholars. — **ONA**

Fish sellers told to ensure public health, hygiene

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Muscat Municipality has asked shops selling fish and fish products to maintain hygiene and public health practices before renewing their licences and ensuring quality and quantity to the customers.

This announcement comes in the wake of the recent raids conducted in several shops in the capital region where nearly 75 kilos of fish, unsuitable for human consumption, was found and destroyed recently.

Also, consumers should discourage those who sell fish on the streets due to its vulnerability to spoilage and violating civic rules when practised by street vendors.

Speaking to *Observer*, a highly placed source at the civic body said that the Municipality has established some controls and requirements to be met and observed in practising this trade.

“We, at the Muscat Municipality, pay great attention to the activity of selling fish as this activity is related to the food sector, which directly impacts people’s lives,” he said.

“First of all, trading in fish, either inside the market or in standalone shops, should be licenced, failing of which will



Fish shops have been asked to maintain hygiene and public health practices

attract a fine of RO 300, and other legal action will be initiated depending upon the nature of the offence,” he said adding that the authorities conduct periodic surprise inspections on food and food establishments to ensure that they adhere to healthy practices.

To practice the activity of selling fish, the area of the shop must be proportional to the size of the business, provided that it is at least 20 square meters.

Also, the store must be equipped with refrigerators for preserving fish and devices to measure temperatures, record temperatures daily, and ensure that cooling devices are kept in operation as long as there are fish in them.

Chilled fish should be displayed and preserved in refrigerators at a temperature ranging from 1 to 4 degrees Celsius, while frozen fish should not exceed -18 degrees Celsius.

“Additionally, selling fish meat on the street-side in unhealthy environmental conditions and prolonged exposure to the sun for a long time can cause environmental and health issues,” he adds.

Insect-repellent devices should appropriately be used and ensure that the instruments, walls and floors are cleaned and disinfected from time to time, taking care not to affect the fish. The presence of fire-resistant waste containers with lids that open with the foot should be in place.

Al Amerat-Bausher road closure

FROM PAGE 1
Ahmed al Riyami, who resides in Al Amerat, said: “I leave home by 6.15 am and still not able to avoid traffic. I don’t want to be late at work, and I am sure that is the case with others too. So there is lot of nervousness around.”

So, the morning drive to work has become tedious for most people.

“For those coming from Ruwi and Wadi Kabir, it might be best to go by Qurum Heights,” said Abdulmalik Yousuf, who has also been thinking of other routes to get to work after dropping

his children at school. He feels the traffic block in this area can have a ripple effect on other areas. His friend, however, feels it is convenient to use Sultan Qaboos Road as he lives in Ruwi.

Sultan al Balushi, who lives in Amerat, said people are tense as they take longer time to reach the office. “I have to start at around 6.30 am to ensure that I reach the office at 7.30 am. I came across two road accidents on Wednesday and one on Tuesday. The traffic is tight and vulnerable to mishaps on the road from Wadi Adai to Wattayah. The

period between 6 am and 7 am has school students in addition to office goers. So naturally, the school buses are also part of the rush.”

On Sunday, traffic was bottle-necked from the beginning of Al Amerat till the end, including the service roads, said Sultan.

The ROP has been doing their part in easing the traffic in Al Amerat.

The traffic woe goes on to prove the importance of Al Amerat to Bausher Road. The mountain road from Amerat to Bausher should be ready within four months.

Marital programme initiative organised

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, SEP 20

The General Directorate of Social Development in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, located at Nizwa Hospital, recently hosted an enlightening dialogue session as part of its marital programme initiative.

The session was held under the auspices of Shaikh Saleh bin Dhiyab al Rubaie, Wali of Nizwa. The session united experts from the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, Sultan Qaboos University, and educational counsellors.

The primary objective of this session was to educate prospective couples and newlyweds on the crucial aspects of married life and the foundation of a strong family.

By enhancing community awareness of the marital



A dialogue session was held at General Directorate of Social Development in Nizwa.

counselling programme and fostering partnerships with various institutions, the aim was to encourage more individuals to enrol in marital counselling courses.

This initiative addressed challenges such as the lack of clarity about the programme and the reluctance of prospective couples to attend such courses.

Fadel bin Abdullah al Shezawi, Director-General of Social Development in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, emphasised in his opening speech that the well-being of a family hinges on the strength of its foundation—the relationship between spouses. He stressed that empowering couples with knowledge and skills is essential for preserving family unity and

preventing disputes.

The session featured four enlightening working papers:

‘Cohesion’ by Dr Khalfan bin Salim al Busaidy, Head of the Family Development Department at the Department of Social Development in Barka.

‘Our Children are Honesty’ by Dr Salam bin Salim al Kindi, Professor and Senior Consultant in Hematology at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

‘Developing Feelings’ by Dr Idris bin Issa al Faliti, Director of the Humanisation Center for Educational Consultations.

‘Affection and Mercy’ by Shaikh Salim bin Ali al Namani, a religious guidance and counselling expert at Sultan Qaboos University.

To ensure the programme’s success, the Ministry has equipped its staff with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Sultanate of Omanسلطنة عُمان

وزارة التراث والسياحة

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

Tenders Announcement

Tender No.	141/2023/MHT/HQ-27	Tender Name	Providing cleaning services for the Heritage and Tourism Administration building in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and its sites for the year 2024
	142/2023/MHT/HQ-28		Providing cleaning services for the Heritage and Tourism Administration building in Buraimi Governorate and its sites for the year 2024
	143/2023/MHT/HQ-29		Providing cleaning services for the Heritage and Tourism Department building in North Al Batinah Governorate and its sites for the year 2024
	144/2023/MHT/HQ-30		Providing cleaning services for the Heritage and Tourism Administration building in the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate and its sites and the Qalhat Archaeological City Site Department for the year 2024
	145/2023/MHT/HQ-31		Providing cleaning services for the Heritage and Tourism Administration building in Al Dhahirah Governorate and its sites for the year 2024
	146/2023/MHT/HQ-32		Providing cleaning services for the Heritage and Tourism Department building in the South Al Batinah Governorate and its sites for the year 2024
	147/2023/MHT/HQ-33		Providing cleaning services for the Heritage and Tourism Department building in Musandam Governorate and its sites for the year 2024
	148/2023/MHT/HQ-34		Providing cleaning services for the Heritage and Tourism Department building in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate and its sites for the year 2024
Fees of Tender Documents For Local Company		25 O.R	
Fees of Tender Documents For SME		10 O.R	
Tender Document Sales End Date		8/10/2023	
Last Date for Bid Submission		29/10/2023	
Grade		First,Second,Third,Fourth SME	
E-Tendering Portal		https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om	
Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. The Tenderers must acknowledge commitment to the bid. The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids. The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).			
Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ita.gov.om or 24402200		
For further information	Email : sotic@mht.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085		



Libya flood survivors endure unbearable wait for relatives

DERNA: In Libya’s flood-hit city of Derna, the Mediterranean Sea breeze mixes with the nauseating stench of human remains buried under the mud-caked rubble.

Ten days after a tsunami-scale flash flood ripped through the coastal city, razing entire neighbourhoods, many of the traumatised survivors are still waiting to learn the fate of missing relatives.

Few of them have any hope of seeing their loved ones alive.

Bodies are still trapped inside shattered buildings and below the mountains of mud now turning into choking dust, as emergency response crews keep up their grim search.

Untold numbers of people were swept away by the raging waters and into the sea when two upstream dams burst late at night after Storm Daniel’s torrential rains lashed the area on September 10. Hundreds of bodies have since washed back onto the shores.

The official death toll stands at more than 3,300 — but the eventual count is expected to be far higher, with international aid groups giving estimates of up to 10,000 people missing.

Entire families have vanished, said Derna resident Mohamad Badr as he was clearing his house of mud and trying to salvage what furniture and household items he could.

In the first days after the disaster, rescue teams and volunteers hastily



An aerial view shows a destroyed bridge in the aftermath of a deadly storm and flooding that hit Libya, in Derna, Libya. — Reuters

buried hundreds of unidentified bodies in mass graves.

DNA samples were taken in the hopes they could be identified later, authorities said.

Elsewhere in the shattered city, Mahmud Erqiq, 50, has been offering drinking water and refreshments to the rescue workers.

With misty eyes, he also listed the names of neighbouring families of whom he has had no news.

Floods also inundated one of the country’s premier ancient sites, threatening its UNESCO-listed monuments with collapse, a recent visitor and a leading archaeologist said.

The immediate damage to the monuments of Cyrene, which include the second century AD Temple of Zeus, bigger than the Parthenon in Athens, is relatively minor but the water circulating around their foundations threatens future collapses, the head of the

French archaeological mission in Libya, Vincent Michel said.

Settled from the Greek island of Santorini around 600 BC, Cyrene was one of the leading centres of the Classical world for nearly a millennium before being largely abandoned following a major earthquake in 365 AD. Its name lives on in Cyrenaica, the historical name for eastern Libya.

UNESCO declared its surviving monuments a World Heritage Site in 1982. — AFP

Japan PM says open to meeting N Korean leader

UNITED NATIONS: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on Tuesday he was willing to meet North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, seeking a diplomatic path as tensions soar over Pyongyang’s weapons programmes. Kishida reiterated the public offer at the UN General Assembly days after his government publicly announced his willingness for a summit.

In a speech from the UN rostrum, Kishida said that Japan was willing to resolve all issues with North Korea — including Pyongyang’s past kidnappings of Japanese civilians to train its spies.

“From the perspective of opening up a new era together, I would like to convey my determination to meet with President Kim Jong Un face to face at any time without any conditions,” Kishida said. He said he would “like to hold high-level talks under my direct supervision to realise a summit meeting at an early time.”

Japan’s former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi paid a landmark visit to Pyongyang while in office in 2002, meeting Kim’s father Kim Jong Il and setting out a path to normalise relations in which Japan would offer



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida addresses the 78th United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York City. — AFP

economic assistance.

The trip led to the return of five Japanese nationals and a follow-up trip by Koizumi but the diplomacy soon broke down, in part over Tokyo’s concern that North Korea was not coming clean on the abduction victims.

North Korea carried out a nuclear test in 2006, setting a more confrontational phase. Tensions have soared in recent months as Pyongyang carries out a series of missile tests. The United States under President Joe Biden has also offered talks but North Korea has shown little interest.

Biden’s predecessor Donald Trump took an unusually personal approach with Kim, meeting him three times and voicing admiration for him. — AFP

Israel bans workers from Gaza as border tensions escalate

GAZA: Israel closed crossing points with Gaza on Wednesday, preventing thousands of workers from getting to their jobs in Israel and the West Bank, following days of border demonstrations that saw Israeli forces open fire and kill a protester a day earlier.

The move stops more than 18,000 Palestinians from crossing for work, depriving the blockaded territory’s ailing economy of around \$2 million a day, according to local economists.

Protests backed by Hamas have been held for days, against issues ranging from the treatment of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails to Jewish visits to the Al Aqsa mosque compound, a site holy to Muslims.

On Tuesday, a Palestinian man was shot and killed by Israeli forces during the protests and 11 others were wounded, according to Gaza

health officials.

A spokesperson for Cogat, the Israeli Defence Ministry agency that coordinates with the Palestinians, confirmed that the Erez crossing into Gaza was closed and said it would be re-opened “in accordance with situational assessments.”

The border closure will add pressure to an economy already under strain due a blockade.

“We are too afraid the crossing won’t open anytime soon and I go back to living in poverty and need,” said one Gaza father of five, who has been sleeping at the Palestinian side of Erez crossing since Sunday evening. The 18,000 workers permits allowed by Israel bring in significant quantities of cash to a territory where according to IMF figures, per capita income is only a quarter of the level in the West Bank and where unemployment is



A Palestinian policeman walks by the gate to the Palestinian side of the passenger terminal as Israel bans Gaza workers, at the Erez crossing in northern Gaza. — Reuters

running at nearly 50 per cent.

Ayman Abu Krayyem, the spokesman of the Ministry of Labour, said that as a result of the closure 8,000 workers who returned to Gaza because of Israeli Jewish holidays have been stranded in the territory since the ban.

“Those are losing \$842,000 a day. These are important money by which they could help their families and improve their economic conditions,” said Krayyem.

Over the past few weeks, the military said its soldiers had been using riot dispersal means against Palestinians throwing explosives at the border fence along the Gaza Strip.

Egypt and Qatar were talking to the two sides in a bid to avoid sliding into a new wave of armed confrontation, said one Palestinian official familiar with those efforts.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

PORT SUDAN

Army chief headed to UN General Assembly

Sudanese army chief General Abdel Fattah al Burhan was headed to New York on Wednesday to address the UN General Assembly, his office said.

Burhan, de facto leader of Sudan since a 2021 coup, “will lead the Sudanese delegation” to the annual session, the Sovereignty Council he heads said in a statement.

Analysts have said his diplomatic offensive is a drive to burnish his legitimacy in the event of negotiations to end the



fighting.

During his UN visit, Burhan intends to address the UN General Assembly and will attend “high level meetings” on the sidelines. — AFP

SEOUL

South Korea investigates 17 US soldiers

Seventeen American soldiers stationed in South Korea are being investigated by the local police for “alleged illegal drug behaviour”, the United States Forces Korea said on Wednesday.

Two women, a South Korean and a Filipina, involved in the case have been arrested for allegedly smuggling drugs from the United States through military mail, Yonhap news agency reported. The 17 American soldiers have been referred to prosecutors and could face charges.



“United States Forces Korea is aware of the Korean National Police’s investigation of 17 Soldiers for alleged illegal drug behavior,” the USFK said in a statement on Wednesday. — AFP

LIBREVILLE

Son of ousted leader held in graft case

The son of Ali Bongo Ondimba and several allies of the ousted Gabon president have been charged with corruption and placed in custody, the state prosecutor said on Wednesday.

Bongo’s eldest son Nouredin Bongo Valentin and former presidential spokesman Jessye Ella Ekogha “have been charged and placed in provisional detention” on Tuesday over alleged corruption, said Libreville prosecutor Andre-Patrick Roquat.



In all, 10 people were indicted with charges ranging from electoral college operational issues, counterfeiting and use of the seals of the republic, to corruption. — AFP



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THURSDAY | SEPTEMBER 21 | 2023

7

In brief

■ BUCHAREST



EXPLOSION ROCKS CARGO SHIP NEAR DANUBE PORT

Romanian authorities said an explosion occurred on a ship close to its Danube port of Sulina on Wednesday, deploying a minesweeper ship with divers to scout the area for mines.

Members of the Romanian rescue services evacuated 12 crew members on board the Togo-registered cargo ship and brought them to shore for medical checks following the explosion, early on Wednesday.

"A ship under the flag of Togo, transporting cement, reported an explosion in the engine room and asked for the ship to be evacuated," Romania's Transport Minister said in a statement. — AFP

■ ROME



GERMAN PRESIDENT URGES FAIR MIGRANT DISTRIBUTION

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier visited Sicily on Wednesday, calling for a fair distribution of migrants who arrive in Europe after a rise in boat arrivals in southern Italy.

Steinmeier, who is being accompanied by Italian President Sergio Mattarella during the two-day visit, said both Germany and Italy were "at their limits".

"We need a fair distribution in Europe and stronger controls and surveillance at our external borders," he told Italy's *Corriere della Sera* daily in an interview ahead of his trip.

Over 130,000 people have landed on Italian shores, up from some 68,200 in the same period last year. — AFP

■ MOSCOW



PUTIN SAYS ACCEPTED XI'S INVITATION TO VISIT CHINA

Russian leader Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday he had accepted Chinese President Xi Jinping's invitation to travel to China in October.

China and Russia describe each other as strategic allies, with both countries frequently touting their "no limits" partnership and cooperation.

They came even closer after the start of Russia's offensive in Ukraine in February last year.

"I was pleased to accept the invitation of the Chairman of the People's Republic of China to visit China in October," Putin told Beijing's Foreign Minister Wang Yi as they met.

— AFP

Azerbaijan halts Karabakh offensive after ceasefire deal



Protesters gather in downtown Yerevan as separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan's authorities announced they would cease hostilities. — AFP

YEREVAN: Azerbaijan said on Wednesday it had halted military action in its breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh after Armenian separatist forces there agreed to a ceasefire whose terms signalled the area would return to Baku's control.

Under the agreement, confirmed by both sides and effective from 1 pm on Wednesday, separatist forces will disband and disarm and talks on the future of the region and the ethnic Armenians who live there will start on Thursday.

Karabakh, a mountainous area in the volatile wider South Caucasus region, is internationally recognised as Azerbaijani territory, but part of it has been run by separatist Armenian authorities who call the area their ancestral homeland.

Fearful of what the future might hold, thousands of Armenians massed at the airport in Stepanakert, the capital of Karabakh which is known as

Khankendi by Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan, which sent troops backed by artillery strikes into Karabakh on Tuesday to bring the breakaway region to heel, says it plans to integrate the area's 120,000 ethnic Armenians and that their rights will be protected under the constitution.

Some Armenians are sceptical and neighbouring Armenia has accused Azerbaijan of trying to ethnically cleanse the territory, something Baku denies.

"They are basically saying to us that we need to leave, not stay here, or accept that this is a part of Azerbaijan — this is basically a typical ethnical cleansing operation," Ruben Vardanyan said, a former top official in Karabakh's ethnic Armenian administration. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was already facing calls on Wednesday from some opponents to resign.

Some Armenians are also furious that Russia, which has peacekeepers on

the ground and helped broker an earlier ceasefire deal in 2020 following a 44-day war, was unable to stop Azerbaijan.

The Kremlin rejected that criticism on Wednesday and President Vladimir Putin was quoted as saying that Russian peacekeepers would protect Karabakh's civilian population.

Separatists running the self-styled "Republic of Artsakh" said they had been forced to agree to Azerbaijan's terms — relayed by Russian peacekeepers — after Baku's army broke through their lines and seized a number of strategic locations while the world did nothing.

Azerbaijan had said it could no longer tolerate a situation it regarded as a threat to its security and territorial sovereignty.

Separatist fighters were expected to leave Karabakh for Armenia and hand over their tanks and artillery later under the supervision of Russian peacekeepers. — Reuters

Poland summons Ukrainian ambassador over Zelenskiy comments

WARSAW: Poland summoned Kyiv's envoy to the foreign ministry on Wednesday, after comments by Ukraine's president on a ban on grain imports angered the government in Warsaw, which is toughening its stance ahead of October elections.

Poland has been one of Ukraine's staunchest allies since Russia attacked the country in February 2022,

but the countries are now embroiled in a deepening conflict over agricultural imports since Poland, along with Hungary and Slovakia, extended a ban on grain imports from their war-torn neighbour.

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy told the United Nations General Assembly Kyiv was working to preserve the land routes for grain exports, but he added that the "political theatre" around grain imports was only helping Moscow.

"Deputy Foreign Minister Pawel Jablonski conveyed the Polish side's strong protest against the statements made by President V. Zelenskiy at the UN General Assembly yesterday, alleging that some EU countries feigned solidarity while indirectly supporting Russia," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

It said Jablonski also told Ambassador Vasyl Zvarych that "putting pressure on Poland in multilateral forums or sending complaints to international tribunals are not appropriate methods of resolving disputes between our countries".

Poland, Slovakia and Hungary announced curbs on grain imports from Ukraine on Friday after the European Commission decided not to extend a ban on sales into Ukraine's five EU neighbours, which also include Romania and Bulgaria.

The ban was introduced to protect farmers in those countries from a surge of grain and food imports from Ukraine, after Russia's war largely blocked Ukraine's favoured routes via Black Sea ports.

A World Trade Organization spokesperson confirmed that Ukraine had taken the first step in a trade dispute by filing a complaint to the global trade body.

He did not name the countries although Kyiv has previously said the complaint targeted Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. — Reuters



Polish President Andrzej Duda addresses the 78th United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York City. — AFP

Charles III welcomed in France for first visit as king

PARIS: King Charles III on Wednesday embarked on his first state visit to France as monarch, a three-day trip aimed at showing the fundamentals of the cross-Channel alliance.

Charles and his host President Emmanuel Macron were driven down the Champs-Élysées for their talks at the Elysée Palace, escorted by 136 horses of the Republican Guard and standing up with the car roof open to acknowledge the greetings of a few thousand people lining the famed avenue.

The trip was initially planned for March and was supposed to have been Charles' first state visit abroad since becoming monarch on the death of his mother Queen Elizabeth II. But it was shelved due to widespread rioting and strikes across France against pension reforms.

The original itinerary in the capital Paris and the southwestern city of Bordeaux — packed with ceremony and pomp.

The king and his wife Queen Camilla were welcomed at Paris Orly airport by Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne, with the visit blessed by pristine autumn clear skies.



French President Emmanuel Macron (R) and Britain's King Charles III leave the Elysée Palace to walk the British Ambassador's residence in Paris. — AFP

Driven down the Champs-Élysées, Macron and the king were seen chatting amicably while Camilla and Macron's wife Brigitte

followed behind in a similar vehicle.

The Macrons will then in the evening host the royal couple

at a sumptuous state banquet at Versailles, the palace west of the capital synonymous with French royalty.

The menu will include delicacies including blue lobster cooked as a starter by star chef Anne-Sophie Pic, who has said she was inspired by the tastes of the so called "Sun King" Louis XIV.

Many of the engagements on the trip reflect Charles' lifelong interest in the environment, sustainability and biodiversity, as well as promoting young entrepreneurs and community.

"This is King Charles, who was only just over a year ago still Prince Charles, putting himself on the international stage as a leading public figure," said Ed Owens, a royal historian and author.

"We know that he's going to address things including his concerns around climate and environment, so he's playing to the crowd in that respect, but doing so on his own terms," he said.

Charles' visit is seen as the follow-up to moves by UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to reset relations between the two neighbours following tensions sparked by the UK's exit from the EU.

Macron had a particularly prickly relationship with Sunak's predecessor-but-one Boris Johnson. — AFP

Slovakia struggles with illegal migrants

Residents of Chlaba say large groups of illegal migrants have been traipsing through their tiny border village in southern Slovakia every day in the past few weeks after fording a local river or crossing a railway bridge from neighbouring Hungary.

The migrants mostly arrive by night and do not intend to stay long as their final destination is usually Germany, but the uptick has stirred anxiety and calls for tighter border controls in Slovakia as it prepares for an election on September 30.

“They don’t want to live or work here, they are in transit, they rush through as they can,” said Jozsef Barta, 70.

Although he knew of no criminal incidents involving the migrants, he added: “People are scared to walk in the street.”

Renata Gregusova, manager of a foodstore where the migrants often drop by, said they ask locals to call the police and sit down by the road, waiting for the police van to take them to a detention centre. There, under a Slovak law, they can get a document registering their entry to the European Union.

“Somehow this (flow) should be limited... They should be checked to find out whether they were really forced to flee their country,” she said. Around three quarters of Slovaks want the next government to tighten rules against illegal migration, according to a poll by the AKO agency this month.

The SMER-SSD party of former prime minister Robert Fico, campaigning on an anti-immigrant platform, has urged Slovakia’s caretaker government to suspend Europe’s Schengen ‘open border’ rules and reinstate passport checks on the Hungarian border.

“The government lets in every illegal migrant. We know nothing about them, they have no documents, they make up names, dates of birth, but the government allows them to stay



Krisztina Than

The writer is Reuters Deputy Bureau Chief for Central & Eastern Europe

THE MIGRANTS MOSTLY ARRIVE BY NIGHT AND DO NOT INTEND TO STAY LONG AS THEIR FINAL DESTINATION IS USUALLY GERMANY, BUT THE UPTICK HAS STIRRED ANXIETY AND CALLS FOR TIGHTER BORDER CONTROLS IN SLOVAKIA AS IT PREPARES FOR AN ELECTION ON SEPTEMBER 30

here,” Fico told a news conference on Tuesday.

Opinion polls put Fico’s party ahead with about 20 per cent support, ahead of its main rival the liberal Progressivne Slovensko, but no party is expected to win an overall parliamentary majority.

The Slovak government says it is virtually impossible to seal the 655-km border with Hungary, though caretaker Prime Minister Ludovit Odor recently sent up to 500 soldiers to help police patrol the border and maintain order.

Last weekend, Odor visited the border crossing at Chlaba-Ipolydamasd, which has the second highest migrant detention rate with around 2,000 this year, and said police were trying to increase a sense of security in the local villages. The number of illegal migrants detained in Slovakia has increased ninefold from a year ago to more than 27,000 so far this year, the country’s interior ministry said.

Police discouraged Reuters from trying to speak with a group of migrants they had just rounded up, but the increased popularity of this route into western Europe appears linked to the Slovak law that allows Syrians and Afghans — deemed to be refugees fleeing war — to register.

This, experts say, gives them a measure of assurance that they cannot be deported from the EU and then they typically leave their detention centres and continue westwards, via Slovakia and the Czech Republic to Germany.

“For Slovak authorities, this is an administrative issue but it makes it worthwhile for migrants to divert from their standard route and make a stop in Slovakia,” said Marian Cehelnik who deals with migration at the People in Need NGO.

The migrants, predominantly young men from the Middle East and Afghanistan, have mostly come up via the so-called Balkan route, entering Hungary from Serbia despite a steel fence that Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban had built after the 2015 migration crisis that rocked Europe.

FOR BETTER PAY



National Health Service workers hold placards at a picket line outside University College Hospital in central London on Wednesday as thousands of medical consultants working in England for the country’s NHS went on strike over below-inflation pay offers and heavy workloads. – AFP

Fully replenishing the green climate fund

When the Green Climate Fund (GCF) was established a little over a decade ago, it was considered a potentially useful tool to support developing countries in the shift to climate-resilient and low-emission development pathways. Today, it is the world’s largest climate-dedicated fund, representing a significant share of the war chest for combating global warming. It must be adequately funded to succeed.

To continue financing ambitious climate action, the GCF will need traditional contributors to increase their pledges and new contributors to step forward during its second replenishment round, which is currently under way. It is no exaggeration to say that the GCF’s replenishment campaign is a test of the world’s commitment to fighting climate change; a successful outcome will help developed countries rebuild trust by showing that they understand the urgency of the crisis and that they can deliver on their commitments.

The two most recent United Nations Climate Change Conferences (COP26 and COP27) have shown that world leaders recognise the importance of limiting global warming to 1.5° Celsius. But the implementation challenge — highlighted at last year’s COP27 in Sharm el Sheikh, the Summit for a New Global Financing Pact in Paris in June, and this month’s Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi — is delivering



Mahmoud Mohieldin

The writer is a former Egyptian minister for investment, is Egypt’s High-Level Climate Champion for COP27 in Sharm el Sheikh



Vera Songwen

The writer is Chair of the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility, is a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and Co-Chair of the High-Level Expert Group on Climate Finance

the \$2.4 trillion that developing countries will need annually by 2030 to achieve this goal.

The developing world faces fierce headwinds in mitigating and adapting to climate change. During the past year, the United States and the European Union have announced massive subsidies to incentivise domestic clean-energy investments. These policies will likely lead to rapid advances in green technology. But, when coupled with rising interest rates and finance costs, they will also make it more difficult for the developing countries seeking to benefit from these innovations to attract capital.

Moreover, the total number of green bonds issued by developing countries fell between 2020 and 2022, while those issued in the West increased. And the widening renewables gap between developed and developing countries comes on top of a slowdown in clean-energy investments in 2022. Supply-chain disruptions are further harming emerging-market economies.

The war in Ukraine has also complicated the green transition by derailing some countries’ plans to phase out coal power and fossil fuels. Many other countries have revised their net-zero timelines and commitments, while the corporate sector has also revised its targets downward. Perhaps more importantly, owing to

record increases in food, fuel, and fertiliser prices (largely a byproduct of the war), interest-rate hikes, and unsustainable debt burdens, many developing countries have depleted their foreign-exchange reserves and lack the fiscal space to pursue their climate goals.

At the same time, climate change is driving ever more extreme and anomalous weather events, from cyclones in Southern Africa and Libya, to typhoons in East Asia and droughts in Latin America. If these events continue apace, an estimated 1.2 billion people could be displaced by 2050. Many developing countries are thus increasingly vulnerable to climate-related disasters through no fault of their own and have already started directing domestic resources to adaptation efforts.

The exponential increase in the scale and frequency of extreme weather, and the mounting costs associated with such events,

stands in stark contrast to the slow pace of the global response. This incongruence, coupled with a severe lack of financial instruments that do not generate debt, has diminished developing countries’ trust in the global financial architecture. While the developed world can spend billions on government subsidies and incentives to encourage the green transition at home, low-and middle-income countries suffer the most from delays in climate mitigation and adaptation globally. Even more unsettling is the flood of investment pouring into the fossil-fuel industry to expand operations globally.

Just Energy Transition Partnerships, launched at COP26, made headlines with the promise to funnel money from wealthy countries to the highest emitters in the developing world. Furthermore, COP27 had a similar impact with the establishment of a “loss and

damage fund” for developing countries facing the effects of climate change, as well as official calls to reform international financial institutions and to scale up funding for the GCF. But they have yet to deliver, and the global climate financing gap continues to widen as a result. As costs increase exponentially, the developing world is losing hope.

This trend, however, is not irreversible. The developed world and institutions like the GCF can take the initiative in three key areas to restore developing countries’ trust and shore up their climate resilience. For starters, developed countries must significantly increase funding for the GCF — the one international institution whose sole responsibility is to fight climate change. The GCF can do much more, especially by helping to build and implement country programmes and adaptation plans, and by enabling the delivery of emissions-reduction projects.

To leapfrog climate technologies, for example, developing countries need financing to adopt scalable adaptation and mitigation strategies. Moreover, investment in technology transfers can transform other sectors and industries — such as agriculture — in addition to fighting climate change.

sport

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Oman beach spikers defeat S Korea, Macau in Asian Games



Oman swimming squad



Oman shooting squad

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 20

Oman beach spikers are hoping high at the underway 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, as the Sultanate of Oman beach volleyball teams A and B registered opening victories.

The Oman Team B commenced their Asian campaign on Wednesday with a winning note as they edged Macau 2-0. The team comprising Nouh al Jalboobi and Mazin al Hashmi ended the first half at 21-9 with 12 points lead while the deciding set finished at 21-17. Oman Team B are grouped with Iran 'A', Macau 'B' and Tajikistan.

Oman 'A' pair of Ahmed al Hosni and Haitham al Shuraiqi started their matches in Asian

Games strongly with a 2-0 victory over South Korea. The Oman team won the first set at 21-8 while the following set ended at 21-10.

Oman 'A' are clubbed with Kazakhstan 'A', East Timor and South Korea 'B'.

In their second match, Oman 'A' lost to Kazakhstan 'A' 2-1. Kazakhstan won the first set 21-16. The Oman spikers bounced back strongly in the following set to win it at 21-15. In the deciding set, the Kazakh pair managed to benefit from Oman team mistakes to convert into points and finish the set with four points gap at 15-9.

Oman's Ahmed and Haitham will play a vital game on Thursday against East Timor while Oman 'B' pair of Nouh al

Jalboobi and Mazin al Hashmi will take on Iran 'A' in a strong encounter. The two toppers from all the eight groups will advance to the knockout stage starting from last 16 round.

Post the match, Oman's Mazin al Hashami said that the victory against Macau was very crucial for the team specially in the beginning of the tournament. "Our full focus is on today's assignment against Iran and we hope to defeat them to move into the next level of the tournament. Myself and teammate Nouh will deliver our top technical performance to secure slot in the last 16," he added.

ISSA TAKES PART IN TORCH RELAY

On the other hand, Oman's flag

will be raised on Thursday at the Olympic Village of the Asian Games. The head of Oman's delegation, Taha al Kishry, will attend the ceremony in presence of Oman chef de mission and some athletes.

Oman's Olympic swimmer Issa al Adawi took part in the torch relay at Hangzhou city in China. He was the torch bearer from the Omani contingent. The official opening ceremony of the Asian Games will be held on Saturday and Oman's delegation will take part in the ceremony.

Oman's delegation comprised 44 athletes in this Asian Games and will be competing in seven sports namely athletics, weightlifting, aquatics (swimming), sailing, shooting, hockey and beach volleyball.



Issa al Adawi takes part in Asian Games torch relay.

Al Seeb secure third straight victory in Omantel League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 20

Al Seeb continued their winning streak by securing third consecutive victory in the Omantel League (OL) by blanking Al Rustaq 2-0 at the Al Rustaq Complex Stadium.

The first half of the match witnessed a cautious approach from both teams, with a relative advantage for Al Seeb, as they attempted to breach Al Rustaq penalty area several times.

In the 16th minute, Al Seeb striker Abdulaziz al Muqbali had a close call as he aimed for the left post of Al Rustaq's goalkeeper.

Al Seeb managed to score the first goal with a wonderful shot from outside the penalty area by Ali al Busaidi in the 30th minute.

Then, Al Seeb continued to dominate the first half, with Al Rustaq retreating back and relying on counterattacks.

At the end of the first half, Al Seeb had several opportunities that were not exploited properly, to end the first half 1-0.

In the second half, Al Rustaq made efforts to regain momentum, but Al Seeb's



Al Seeb players celebrate during the Omantel League match.

organised defence thwarted their attempts. Al Seeb solidified their lead with a second goal, skillfully headed in by Hamad al Amri in the 51st minute.

Al Rustaq made strategic substitutions, attempting to turn

the tide, but Al Seeb's resilience prevailed.

Al Seeb had multiple opportunities to widen the gap, yet Al Rustaq's goalkeeper stood firm, denying any further goals. Al Rustaq tried to reduce



Al Seeb and Al Rustaq players in action.

the score and led a number of attacks, but they were unable to threaten Al Seeb goal. Mohsin al Ghassani missed the third goal by shooting a weak ball that the Al Rustaq goalkeeper was able to easily save. The two teams

continued their attempts until the final whistle by the referee.

With this result Al Seeb, led by their Brazilian coach Jorvan Vieira, were able to achieve the full mark in the league, securing second place with nine points

from three matches and has a postponed match.

On the other hand, Al Rustaq failed to break the series of draws, and are in ninth place with three points from three draws and a defeat.

Ronaldo helps Al Nassr to historic ACL win in Iran



Al Nassr's Cristiano Ronaldo in action with Persepolis' Hossein Kanan Majid Asgaripour during the Asian Champions League match at Azadi Stadium, Tehran. — Reuters

TEHRAN: Cristiano Ronaldo enjoyed a winning debut in the Asian Champions League as he helped Al Nassr to a 2-0 victory against 10-man Persepolis in Iran on Tuesday night.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner, who has five Uefa Champions League titles to his name, captained the Saudi Arabian side to an opening three points in Group E. The match at the Azadi Stadium in Tehran was played without fans after the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) upheld a one-game ban for Persepolis supporters dating back to 2021.

That clearly helped Nassr, who grabbed both goals in the second half against the two-time runners-up, through a Danial Esmailifar own goal and a fine strike by

defender Mohammed Qassem.

It marked the first time a Saudi club played in Iran since 2016, after the AFC announced a "ground-breaking agreement" earlier this month between the two countries' federations.

Ronaldo, 38, was heavily involved throughout, twice going close in the first half. His initial chance — a powerful, close-range header — was sent straight at Persepolis goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand which left Ronaldo beating the post in frustration.

Nassr's hopes grew considerably at the beginning of the second half, when Persepolis midfielder Milad Sarlak was given a second yellow card, this time for appearing to stamp on Ronaldo's boot.

Replays showed it was

unintentional, the contact minimal.

Ronaldo played a key role in Nassr's opener just after the hour, the Portuguese instigating the move that led to Abdulrahman Ghareeb's blocked shot cannoning off Persepolis full-back Esmailifar and nestling in the net. Ten minutes later, Nassr left-back Mohammed Qassem broke down the left and thumped his shot high past Beiranvand to double the visitors' advantage and secure the points.

INCHEON WIN

In the group's other match, Iran's Istiklol were held to a goalless draw in Dushanbe by Qatari heavyweights Al Duhail. In Group A, 2003 winners Al Ain secured an impressive 3-0 victory at Pakhtakor in Tashkent, while Turkmenistan

side Ahal defeated Saudi opponents Al Fayha 1-0 at home to record only a second win in the competition.

In the East Asian side of the draw, South Korea's Incheon United opened their Group G account with a 4-2 win over J League champions Yokohama F Marinos in Japan.

As a result, Incheon sit on three points alongside Chinese Super League side Shandong Taishan, who were made to work for their 3-1 victory in Manila over Kaya-FC Iloilo of the Philippines.

In Group I, South Korean champions, and 2020 Asian Champions League winners, Ulsan Hyundai won at home over Thailand's BG Pathum United 3-1, while Japan's Kawasaki Frontale saw off hosts Johor Darul Ta'zim 1-0 in Malaysia. — AFP

Japan beat Qatar to launch bid for football gold

HANGZHOU, China: Japan began their bid for a first Asian Games men's football gold since 2010 with a 3-1 win over Qatar on Wednesday, as Syria and Afghanistan pulled out.

Japan were cruising 2-0 at half-time after goals by Teppei Yachida and Kotaro Uchino, before Qatar hit back in the 79th minute through substitute Abdulla al Sulaiti.

But just as the Qataris threatened to grab a point in the group-round match, defender Taichi Yamasaki popped up to make the game safe for Japan in the closing minutes.

The Games in the eastern Chinese city of Hangzhou do not officially open until Saturday, but several sports are already under way.

On Tuesday, the first day of action, South Korea launched their quest for a third men's football gold in a row with a 9-0 demolition of Kuwait.

The men's football competition has been hit by withdrawals, however, with Afghanistan and Syria pulling out on Wednesday from Group C.

That means group opponents Hong Kong and Uzbekistan are



Japan's Taichi Yamasaki (C) celebrates after scoring a goal during the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games football match between Japan and Qatar at the Xiaoshan Sports Centre Stadium in Hangzhou, China's eastern Zhejiang province. — AFP

into the last 16 without kicking a ball.

India were thrashed 5-1 by hosts China on Tuesday but coach Igor Stimac said he was just pleased to be able to field a team.

"I'm happy because I see that some teams pulled out at the last minute (because) they couldn't

get enough players," said the former international defender for Croatia.

"It's a big problem for the whole tournament now."

The Asian Games are outside FIFA's international window so clubs are not compelled to release players.

Asian Games football teams are made up of under-23 squads but they can have three overage players.

Football, beach volleyball, cricket, modern pentathlon, rowing, sailing and volleyball will all take place at the Games on Thursday. —AFP

Muscat International Unity Youth Cup from October 12



Chuck Martini addresses the press conference.

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, SEPT 20

Muscat International Unity Youth Cup, a brainchild of Chuck Martini under his Premier Sports company, will see top football academies from Oman and GCC countries strive for excellence in Muscat.

The youth tournament for boys and girls will be a three-day affair starting on October 12 at the Cheltenham International School grounds.

The group stages will continue on October 13 at Cheltenham and the finals of the different age-group categories will be held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on October 14.

"This is a football festival for children training under different academies in Oman and the GCC countries like UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait. The tournament is run in cooperation with the Oman Football Association (OFA) and comes under the Fifa grassroots development programme," the owner of Muscat Football Academy said during a press conference at Grand Hormuz Hotel to unveil the details of the new tournament.

The former Moroccan international said it was delight to get approval from the OFA.

"The tournament is being launched with the close cooperation and support from the OFA. The finals of the different age categories will be staged at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex with a spectacular closing ceremony," Martini said.

He recalled the crucial support from OFA General-Secretary Mohammed al Yahmadi and the OFA technical director Sghaier Zouita.

The OFA officials are expected to be present at the tournament to monitor the standards of grassroots level football in Oman, Martini added.

The OFA will provide the referees and match officials along with other technical assistance for the tournament.

TOP ACADEMIES

The top-notch academies from the GCC like Manchester City, Juventus, Paris Saint Germain (PSG), Barcelona and Evolution Qatar have confirmed their attendance for the Muscat International Unity Cup.

Most of the Oman academies are expected to participate with the likes of Muscat Football Academy, Juventus, PSG, Junior Stars, Algeria Academy, Alfa Academy, Brazil Academy and Rio Academy Salalah.

"This tournament has the approval of Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and it will be an annual event. We expect a lot more participation of teams after today's launch. Overall we expect 15 to 16 academies to field teams in different age categories like under-9, under-11, under-13, under-15 and under-17."

It will be an 8-a-side team format for lower age groups and 9-a-side for under-15, while under-17 will field 11 players with Fifa regulations.

"Oman has got wonderful footballing talent according to the head coaches of the different academies here. The football academies have already contributed a good number of players to the national and the club teams in Oman and outside."

The MFA owner said: "The event will bring in hundreds of players and their parents from the neighbouring countries and we are committed to make it a top-class event. All the participating teams will be put up in one hotel, Grand Hormuz, and we are in talks with Mwasalat for transportation of teams to the venues."

Martini called on all Oman academies to come and cheer for the local academies.

"This is a rare opportunity for the children to showcase their talent in the highly competitive matches at some of the top facilities in the country. Exciting prizes including special trophies and individual awards are awaiting the top-placed teams," he concluded.

Alvarez saves Man City blushes

MBAPPE HELPS PSG TO OPENING WIN,
BARCA FLEX MUSCLES



Manchester City's Julian Alvarez celebrates scoring their first goal. – Reuters

PARIS: Manchester City overcame an early scare to get their Champions League defence off to a solid start on Tuesday but nine-man Celtic endured a rough night in Rotterdam.

Barcelona cruised past Antwerp and Kylian Mbappe helped Paris-Saint Germain to an opening win on a breathless beginning to the group stage of Europe's top club competition.

Newcastle returned to the high table of European football for the first time in two decades with a battling goalless draw against AC Milan at the San Siro and Lazio grabbed an equaliser deep in injury time to hold Atletico Madrid.

In Manchester, Pep Guardiola's City were stunned when Red Star's Osman Bukari opened the scoring in first half stoppage time. But Julian Alvarez continued his sparkling early season form by levelling just two minutes after the break.

The Argentine then got some help from Red Star goalkeeper Omri Glazer as he flapped at Alvarez's free-kick to allow the ball to fly into the far corner.

Rodri rounded off a 3-1 win with a composed finish 17 minutes from time.

"If we scored two goals early in the beginning it would've been completely different," said Guardiola, who was frustrated at his side's finishing.

"Having 22 (first-half) shots on goal means you are playing really good. It has to be the responsibility of the people in front to score the goals."

City are next away to RB Leipzig, who share top place in Group E after a 3-1 win at Swiss champions Young Boys.

Mohamed Simaken earned the distinction of scoring the

first goal of the group stages with the 2023/24 competition only three minutes old.

The French-born defender's header put Leipzig into a lightning lead in Berne but Elia levelled for the Swiss hosts before Xaver Schlager and Benjamin Sesko wrapped up the win for the Austrian visitors.

In Catalonia, Joao Felix struck twice as Barcelona flexed their muscles with a crushing 5-0 win over Royal Antwerp to show their determination to be considered among Europe's elite once again.

After consecutive humiliating group stage eliminations, Barcelona are desperate to go deep in this season's competition, last winning it eight years ago.

Felix shone for the Spanish champions on a stroll on a warm night in the Catalan capital, helped on their way by an own goal, with Robert Lewandowski and Gavi also scoring. That lifted them top of Group H from Porto, 3-1 winners over Shakhtar Donetsk.

Barca's victory followed a 5-0 thrashing of Real Betis on Saturday, leading coach Xavi

Hernandez to say: "I think these last two games are the best level we have shown with me as coach — it's the path to follow."

‘ALMOST PERFECT’

At Parc des Princes, PSG may have lost Neymar and Lionel Messi over the summer but they held on to Mbappe who set them up for a 2-0 victory over Borussia Dortmund.

The French champions went ahead four minutes after the break when Mbappe scored a spot-kick awarded for a Niklas Sulele handball.

Achraf Hakimi added a memorable second, and PSG could have won the Group F encounter by a far more handsome margin in the end.

"It was an almost perfect evening," purred new coach

Luis Enrique.

PSG's next date is at Newcastle, whose manager Eddie Howe was proud of his side's dogged return to the competition against seven-time European kings AC Milan.

Howe was the happier of the two managers after taking a point from the clash at the San Siro as his team were mostly on the back foot against last season's losing semifinalists.

"Definitely pride in result and the performance and the mentality shown," Howe told reporters. — AFP

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RESULTS ON TUESDAY:

GROUP E

In Rotterdam

Feyenoord (NED) 2 (Stengs 45+2, Jahanbakhsh 76) Celtic (SCO) 0

In Rome

Lazio (ITA) 1 (Provedel 90+5) Atletico Madrid (ESP) 1 (Barrios 29)

GROUP F

In Milan

AC Milan (ITA) 0 Newcastle United (ENG) 0

In Paris

Paris Saint-Germain (FRA) 2 (Mbappe 49-pen, Hakimi 58) Borussia Dortmund (GER) 0

GROUP G

In Berne

Young Boys (SUI) 1 (Elia 33) RB Leipzig (AUT) 3 (Simaken 3, Schlager 74, Sesko 90+2)

In Manchester

Manchester City (ENG) 3 (Alvarez 47, Rodri 73) Red Star Belgrade (SRB) 1 (Bukari 45)

GROUP H

In Barcelona

Barcelona (ESP) 5 (Felix 11, 66, Lewandowski 19, Bataille 22-og, Gavi 54) Antwerp (BEL) 0

In Hamburg, Germany

Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 1 (Kelsy 13) Porto (POR) 3 (Galeno 8, 15, Taremi 29)





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OPAZ approves 2024 plan of affiliated zones



OPAZ BoD meet at their headquarters in Muscat.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 20

The Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) held its third meeting for the year 2023, chaired by Dr Ali bin Masoud Al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Board, at OPAZ headquarters in Muscat.

During the meeting, the Board of Directors approved the general framework of OPAZ’ annual plan for 2024 and its affiliated zones, which will be submitted to the Council of Ministers.

The meeting touched on a number of subjects, including the regulation of electricity sector in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) between the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Zones and the Public Services Regulatory Authority.

The Board also approved unifying usufruct fees for lands allocated to companies providing services in SEZAD and directed OPAZ Management to study

the possibility of applying the same in all affiliated zones, in coordination with the zones’ management.

The Board of Directors, further, discussed the requests submitted to extend the exemption period from paying usufruct fees for some local companies in the zones supervised by OPAZ and actions were taken accordingly.

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) was established as per the provision of the Royal Decree No. (105/2020), issued on August 18, 2020.

OPAZ oversees the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, free zones in Sohar, Salalah and Al Mazunah and any other special economic zone or free zone. It also oversees the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) as per the provision of the Royal Decree No. (53/2022), and Khazaen Economic City, as per the provision of the Royal Decree No. (44/2023) establishing the City.

Oman tackles water scarcity with innovative irrigation techniques

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, SEPT 20

To address potential water scarcity challenges, the Sultanate of Oman – represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources — is implementing a number of projects to improve the efficiency of water use in the agricultural sector.

One key initiative Al Aflaj Agricultural Development Project, which aims to replace traditional flood irrigation methods with modern irrigation systems, such as drip irrigation and sprinkler irrigation.

These systems are more efficient in their use of water, and they can help to save up to 70 per cent of water, an official source of the Ministry told the *Observer*.

The government is also providing technical and financial support to farmers who want to convert to modern irrigation systems. The Ministry provides engineering designs for irrigation systems, as well as tables of quantities and schedules for irrigation, the official said.

In addition to modern irrigation systems, the government is also exploring the use of other innovative water conservation techniques.

For example, the government is developing guidelines for the use of treated wastewater and seawater for irrigation.

These waters are not suitable



The Al Najd agricultural farm in seen in this illustration image.

ONE KEY INITIATIVE AL-AFLAJ AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, WHICH AIMS TO REPLACE TRADITIONAL FLOOD IRRIGATION METHODS WITH MODERN IRRIGATION SYSTEMS, SUCH AS DRIP IRRIGATION AND SPRINKLER IRRIGATION.

for human consumption, but they can be used to irrigate crops. Importantly, the government’s efforts to improve water efficiency in the agricultural sector are essential to ensuring food security in Oman.

By using innovative irrigation techniques, the government can help to conserve water and

increase agricultural production.

Key initiatives currently under implementation:

- Al-Aflaj Agricultural Development Project: This project is being implemented in the Al-Aflaj region, which is a Unesco World Heritage Site. The project aims to improve the efficiency of water use in the region’s traditional falaj irrigation system.
- The falaj system is a complex network of underground canals that has been used for centuries to irrigate crops.
- Technical and financial support project to convert traditional flood irrigation systems on well lands into modern

irrigation systems.

This project provides financial assistance to farmers who want to convert to modern irrigation systems. The government also provides technical support, such as engineering designs and irrigation schedules.

- Issuing controls and instructions for the use of tertiary treated wastewater and salt water in irrigating agricultural crops.

This project aims to regulate the use of treated wastewater and seawater for irrigation. The government has issued guidelines that specify the quality standards for these waters and the crops that can be irrigated with them.

Oman excels in aquatic food production and exports: FAO

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 20

In the recently published Fishery and Statistics Yearbook for 2020 by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, Oman’s thriving fishery industry and impressive statistics have garnered attention.

The yearbook provides insights into Oman’s fishery sector, including its per capita consumption, production, exports, imports, and employment figures.

According to the statistics, Oman’s per capita consumption of aquatic food reached 30.9 kilogrammes in 2019, reflecting the country’s significant reliance on fishery products.

In 2020, Oman’s total fishery production recorded an impressive figure, with 1,307 tonnes of aquaculture production and a substantial capture of 793,419 tonnes.

This showcases the country’s

commitment to both aquaculture and sustainable fishing practices.

The value of Oman’s fishery exports for 2020 was reported at \$411,375,000, highlighting the nation’s strong position in the international market.

Conversely, imports amounted to \$64,827,000, indicating a trade surplus and a self-sufficient domestic market.

Additionally, Oman engaged in the export and import of algae, with exports valued at \$35,000 and imports at \$932,000, further diversifying its aquatic product trade.

Among the various species, Indian oil sardines were the primary items of aquatic animals, contributing a significant share of 430,130 tonnes, which accounted for 54.1% of the total aquatic production.

Yellowfin tuna followed with 68,578 tonnes, representing 8.6% of the total, while longtail tuna contributed 27,206 tonnes, comprising 3.4% of the total



Vendors prepare the fish for display at a local market in Muscat.

aquatic production.

Oman’s fishery industry has experienced substantial growth over the years, as evident from the historical production figures.

The country has consistently increased its average production, with annual averages of 111,000 tonnes in the 1980s, 117,000

sector accounted for 1.1% of the total global production, solidifying its position among the top 30 fishery producers worldwide.

The report also sheds light on the state of Oman’s fishing vessels and employment figures. In 2020, the number of motorised fishing vessels stood at 25,206, while non-motorised vessels amounted to 9,091. This emphasises the industry’s modernisation and adoption of advanced technology.

Moreover, the fishery sector played a significant role in providing employment opportunities, with a workforce of 58,710 individuals in 2020, contributing to the country’s economic development.

Oman’s net export of aquatic animals displayed substantial growth, reflecting the increasing demand for its products globally.

In 2019, the country’s net export value was reported at \$180 million, which surged to \$341 million in 2020, representing a

significant increase. This growth reaffirms Oman’s position as a leading exporter of high-quality aquatic products.

The Fishery and Statistics Yearbook 2020 by FAO underscores Oman’s achievements in the fishery sector, highlighting its robust production, expanding exports, and contribution to the global market.

The country’s commitment to sustainable fishing practices and investment in aquaculture have played a pivotal role in its success.

The FAO Yearbook of Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics, prepared by the Statistics Team of the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, offers a synthesis of the major trends in the fisheries and aquaculture sector. Statistics are presented in eight main thematic chapters, covering statistics of production (total, aquaculture, capture fisheries), employment, fleet, consumption and trade.

Mohsin Haider Darwish Automobiles launches brand-new showroom in Muscat

MUSCAT: Mohsin Haider Darwish Automobiles LLC (MHD), Oman's leading automotive distributor, is proud to launch its brand-new showroom for its iconic Stellantis brands including Jeep, Dodge, RAM, Alfa Romeo and its after-sales brand, Mopar.

The flagship showroom located in Al Hail North opened on Monday, September 18, under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat and in the presence of Madam Areej Mohsin Haider Darwish, Chairperson of Mohsin Haider Darwish - ACERE, Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, Chief Executive Officer of MHD Automobiles, and representatives from Stellantis.

The state-of-the-art showroom features a wide range of Stellantis models from high-end brands including Jeep, Dodge, RAM, and Alfa Romeo.

A one-stop destination for Stellantis customers, the showroom also includes convenient after-sales services such as car care and spare parts stations.

With the launch of this brand-new showroom, customers can now discover the popular Stellantis models and access professional expert advice from MHD's trained professionals. This showroom marks a new milestone for MHD as it recently became a distributor of Stellantis



MHD officials and guests during the opening ceremony.

in Oman, the world's fourth-largest car maker.

The strategic partnership between MHD Automobiles LLC and Stellantis saw iconic brands such as Jeep, Dodge, RAM and Alfa Romeo added to MHD's renowned portfolio of brands including MG, Jaguar, Land Rover, Jetour, INEOS, Hongqi and McLaren. Commenting on the launch of the flagship Stellantis showroom, Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO said: "We are thrilled to announce the launch of our brand-new showroom.

After becoming a Stellantis distributor in Oman, we were



The new showroom in Al Hail North.

determined to offer our customers access to a first-class destination where they could discover a wide range of Stellantis models.

This new showroom is indicative

of our commitment to providing the Omani market with access to world-class brands.

We worked closely with Stellantis to develop this unique

space bringing together modern features, high-end technology, and quality services for our valued customer."

Madam Areej Mohsin Haider Darwish, Chairperson added: "I am proud to see MHD Automobiles LLC expanding its leading position as an automobile distributor in Oman.

Responding to market demands, we were committed to opening a unique showroom for our Stellantis models as a testament to our innovative and forward-thinking approach for our valued customers in Oman."

Samir Cherfan, Chief Operating Officer at Stellantis Middle East and Africa stated: "Our partnership with Mohsin Haider Darwish Automobiles LLC has been instrumental in expanding our footprint in Oman.

Together, we are committed to delivering Best in Class Customer Experience, underpinned by both top-notch products and exceptional pre and after sales services.

This showroom embodies our mutual dedication to setting the highest standards for quality performance in the Omani market. Customers will have the unique opportunity to fully engage with the pioneering innovation that distinguishes each of our iconic brands."



Sulaiman al Hinai

OAB customers can digitally subscribe to OQGN's IPO

MUSCAT: Customers of Oman Arab Bank (OAB) will be able to digitally subscribe to Oman's largest Initial Public Offering (IPO) in history for OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), the exclusive operator of Oman's gas transportation system.

Starting from September 26, 2023 until October 9, 2023 and using the OAB mobile banking app, customers will be able to subscribe, place their orders and complete transactions conveniently from the comfort of their homes, offices or on-the-go, completely paperless, without needing to visit the branch.

Through the OAB app, customers can also apply for short-term loans to finance up to 50 per cent of their total IPO investment which expires on October 9, 2023.

Sulaiman al Hinai, General Manager and Head of Wholesale Banking Group at Oman Arab Bank said: "We are determined to make investing simpler, easier, more accessible and secure for our customers so they can reach their financial goals.

We take immense pride that we are able to contribute to Oman's economic diversification by providing seamless access to market opportunities through our mobile banking app."

He added, "At the heart of our operations lies a dedication to innovation, propelling us to do more and deliver greater value for our customers. We are committed to constantly keeping pace with the latest trends to enhance our offerings and provide the best possible service across all our channels."

OQ Gas Networks will float up to 49 per cent of its shares on the Muscat Stock Exchange. The IPO is a great investment opportunity for customers interested in growing their investment portfolios, fostering economic growth, market development and liquidity.

Bank Muscat opens new corporate branch in Duqm

MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision and continuous endeavours to provide high-quality banking services to customers across the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Muscat recently opened a new corporate banking branch in the Wilayat of Al Duqm.

The opening ceremony was held in the presence of Shaikh Bader Nasser al Farsi, Wali of Duqm, Ilham Murtadha al Hamid, General Manager, Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat, senior officials from the bank and customers.

The opening of the new branch is in line with the emergence of Duqm as a key business and industrial hub in the Sultanate of Oman and also the future prospects for rapid development



Bank officials and guests pose for a photo during the opening of the new corporate branch in Duqm.

in this strategic part of Oman. The new corporate banking branch features state-of-the-art technology and the highest levels of security and safety required for various banking transactions.

It is characterised by a spacious

and comfortable design and layout, and is manned by well qualified and experienced Omani cadres.

It will provide a wide range of banking products and services, including loans for global trade

services, project financing, debt financing through direct loans and syndicated loans.

Speaking on the occasion, Ilham Murtadha al Hamid, General Manager, Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "We are pleased to open our new corporate branch in the Wilayat of Al Duqm, which is one of the most important upcoming cities in the region and currently witnessing unprecedented economic growth.

Bank Muscat will be delighted to play its part in the enormous developments happening in Duqm, and will be offering a range of banking services and facilities to both government institutions and corporates in the Governorate of Al Wusta."

With the latest addition in

Duqm, the bank now has 5 Corporate Banking branches across the Sultanate of Oman including two branches in Muscat and one each in Suhar and Salalah.

Corporate banking branches offer a range of important services including corporate loans and capital financing to expand projects as well as bid bonds, performance bonds, advance payment bonds, financial bonds, and performance guarantee bonds.

The bank also provides letter of credit services for the purchase of equipment and machinery, standby letters of credit, and a range of other services to corporates and institutions.

The new branch will be open on all weekdays from 8am to 2pm.

Ominvest exchanges governance insights in Salalah forum

MUSCAT: Oman International Development and Investment Co SAOG (Ominvest), the leading investment company in the Sultanate of Oman listed in the Muscat Stock Exchange, participated in an insightful Forum titled 'Strategic Project Management within the Concept of Good Governance' organised by the References for Conferences and Seminars Center, Salalah in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour.

The forum served as a platform for governance experts and professionals within the Sultanate of Oman and abroad to engage and exchange experiences and ideas, and further explore progressive approaches to governance across different industries and sectors.

The Forum also touched upon the effects of good governance in relation to strategic project management and sustainable development.

Sarah Lashkoo, Chief Legal Officer and Company's Secretary at Ominvest, was the natural choice to represent Ominvest at this Forum as an accredited governance expert, in addition to her extensive experience in the governance domain.

Sarah shared Ominvest's experience that stems from its pledge to uphold the highest standards of governance and transparency in all its investments and operations.

Sarah Lashkoo commented that "The forum was a chance to showcase the company's

experience in the field of governance from a publicly listed investment company perspective.

We shared our experiences, success stories and best practices in the investment-decision process in terms of governance, ESG and sustainability."

Lashkoo added "It was a great opportunity for us to actively participate in the Forum and exchange governance knowledge with a diverse group of specialists and experts. We believe that engaging in such dynamic platforms is instrumental for all stakeholders."

On the occasion, Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Balushi, Group CEO, Ominvest, commented that the company's vision is focused on enhancing its presence as a

leading investment company that works to invest wisely in terms of governance in various sectors, locally and abroad.

"Ominvest is committed to maintaining governance and ESG standards and is determined to implement them across its businesses, due to their importance in maximising gains and achieving sustainability for all stakeholders as well as customers" he explained.

He added that Sarah Lashkoo's participation in this forum confirms the company's dedication to developing the skills of its people, through participation in various events.

This further reaffirms the Company's commitment to empower women and see them excel in all their endeavours.



Ominvest headquarters in Muscat.



Key study sees potential for expansion of Oman's LNG capacity

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 20

A key study commissioned by OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) — the wholly state-owned operator of the nation's gas transportation system — has concluded that gas demand in the Sultanate of Oman is anticipated to remain stable over the next 20 years, with feedgas supply for LNG exports constituting an important source of this demand.

The study was undertaken by Gas Strategies Ltd, a UK-based global gas and LNG commercial advisory firm, as part of a market review of the natural gas industry and the gas transportation network in Oman.

The upbeat outlook for gas demand bolsters OQGN's positioning as the sole transporter of gas over the next couple of decades, despite the changing dynamics of the energy landscape globally.

OQGN, part of OQ Group, is preparing to offer 49 per cent of its share capital for public subscription on the Muscat Stock Exchange from September 26, 2023. Summing up the high-level conclusions reached by Gas Strategies Ltd, OQGN stated: "Gas Strategies expects gas demand in Oman to remain stable over the next 20 years, with gas supply for LNG exports being an important foundation source of demand; diversification of gas demand across sectors and geographically across the country provide resilience to total gas demand and, accordingly, to the utilisation of the network on a regional basis."

In particular, the market consultant noted the potential for



The Oman LNG plant is seen in this illustration image.

the addition of a fourth LNG train to the 3-train gas liquefaction complex of Oman LNG at Qalhat in light of sustained LNG demand growth in key global markets.

Oman LNG, as the biggest consumer of natural gas, accounted for a hefty 44 per cent share of the 39.4 billion cubic metres (bcm) transported by OQGN in 2022.

Given its track record in securing global markets for its LNG output, combined with more recent investments in debottlenecking and capacity upgrades, Oman LNG is strongly tipped to secure a further extension of its operating licence beyond 2024 when the current licence is due expire.

Under new binding term sheets signed by the company since the start of this year, a sizable chunk of its future LNG capacity, for delivery starting

from 2025 and 2026, has already been committed to an array of long-term international offtakers.

Given Oman LNG's strong positioning, and coupled with upbeat projections of buoyant global LNG demand for the foreseeable future, Gas Strategies has underlined the potential for a further ramp-up of domestic LNG capacity.

"There is potential to further expand the plant with an additional liquefaction train," said OQGN, citing the market consultant.

"Assuming that a positive final investment decision (FID) is taken on a fourth train at the time of the renewal of the operating arrangements, that would likely result in the new train beginning production in 2029 at the earliest.

"Gas Strategies' view is that Asian LNG demand can be

expected to grow at a 3.4-per cent CAGR between 2023 and 2043, providing strong support for increased Omani LNG production.

"However, this has to be balanced with an overall plateauing of global LNG demand (which Gas Strategies expects to occur in the late 2030s) and competition from new Qatari and US liquefaction plants.

"As a result, Gas Strategies has included the expansion at Oman LNG in the High Case demand scenario only, where it supports an additional 5.8 BCM/yr of gas demand," it further noted.

Other opportunities for LNG productions include small-scale LNG bunkering projects, such as the Marsa LNG initiative of TotalEnergies.

Marsa LNG, which is awaiting a Final Investment Decision, will be sized at 1.15 mtpa.



Trade delegates from Oman and Iran discuss trade cooperation.

Oman and Iran discuss joint trade, economic and investment cooperation

MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), met yesterday in his office Abbas Aliabadi, Minister of Industry, Minerals and Trade of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and his accompanying delegation.

During the meeting, they discussed ways to enhance economic, trade and investment relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran and increase trade and investment exchange between them.

During the meeting, Al Yousef discussed the historic visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Islamic Republic of Iran and the priorities that were discussed during the leaders' meeting.

For his part, Abbas Aliabadi stressed that the Sultanate of Oman is a friend and strategic partner of the Islamic Republic of Iran, explaining that the two countries have great potential for joint cooperation due to their geographical location.

The two sides discussed the exchange of investment

ABBAS ALIABADI STRESSED THAT THE SULTANATE OF OMAN IS A FRIEND AND STRATEGIC PARTNER OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, EXPLAINING THAT THE TWO COUNTRIES HAVE GREAT POTENTIAL FOR JOINT COOPERATION DUE TO THEIR GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION.

opportunities and information that will hopefully contribute to attracting Iranian investors to invest in the sectors that the Sultanate of Oman focuses on in industry, tourism, mining, food security and logistics.

During the meeting, private sector projects in the two countries and increasing joint investments were also discussed.

The meeting was attended by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment Promotion for Trade and Industry, Ali Najafi, the Iranian Ambassador accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, and a number of officials from both sides. — ONA

Omani-British strategic advisory group holds second meeting

LONDON: The Omani-British Strategic Advisory Group concluded its second meeting of the year in London.

The meeting aimed at enhancing relations between the two countries and achieving the joint financial, investment and economic goals.

The Omani side was chaired by Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance and the General Supervisor of the National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability.

Meanwhile, the British side was chaired by Lord Gerry Grimstone.

Al Jashmi underlined the importance of the Advisory Group's role in identifying areas of cooperation between Oman and the United Kingdom.

He commended the progress made in various

areas of cooperation since its establishment, stressing the need for further efforts towards more successes.

The meeting discussed Oman's approach towards clean energy and achieving zero neutrality in 2050, in light of the two countries' approach to build a firm base for a sustainable economy.

The two sides touched on the cooperation mechanism to prepare for attending the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), scheduled to be held next November in the United Arab Emirates.

On the sidelines of the meetings, the Omani delegation went on tour of some financial institutions, such as the British Growth Fund and London Stock Exchange. — ONA



Omani and British delegates during their second meeting in London.

be'ah's role in achieving net zero in Oman

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik announced that Oman commits to achieving Net Zero by 2050.

According to the Sultanate of Oman's National Strategy for an Orderly Transition to Net Zero Report published in 2022, Oman is making great effort towards this goal. be'ah has been dedicated to creating a sustainable future for generations to come by focusing on a number of renewable initiatives.

be'ah is in the process of developing a Waste-to-Energy (WTE) plant in Barka that will treat 4,500 tonnes of municipal solid waste per day. The plant will generate 130-150 megawatts of electricity allowing the station to reduce the carbon footprint from the current total emissions of landfills within 35 years.

Additionally, be'ah in collaboration with Oman Cement Company, will work on reducing the pollution caused by cement manufacturing by using Refuse-Derived Fuel (RDF) which is produced by utilising municipal solid waste.

As part of the national effort, be'ah and OQ Trading (OQT) are collaborating on an emission reduction project that will be implemented in the waste management industry.



A dhow cruise is seen in the fjords of Musandam in Oman.

This partnership will allow the development of waste management practices aligned with international emission reduction standards.

It will also explore opportunities in waste management and waste-to-energy, including landfill rehabilitation for biogas and methane reduction projects.

The partnership supports Oman's decarbonisation and climate goals towards Net Zero by 2050, with a focus on also obtaining emission reduction credits. be'ah is also currently conducting a quantitative assessment of the Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) released into the atmosphere through its operations, to establish a baseline from the

beginning of 2020 till 2050 and to assess the GHG savings contribution of be'ah's future projects.

The outcome of the study will enable be'ah to formulate an effective sustainability/ESG (Environment, Social and Governance) strategy.

Additionally, it will enhance funding opportunities and support from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to implement climate mitigation and adaptation projects.

This project will contribute to supporting Oman's goals to meet its Paris Convention Agreement targets.

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) was

established in 2007 to support a cohesive plan laid out in a National Strategy Report in 2006 to promote proper waste management practices. This includes the effective use of resources, development of adequate infrastructure and implementation of sustainable goals to make a lasting impact on the country's future.

Headquartered in Muscat, be'ah is responsible for managing municipal, industrial and healthcare waste in the country, providing waste management services from collection to disposal to both private and public sectors. be'ah is committed to integrating the principles of a circular economy business model in a sustainable manner.

This commitment is exemplified throughout the company's operations, as well as its consistent communication with stakeholder groups at multiple levels to promote circular economy through capacity building and raising awareness in society at large, and the communities that it operates within including academia, Omani-owned SMEs, entrepreneurs, as well as engaging with international partners that bring global experience and innovation.

Intellectual property rights valuation under banking systems



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Intellectual property (IP) rights hold significant value in today's knowledge-based economy. It is essential to use different valuation methods for intangible assets than tangible ones. Banks play a crucial role in valuing IP rights and providing financial services to businesses and individuals who want to leverage their IP assets. Intellectual property rights refer to the legal rights granted to individuals or organisations for their inventions, creative works, or unique business models. These rights protect the creators' exclusive rights to use, sell, or license their IP assets. Valuation methodologies for various types of IP, including patents, trademarks, copyrights, and trade secrets, differ. Banks rely on accurate IP asset valuation to make informed lending decisions. Valuation

helps banks assess the collateral borrowers offer, determine creditworthiness, and appropriately price loans. Additionally, IP valuation assists in estimating the value of IP assets during mergers and acquisitions, allowing banks to assess risk and identify potential growth opportunities. The industry in which a company operates, its growth potential, and market demand for its IP assets significantly impact IP valuation. Technological advancements, market size, competition, and regulatory frameworks also affect IP's value and potential commercialisation. These factors shape the perception of the IP's future cash flows and determine its value. The strength and enforceability of IP protection laws influence

its valuation. Banks consider factors such as the age and scope of patent claims, renewal status, pending litigations, or potential infringement risks. Understanding the legal and regulatory landscape ensures that banks accurately assess the risks associated with IP assets. IP assets' market potential and profitability are crucial in their valuation. Banks consider market demand, licensing agreements, revenue generated, historical financial performance, and projected cash flows. Estimating the IP's earning potential assists in determining its value, ensuring that loans or investments are appropriately aligned with the asset's potential. The cost approach determines the value of IP rights based on the cost incurred to create, protect, or maintain the asset. It considers research and development

expenses, filing and legal fees, and ongoing maintenance costs. However, this method may only adequately capture the asset's worth if the market value exceeds the costs incurred. The market-based approach assesses the value of IP by comparing similar assets that have been sold or licensed in the market. It relies on transactions or licensing agreements to determine the asset's fair value. However, finding comparable IP assets can be challenging, especially for unique or niche inventions or creations. The income-based approach estimates the value of IP rights by capitalising on their expected future earnings. This approach considers projected cash flows, discount rates, risk factors, revenue streams, and valuable life. Banks can use

financial models like discounted cash flow analysis or royalty rate projections to determine the present value of expected future benefits. Accurate valuation of intellectual property rights is crucial for banks to assess the value of intangible assets under banking systems. Banks can make informed lending decisions and identify growth opportunities by considering industry and market factors, legal and regulatory aspects, and commercialisation potential. Understanding different valuation methods allows banks to select the most suitable approach for assessing IP rights. Accurate valuation ensures that IP assets are appropriately priced, enhancing financial stability and facilitating strategic capital allocation.

Tackling misinformation about vaccine on social media



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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI

both on positive or negative sides as usual with every topic that concerns the world. The good thing about such fabricated news is that there are special platforms that follow such news up to date and tell the whole story to convey the truth. Among these sites is the 'Takded' which means 'Verify' website in Arabic. His team conducted advanced research to validate the claim that the US Supreme Court is overturning mass vaccination. It turned out to be false and fabricated news. Through his follow-up of this topic, it became clear that the results of the research showed that the Supreme Court in the US had not recently issued any decision to abolish mass vaccination in this regard. It indicated that Kennedy was an American lawyer and not a senator, as was alleged by the prosecution. He previously addressed some misleading information related to the pandemic and vaccines through his accounts on social networking sites through tweets and publishing misleading and false information about vaccines. As for those whose names were mentioned at the beginning of this article, they had a great deal of history in talking about this pandemic and the vaccines against it, but this does not mean denying the plans of them and others to attempt to exterminate people, especially on the continent of Africa through spreading certain diseases that lead to their death. The goal is to reduce the world's population. It is not unlikely that such people and organisations will continue to play major roles and manipulate genetic material to reduce the control and prevention of epidemic diseases in the future. What people know about diseases is that the chance of the virus spreading anywhere increases in the absence of sufficient doses of antibiotics and vaccines, but as a result of the abundance of fabricated news, people today are confused about whether to take these antibiotics and vaccines or to avoid taking them.

Social media plays many roles in conveying different messages. Some of them are creating chaos and confusion in societies due to exposing to the policies of the countries. Fabricated news sometimes plays a major role in conveying contradictory messages to peoples and societies, which lead to quick responses from the concerned authorities to deny that news. Among the fabricated news that was published on social media recently the one concerned the Supreme Court in America. The news came that the court had cancelled the comprehensive vaccination decision for the 'Covid-19' epidemic. This news published in the French language text saying that a number of businessmen, including Bill Gates and Dr Anthony Fauci — an infectious disease expert in the US in addition to Big Pharma, have lost a lawsuit before the Court, and failed to prove that all of their vaccines over the past 32 years were safe in the health field. This fabricated letter indicated that the lawsuit had been filed by a group of scientists led by Senator Robert F Kennedy Jr, who said that it is necessary to avoid the new Covid vaccine at all costs, since it is unsafe and cause changes in the genetic material of the vaccine recipient. This fabricated news was published on a number of social websites and applications. Many comments on the issue are still continued by bloggers,



BEN WINCK
The writer is a US columnist at Breakingviews.

Some economic yardsticks, like inflation and unemployment, are evergreen. Others, like "gross national product," the predecessor to GDP, have expiration dates. Yield curve "inversions" belong to the latter group. The differences between yields of US Treasuries of various maturities have been regarded as foolproof predictors of recessions for decades. This time, they have failed spectacularly, and closer study reveals several weaknesses in past performance as well. It's time investors and economists look past the US bonds' faulty forecasts. The yield curve plots the yields on government bonds of different maturities. Typically, the curve slopes upward as maturities increase since investors require a higher yield as compensation for the risk of holding a bond for longer. In rare circumstances, though, yields on long-dated bonds fall below those of short-dated ones and the curve slopes downward or, in traders' parlance, "inverts." That's been the case in the United States for more than a year. The yield on two-year Treasuries climbed above that for 10-year government bonds in July 2022, causing a closely watched "two-ten inversion." The reversal is the longest-lasting since 1980, and the spread between the two yields widened the most since 1981 in July. Investors interpret these signs as bad omens because they reflect fears that near-term economic risks exceed the dangers of holding longer-

New economic rules shatter US bonds' crystal ball



Illustration shows plastic letters arranged to read 'Inflation' are placed on US dollar banknote. — Reuters

dated debt. At first sight, they are right: Yield curve inversions have been a consistent predictor of future downturns. Every modern US recession has been preceded by an inversion. The yield curve has only shown one false positive, in 1960, and only because the following slowdown wasn't dramatic enough to constitute a recession, according to the San Francisco Federal Reserve. Yet on closer inspection, the curve's predictive powers aren't as good as they seem. Inversions have preceded downturns by an average of 19 months, leaving plenty of time for unrelated events to spark a recession. That's exactly what happened in 2019; the yield curve inverted that September, well before Covid-19 and the resulting economic shock hit the US in March 2020. There's also no evidence that yield curve inversions predict stocks will underperform Treasuries, according to a 2019 working paper by academics Eugene F. Fama and Kenneth R. French. **BAD TO WORSE** The yield curve's limitations as a crystal ball have been laid bare by the latest economy cycle. Aggressive interest rate hikes by the Fed pushed short-term yields higher while fears of a recession down the line sent yields on longer-maturity debt lower. Yet the

past 12 months turned received wisdom on its head, as inflation cooled to 3.7 per cent and joblessness stayed historically low. Higher interest rates, it seems, are doing little harm to economic growth, and a growing number of economists are ditching their recession forecasts. Inflation expectations may have blunted the yield curve's predictive strength. While Americans' expectations for one-year inflation generally moved with the official growth rate in consumer prices, their three-year expectations were far more muted, according to the New York Fed. By August 2022, households' median three-year expected inflation rate was back to pre-crisis lows, suggesting most had concluded the price surge would be temporary. Such thinking would therefore push short-dated yields higher while leaving longer-maturity bonds relatively unaffected. The latest reversal also has just as much to do with the past as it does with the future. Interest rates sat near zero for much of the 2010s. As such, the rate-hike campaign that the Fed began in March 2022 lifted short-term yields. Strong demand for the safety of longer-dated Treasuries, meanwhile, pulled late-maturity yields lower. Those two dynamics have

made inversions a less reliable recession indicator over the last two business cycles, Morgan Stanley US Chief Economist Ellen Zentner said last year. **BENDING THE CURVE** The Fed's rate hikes aren't the only monetary policy tool influencing the yield curve. The central bank bought nearly \$2.4 trillion of Treasury bonds from 2008 to 2014 in a bid to lower long-term interest rates and aid the economy in the wake of the financial crisis. The onset of Covid-19 prompted the Fed to buy another \$3 trillion of Treasuries. Much of those purchases were focused on longer-maturity debt, increasing prices for those notes and weighing down yields. The central bank has since started to let its Treasury holdings run off its balance sheet. But its bond buying, also known as quantitative easing, had led the bond market to enter 2022 with a much flatter yield curve, and therefore a lower bar for which to reach a two-ten inversion. The European Central Bank made a similar argument, with regards to the euro zone's bond buying, in the minutes of its latest policy meeting, noting that the effect of its bond purchases "could reduce the predictive content of the slope of the yield curve for economic growth". — Reuters

Classifieds

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ACTOR & MUSISIAN

Canadian actor and musician Aliocha Schneider, poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP



FOOD

A chef prepares a Crayfish dish in the kitchen at Silo, a zero-waste restaurant, in London. — AFP



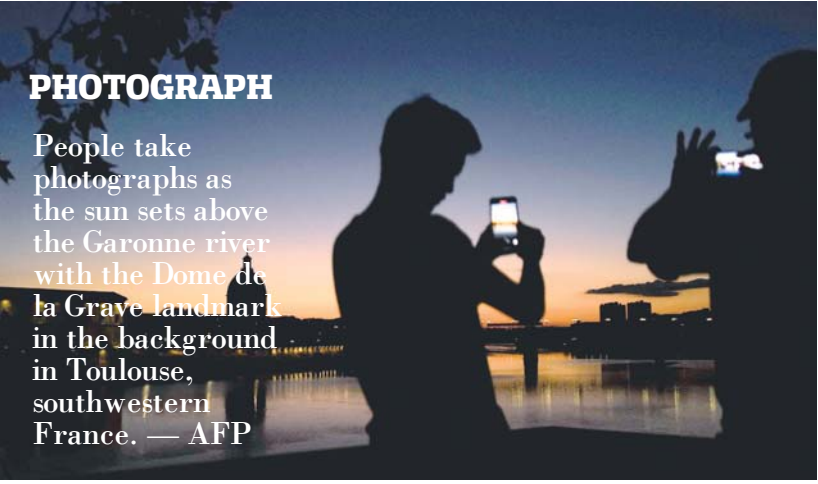
MUSIC

Algerian singer Rachid Taha performs on stage during the 34th Trans Musicales Music Festival. —AFP



FASHION

A model walks the runway at the Antonio Marras fashion show during the Milan Fashion Week Womenswear Spring/Summer 2024 on September in Milan. — AFP



PHOTOGRAPH

People take photographs as the sun sets above the Garonne river with the Dome de la Grave landmark in the background in Toulouse, southwestern France. — AFP

art & life

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Oman's diving paradise: The enchanting Damaniyat Islands

Damaniyat archipelago listed as the fifth-best diving site globally

BY KHALID ABDULMALIK

Damaniyat Islands, fondly dubbed 'The Aquarium', have earned a reputation as the Sultanate of Oman's diving paradise. These pristine islands are part of the UNESCO tentative list of world natural heritage sites. They are just one jewel among many along Oman's extensive 1,700-kilometre coastline.

In the last couple of decades, Oman has been steadily welcoming travellers, gaining recognition for the exceptional quality and diversity of its diving experiences. The country boasts long stretches of unspoiled white sandy beaches, and its crystal-clear waters host 40 recognised diving spots, stretching from the northernmost Musandam peninsula, where the Arabian Gulf begins, to Dhofar Governorate, bordering Yemen.

Several sites have been designated as natural reserves, safeguarding precious ecosystems like the Bar al Hikman peninsula south of Muscat and Al Halaniyat Islands in Dhofar. These areas are home to endangered species, including green turtles and the Arabian humpbacked whale.

The Sea of Oman and the Arabian Gulf in Oman teem with vibrant coral reefs, creating a unique habitat for many marine creatures, as noted by environ-

mental scientist Glyn Barrett. Barrett, who has explored some of the world's most spectacular diving locations, including the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, the Astrolabe Reef in Fiji, and national parks in Thailand, attests that the Damaniyat Islands in Oman stand out with their diverse and colourful underwater life.

While Oman's waters offer regional variations in marine life, they are renowned for their resident stingrays, eagle rays and torpedo rays, along with various species of reef sharks, moray eels, snake eels, and lion and scorpion fish, in addition to a rich diversity of reef fish.

Barrett also notes that Oman's waters exhibit seasonal variations, making it possible to spot charismatic marine life, such as whale sharks, most active from July to September. However, he mentions that visibility might not be at its clearest during this period, affecting the spectacle of the corals.

Divers of all skill levels can reveal the accessibility of dive sites from Muscat and along the coastline to the south. Oman's coral growth remains remarkably healthy, offering an array of coral types and plankton-rich waters that attract many marine species. With few strong currents, dives typically range from 10 to 30 metres along coral-adorned stony walls.

Oman is gaining recognition as the top scuba diving destination in the region, with the Damaniyat archipelago listed as the fifth-best diving site globally. In recent years, the number of diving centres has surged, catering to residents and holidaymakers alike.

As awareness of environmental conservation continues to grow, Oman is also witnessing the emergence of highly professional and knowledgeable Omani dive instructors, ensuring the sustainability of the sport and the protection of its pristine underwater ecosystems.

Moreover, diving in Oman is relatively affordable, with a boat trip, including two dives, equipment, snacks, and excellent company, costing less than RO 50 (approximately \$130). This represents excellent value for money compared to many other diving destinations worldwide.

While diving can be enjoyed year-round in Oman, seasoned



captivating diving experience.

For Al Lamki and many others, 'The Aquarium' remains an unforgettable dive site, along with other remarkable experiences like shark dives in the Bahamas and cave dives in Fiji. Despite the challenges posed by past storms and typhoons along Oman's coast, experts like Barrett assure us that the corals are recovering quickly.

In the hearts and minds of divers, it is the sheer abundance of marine life and the dazzling, vibrantly coloured corals in Oman's reefs that leave indelible impressions. It is recommended to dive into Oman's underwater world to discover a hidden treasure trove of aquatic wonders waiting to enchant and amaze.



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The Verdict on the New Helmut Lang

VANESSA FRIEDMAN

ONCE, IN THE EARLY 2000s, I owned a black Helmut Lang pantsuit. That was a time when even the word “pantsuit” kind of made me cringe, but there was something about how this one was cut — three-button, single-breasted jacket and flat-front (but louche) pants — that skewed all its establishment implications. It made me feel like both the coolest and the most grown-up versions of myself, as if I were a person who could talk to anyone, could go into any room.

I wore it until I wore it out, and have been in mourning for it ever since. When I talk about it, which I still do, there is almost always another person who will come up to me with a story of their Helmut Lang. His clothes caught an angsty, disaffected cultural mood and a moment and then transcended them, which made him enormously influential in both the micro (individual) and macro (industry) sense.

So much so that he shifted the entire show schedule in 1998, when he moved his show to New York Fashion Week from Paris. New York had traditionally been the last of the big four cities on the collection calendar, its shows taking place in mid-October. Lang wanted to go first, so he hopscotched to early September, and the entire city went with him.

Little wonder that ever since he walked away from his brand in 2005, Fast Retailing, a company that bought it the next year, has been trying to revive it, cycling through a series of designers and “editors-in-residence” who mostly have succeeded in garbling the brand’s image.



On Friday, as New York Fashion Week began, it tried once again.

The timing, in theory, could not have been better. The late 1990s and early 2000s — the years just before social media



changed how we live — have become ubiquitous points of reference.

The new designer, too, seemed tailor-made for the post: Peter Do, a rising star whose razor-sharp suiting for his own brand contains the sort of peekaboo surprises that put him smack in the centre of the Lang lineage.

The cavernous space on the Lower East Side where the show was held was heaving with anticipation. A poem by a friend of Do’s, writer Ocean Vuong, had been painted on the floor (sample verse: “Our clothes on the



A model presents a look at the Helmut Lang fashion show in New York. — NYT

sional shots of bright pink and marigold. It had colour blocking and message shirting, worn back-to-front for easy reading. It even had old Lang models: Mipam Thurman (Uma’s brother), Sasha Pivovarov.

It was accomplished, accessible and very commercial. That will probably make the collection sell very well — and it should sell very well. Do went through the motions of Helmut Lang more adeptly, really, than any would-be Lang designer before him. But what it didn’t have was subversion.

One of the reasons Lang’s clothes were so resonant in the first place was that they took classic elements and added just the slickest layer of kink, sending everyone slightly off axis. Do’s clothes, on the other hand, seemed earnest — too respectful of a legacy that understood the allure of strategic disrespect. Lang’s straps spoke of bondage and things done underground, while Do’s straps spoke of your first car (they are actually based on seat belts) and door attendants. These are clothes that fill in a wardrobe rather than redefine it.

Think of it as Lang lite. Easy to digest, but the taste doesn’t linger. —NYT



floor like stepped on flowers”), much as Lang had once plastered slogans from artist Jenny Holzer around his store. Do had clearly done his research.

That, it turned out, was the problem.

The collection was replete with Helmut Easter eggs: Straps! A taxicab print in reference to his taxicab ad campaign! T-shirt dresses with a sheer scrim of twisted silk chiffon like Stella Tennant’s wedding dress! It was carefully crafted in Lang’s sartorial vocabulary: flat-front pants, Crombie coats and lacquered jeans.

It had the Lang palette: black and white and beige, with occa

Google AI tool predicts danger of genetic mutations

RESEARCHERS AT GOOGLE DeepMind, the tech giant’s artificial intelligence arm, on Tuesday introduced a tool that predicts whether genetic mutations are likely to cause harm, a breakthrough that could help research into rare diseases.

The findings are “another step in recognising the impact that AI is having in the natural sciences,” said Pushmeet Kohli, vice president for research at Google DeepMind.

The tool focuses on so-



called “missense” mutations, where a single letter of the genetic code is affected.

A typical human has 9,000 such mutations throughout their genome; they can be harmless or cause diseases such as cystic fibrosis or cancer, or damage brain development.

To date, four million of these mutations have been observed in humans, but only two per cent of them have been classified, either as disease-causing or benign.

In all, there are 71 million such possible mutations. The Google DeepMind tool, called AlphaMissense, reviewed these mutations and was able to predict 89 per cent of them, with 90 per cent accuracy.

A score was assigned to each mutation, indicating the risk of it causing disease (otherwise referred to as pathogenic).

The result: 57 per cent

were classified as probably benign, and 32 per cent as probably pathogenic — the remainder being uncertain.

The database was made public and available to scientists, and an accompanying study was published on Tuesday in the journal Science.

AlphaMissense demonstrates “superior performance” than previously available tools, wrote experts Joseph Marsh and Sarah Teichmann in an article also published in Science.

“We should emphasise that the predictions were never really trained or never really intended to be used for clinical diagnosis alone,” said Jun Cheng of Google DeepMind.

“However, we do think that our predictions can potentially be helpful to increase the diagnosed rate of rare disease, and also potentially to help us find

new disease-causing genes,” Cheng added.

Indirectly, this could lead to the development of new treatments, the researchers said.

The tool was trained on the DNA of humans and closely-related primates, enabling it to recognise which genetic mutations are widespread.

Cheng said the training allowed the tool to input “millions of protein sequences and learns what a regular protein sequence looks like.”

It then could identify a mutation and its potential for harm.

Cheng compared the process to learning a language.

“If we substitute a word from an English sentence, a person that is familiar with English can immediately see whether this word substitution will change the meaning of the sentence or not.”

—AFP



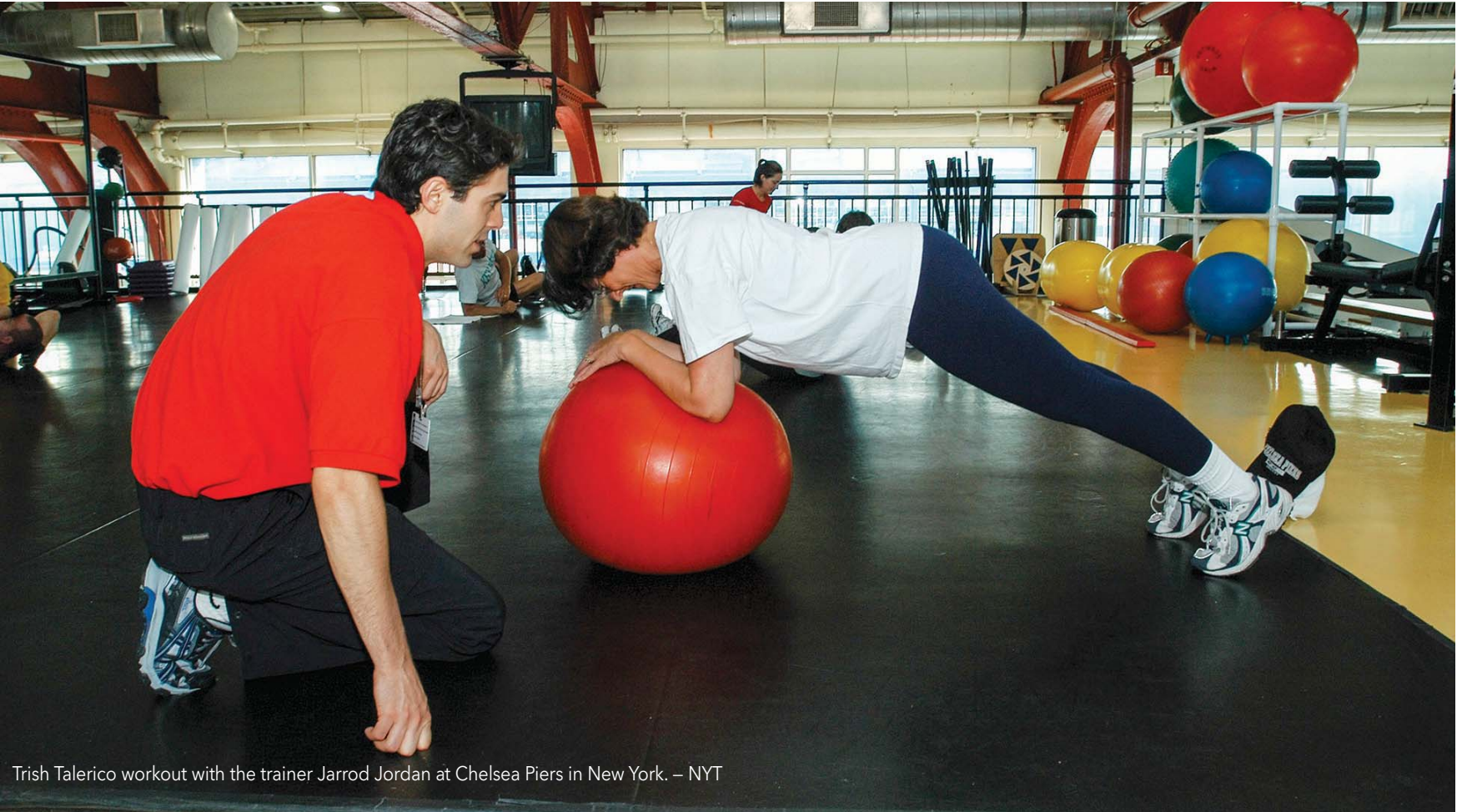
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THURSDAY | SEPTEMBER 21 | 2023

LIFESTYLE

How You Should Change Your Workout Once You Hit 40



Trish Talerico workout with the trainer Jarrod Jordan at Chelsea Piers in New York. – NYT

GETTING OLDER DOESN'T have to mean moving less. The key to long-standing fitness, experts say, is envisioning the kind of athlete you want to be 20, 30, even 40 years from now, and training smartly in the present for that future.

"If you're dreaming of retiring and hiking the mountains of Hawaii, make sure you can do that now, first and foremost," said Kate Baird, an exercise physiologist at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York.

Starting in your 30s, you lose between about 3 per cent and 8 per cent of your muscle mass per decade, and more after turning 60. Bone mineral density also starts to decline in midlife, which puts you at risk for fractures and osteoporosis. Your VO2 max, or the heart and lungs' ability to take in oxygen and convert it into energy, decreases as well.

Making a few changes to your habits early can slow these declines and prepare you for decades of physical activity, Baird said, from the functional (like chasing after grandchildren and lifting luggage) to the fun (like playing tennis and running half-marathons).

Here's how to get started, according to exercise scientists and trainers.

TEST YOUR FITNESS TO LEARN YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The best way to be proactive about your future is to assess your fitness today, said Grayson Wickham, a physical therapist in New York City, and the creator of Movement Vault, a stretching and mobility app.

The four key areas to check are your body's strength, stability,

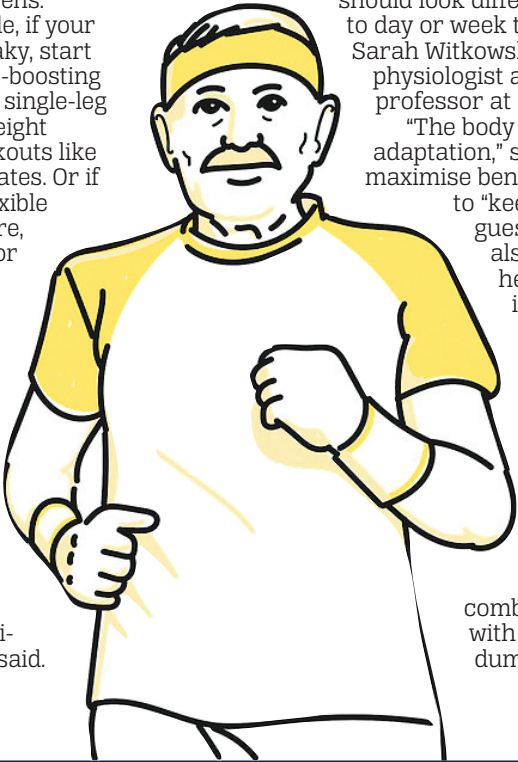
mobility and cardiorespiratory fitness, he said, which all typically decline with age. "The human body is extremely resilient," Wickham said. "But the double-edged sword there is that it's so resilient that we can get away with a lot — until we can't."

For a professional fitness evaluation, make an appointment with an exercise physiologist, physical therapist or certified personal trainer, all of whom can then work with you to create a personalised training program. Or test your fitness at home using online resources.

Testing one's fitness can shine a light on potential weaknesses or areas in need of boosting, Wickham said, helping to prevent injury before it happens.

For example, if your stability is shaky, start doing balance-boosting exercises like single-leg stands and weight shifts, or workouts like tai chi and Pilates. Or if you're less flexible than you desire, take up yoga or devote more time to dynamic stretches.

The best way to measure cardiorespiratory fitness is to test your VO2 max with a doctor or an exercise physiologist, Baird said.



Many wearable fitness trackers, including some Apple Watches and Fitbits, offer estimated VO2 max readings as well.

"VO2 max is sort of the overall functional capacity of your body to do hard work," she said, and regular aerobic exercise and HIIT workouts can help you boost it.

MIX UP YOUR WORKOUT OFTEN

As you get older, you should, above all, strive to exercise 150 minutes per week with moderate-to-vigorous intensity aerobic workouts and two sessions of strength training (15-20 minutes per session), which together can boost both longevity and quality of life.

But how you spend that time should look different from day to day or week to week, said Sarah Witkowski, an exercise physiologist and associate professor at Smith College.

"The body is great at adaptation," she said, but to maximise benefits, you want to "keep your body guessing." Variety also is good for heart health, including blood pressure.

Even small changes can be beneficial, she added. If you typically do lunges, try lunging in different directions some days or combining them with overhead dumbbell presses.

If you like to walk, once or twice a week choose a hillier route or walk as fast as you can.

THINK BEYOND TONED BICEPS AND SIX-PACK ABS

Strength training can be a veritable fountain of youth if you approach it strategically. When we're younger, our motivations are often aesthetic, said Amanda Thebe, a personal trainer based in Canada who specialises in working with people over 40. But focusing only on isolated muscle groups, such as abs or biceps, often neglects muscles we can't see that contribute to health and strength.

"There's nothing wrong with doing your bicep curls and your deltoid raises if you want to be pumped for summer," Thebe said. But balance these exercises with compound movements — exercises that work several joints and muscles at once.

"Things like a dead lift and a squat," she said. "Things that move us up and down, and side to side." Prioritising core muscles beyond the visible abdominals will also contribute to overall strength as we age. Planks are a great option, and pelvic floor exercises help, too.

Finally, to maximise benefits, you need a plan that's progressive, said Lauren Lyness, a physical therapist. Continually increase the amount of weight you lift, or the number of reps.

"We don't get better by doing things that are easy," Lyness said. The more we intentionally challenge our body as we age, she said, the better equipped we'll be for whatever physical feats our future self wants to take on. — NYT

THE CHANGING WORLD



Shaddad al Musalmy

Will working from home ever become a new reality in Oman?

WHEN COVID-19 FORCED many all over the world to send their employees home to work virtually, the rush to give them access to all the tools they would need to work from home was sudden for many employers.

However, after everyone settled in, what quickly became apparent to many office-based teams is that employees could be productive and focused when not in the office and employers everywhere began to understand remote working.

Now that we are in a post-pandemic era, is working from home the new reality in Oman? I do not think so. According to some employees that I spoke to, some of the biggest challenges are communication among staff members. In addition, working parents must juggle work and family priorities.

In Oman, work from home culture was good at the initial stage but now as the days passed by it became hard to maintain. It is hard to establish trust and develop relationships with colleagues and clients when you do not have a daily face-to-face connection.

Moreover, working at home with kids and family together creates distractions, as we can not have dedicated schedules and space to work which makes it challenging to work from home.

"While at work, we communicate directly to our fellow workmates and it ends there. You ask a question and responded to immediately but being at home, I have to be on social media and to top it up, I make calls every other minute. So basically, it ends up staying more time on the phone than the laptop itself, making working hours longer than usual," one employee told me.

NOW THAT WE ARE IN A POST-PANDEMIC ERA, IS WORKING FROM HOME THE NEW REALITY IN OMAN? I DO NOT THINK SO. ACCORDING TO SOME EMPLOYEES THAT I SPOKE TO, SOME OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES ARE COMMUNICATION AMONG STAFF MEMBERS. IN ADDITION, WORKING PARENTS MUST JUGGLE WORK AND FAMILY PRIORITIES.

Others say managing both work and home affairs is a challenge. "It is very challenging for most of us who have families. Lucky are those who have grown-ups at home. Unlike them, I have young children at home who make it difficult for me to work," a private sector employee said.

To children, it feels good that parents working from home is a blessing but for parents handling them is not easy. "As I concentrate on my work, they come and want my attention, or they fight, or one comes to report the other. Sometimes it's fun and sometimes it's agitating," she added.

Zoom, Google Hangouts, WhatsApp and other online meeting places flourished in the initial periods of working from home as professionals met the challenge with vigour and enthusiasm. Since then, this technology has become part of virtually everyone's lives. Bedrooms were turned into offices and dinner tables into workstations.

However, the new normal altered the equation so much that it created tensions and anxiety. I believe that working from home infringes on the home environment and creates unwanted tensions as psychologists the world over were of the opinion that this could lead to serious relationship hassles and mental stress.

I think before we adapt to the work from home system, we need to consider how best to go forward. Whether we set our schedule or have specific hours we need to be working, creating a routine can help us manage our time and concentrate better on work.

There is also a need to create a ritual that indicates the start of the day. As an example, we need to set a daily routine to start our day. For example, this might include taking a walk before you start working, set a regular lunchtime because taking lunch at a particular time every day provides a much-needed break and grants one a time to refuel before getting back to work.

Shaddad al Musalmy is a seasoned Omani journalist who worked for top newspapers in the country. He's currently one of Oman Observer's senior editors and contributes across different beats. His commentaries about life in general paints a vivid picture of the changing landscape in Oman.

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