

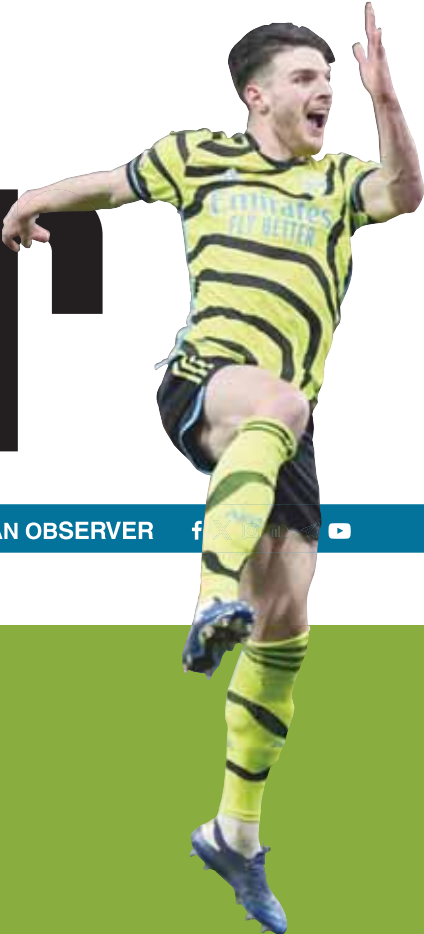
P15

NEGOTIATIONS HEAT UP AT COP28 OVER FOSSIL FUELS



P12

GOALS GALORE IN ARSENAL'S LAST-GASP WIN



P20

AN EXPLORER'S EXPEDITION INTO OMAN'S WADIS



MUSCAT

CRUDE PRICE AT \$77.62 A BARREL

Oman oil price for February delivery on Wednesday reached \$77.62, comprising a drop by 88 cents from the price of Tuesday, which stood at \$78.50. The average price of Oman oil for December delivery has stabilised at \$89.79 per barrel, thus \$2.98 per barrel lower than November delivery. World crude fell another 1 per cent on Wednesday to five-month lows, against a backdrop of a worsening demand outlook from China and doubts about the impact of Opec cuts. Brent crude futures fell 1.1 per cent to \$76.37 a barrel, while US futures fell by the same amount to \$71.53. Gold rose 0.1 per cent to \$2,022 an ounce, stabilising after Monday's surge to a record \$2,135.40.



PILOT PROJECT YIELDS 500 TONNES SHRIMP

Fish farming in the Sultanate of Oman constitutes a fundamental pillar of economic diversification. Studies and research proved that Oman is set to be a leader in the field of fish farming. Fisheries Development Oman plays a pioneering role in this field, evidence to which is its management of the shrimp farming project in the Al Khuwaymah area in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali. The opening of the project will take place on Thursday. The project will be celebrated as a major contributor to food security in Oman. Bilal bin Omar al Battashi, Project engineer of Al Khuwaymah shrimp farm, said that the project occupies an area of two million square metres, with an investment value of RO 16 million.

DETAILS ON P13

GCC unified tourist visa likely from early 2025

VINOD NAIR
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The GCC Supreme Council has approved the Unified Tourist Visa, which will allows free movement of tourists and visitors between the Gulf states.

According to the Saudi Minister of Tourism: "The approval of the Gulf Unified Tourist Visa is a historic step

that reflects its commitment to enhancing cooperation and deepening ties in the field of tourism and various sectors. It will also enhance the Gulf countries' status as a distinguished global tourist destination."

He said the approval of this visa aligns with the development and progress witnessed by the GCC countries across various

levels, and it will have an effective impact on strengthening the desired connectivity and integration among the nations. The implementation of the new system will begin in early 2025.

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, said: "The approval of the draft visa by the GCC Supreme Council after its adoption at the seventh meeting of tourism ministers in Oman represents a fundamental empowerment for the sector and the competitive position of the GCC bloc as a global tourist destination."

This visa will contribute in facilitating the movement of tourists and visitors between the Council countries, thereby boosting the role of tourism as an economic growth driver and opening new opportunities for investment in the tourism sector in each member state, he added.

The approval of the unified Gulf visa comes as part of the Gulf Tourism Strategy during the meeting in Al-Ula in November 2022. The GCC unified tourism visa was approved by the GCC tourism ministers in Manah in October and the interior ministers in November.

UN rights chief says Gazans living in 'utter, deepening horror'

GENEVA: Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are living in "utter, deepening horror", the UN human rights chief said on Wednesday, as he pleaded for an immediate ceasefire.

Volker Turk said there was a high risk of atrocity crimes being committed in such "catastrophic" humanitarian circumstances.

"Civilians in Gaza continue to be relentlessly bombarded by Israel and collectively punished — suffering death, siege, destruction and deprivation of the most essential human needs such as food, water, lifesaving medical supplies and other essentials on a massive scale," he told a press conference.

"Palestinians in Gaza are living in utter, deepening horror"

He said 1.9 million of the Palestinian enclave's 2.2 million people had been displaced and were being pushed into "ever-diminishing and extremely overcrowded places in southern



Gaza, in unsanitary and unhealthy conditions".

"The catastrophic situation we see unfolding in the Gaza Strip was entirely foreseeable and preventable. In these circumstances, there is a heightened risk of atrocity crimes," the UN high commissioner for human rights

said. "As an immediate step, I call for an urgent cessation of hostilities and the release of all hostages," he said, adding: "you need to come back to your senses".

Till date more than 16,248 people in Gaza had been killed.

Turk said he was gravely concerned by "dehumanising and inciteful statements" made by current and former Israeli officials. "History has shown us where this kind of language can lead," he said.

"This is not just unacceptable, but a competent court may view such statements, in the circumstances in which they were made, as incitement to atrocity crimes."

Turk said the human rights crisis in the occupied West Bank was also "extremely alarming", calling for Israeli authorities to take immediate steps to end "widespread impunity" for violations. SEE P6 & 7



Plans to finalise Nature Reserves Strategy soon

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority (EA), is working on the final phases of the Nature Reserves Strategy. The EA has recently announced two nature reserves and is seeking to add more reserves in different governorates over the upcoming period. Currently, the country has both wild and marine reserves.

Eng Sulaiman bin Nasser al Akhzami, Director-General of Nature Conservation at the Environment Authority, said that the EA is preparing the Nature Reserves Strategy after conducting an assessment of nature reserves and setting a unified national framework for reserve management plan. The nature reserves in the Sultanate of Oman are known for their rich biodiversity and many species can be sighted; some of them are only found only in the environments of the Sultanate of Oman. These species live in beaches, coral reefs, sand dunes, mountain valleys and other natural sites.

TURN TO P2



RAFO CELEBRATES PASSING OUT OF OFFICERS

The Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) on Wednesday celebrated the passing out of pilot officers, cadet officers, limited service officers and university officers who completed training courses to this effect. The ceremony took place at the military parade grounds of Ghala Airbase and the Sultan Qaboos Air Academy. It was presided over by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs. DETAILS ON P2

Unesco recognises iftar, harees as 'intangible cultural heritage'

PARIS: The UN cultural agency on Wednesday recognised iftar, the meal that breaks the daytime fast during the holy month of Ramadhan, on its list of intangible cultural heritage.

The application for the sociocultural tradition was jointly submitted by Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

"Iftar (also called Eftari or Iftor) is observed by Muslims at sunset in the month of Ramadhan, upon completion of all religious and ceremonial rites," said Unesco.

Iftar, which follows the sunset



Harees was added to the list after a joint application by the Sultanate of Oman, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

call to prayer during Ramadhan, is associated with gatherings "strengthening family and community ties and promoting charity, solidarity and social exchange," it said.

The age-old community tradition was recognised by the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage that has been meeting in Botswana since Monday.

In several Muslim countries, it is customary to mark iftar by eating a date accompanied by tea. Recipes for dishes and pastries, however, vary greatly depending on the country. The UN body said that "the iftar practice is typically transmitted within families, and children and youth are often entrusted with preparing components of traditional meals".

TURN TO P3



Rafo celebrates passing out of pilot, cadet officers

MUSCAT: The Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) on Wednesday celebrated the passing out of pilot officers, cadet officers, limited service officers and university officers who completed training courses to this effect.

The ceremony took place at the military parade grounds of Ghala Airbase and the Sultan Qaboos Air Academy. It was presided over by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs.

On this occasion, the Rafo presented a military show that demonstrated the skill of its members and highlighted the great attention accorded to the Rafo by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander.

Upon the arrival of HH Sayyid Shihab at the celebration ground, the graduating batches gave a military salute welcoming the chief guest, and the Rafo band played the Royal Anthem.

Then, HH Sayyid Shihab inspected the front row of the parade. After that, the passing out batches performed a military infantry march.

Then, HH Sayyid Shihab pinned aviation wings on the graduating pilots and handed over the Sword of Honour to Officer Cadet Ayman bin Salim al Sinani, who won first place at the overall level of the cadet officers' batch, as well as Cadet Officer Hilal bin Nasser al Toobi, who topped the "Limited Service" and "University Officers" passing out batches.

The ceremony was attended by several members of the Royal Family, ministers, chairmen of the State Council and Majlis AshShura, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and other military and security units, members of the two councils, senior officers in the SAF and other security units, senior government officials, senior retired officers and military attachés to the embassies accredited to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA



The Rafo presented a military show that demonstrated the skill of its members and highlighted the great attention accorded to the Rafo by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander. — ONA



Higher education quality assurance conference kicks off

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 6

The Fifth Regional Conference of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education kicked off here today under the title "Foreseeing the Future of Higher Education Quality: The Impact of Smart Technologies and the International Dimension on the Education Quality System". The event will be ongoing till 7 December 2023.

Dr Jokhah bint Abdullah al Shukailiyah, CEO of the Omani Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education, said in her speech during the conference, "The Sultanate of Oman was among the first countries in the region to make a prominent and strong investment in the quality of education and established an official government body concerned with ensuring the quality of education, to give it full support during the past twenty-two years. It expanded the powers of that government body to include ensuring the quality of education in the Sultanate of Oman in all its



The conference, hosted for the first time in Oman, is held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif bin Hamoud al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit. — ONA

forms. She added, "Hence, it has become necessary for education to keep pace with the increasing technical development, to ensure access to a future full of opportunities and a promising new economy based on knowledge. To keep pace with this global technical development, we designated the conference title and its topics to be a forum in which minds and expertise in the field of higher education and information technology come together." The conference, hosted for the first time in Oman, is held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif bin Hamoud al Jabri, Chairman of

Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit. Further, the conference aims to discuss modern transformations in education and their impact on the quality of education, especially smart technologies and the international dimension. The innovative use of technology in education is a vital resource for developing and improving the quality of education in the contemporary world. The event focuses on a number of main topics, namely digital transformation and quality assurance in higher education, the role of smart technologies and artificial intelligence in enhancing

the quality of higher education, the role of stakeholders in enhancing quality assurance and accreditation processes, and the international dimension of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. On her turn, Dr Nadia Hassan Badrawi, President of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, indicated that ensuring the quality of higher education in the backdrop of technology remains a challenge that should always be considered and difficulties should be overcome to reach the goal of enhancing the level of education in the Arab world. This, she added, is aimed at ensuring the highest levels are achieved in Arab educational outcomes. Moreover, the conference includes dialogue sessions, presentations, and interactive workshops and as many as 4 keynote speakers, more than 25 working papers, and 4 accompanying workshops. A large number of experts and specialists in the field of higher education from various countries, in addition to representatives of relevant

international organisations, are participating in the conference. This conference will represent an opportunity for participants to exchange knowledge and experiences and form new communication networks in the field of education and technology. The conference, scheduled to conclude on December 7, features dialogue sessions, presentations, and interactive workshops, hosting over 25 working papers and 4 accompanying workshops. Participants include experts and specialists in higher education from various countries, along with representatives of international organisations. This conference will represent an opportunity for participants to exchange knowledge and experiences and form new communication networks in the field of education and technology. The conference included the presentation of a video clip about the OAAAQA and another about the ANQAHE, in addition to honouring the main speakers, sponsors, and the sponsor of the ceremony.

Plans to finalise Nature Reserves Strategy soon

FROM PAGE 1
The Environment Authority has offered a group of investment opportunities in nature reserves to the private sector in different governorates since the end of last year. In addition, another investment package was offered this year and will be awarded in the coming period, he said. The EA's specialists undertake the responsibility to highlight the economic, social and cultural values associated with the nature reserves, the official said, indicating that nature reserves are meant to provide an opportunity for current and future generations to enjoy such a beautiful natural heritage. Al Akhazmi pointed out that development of nature reserves continues but requires financial allocations. Private sector initiatives are being unveiled constantly and this will contribute to the development of nature projects that will be announced upon completion of the construction work for each project. He noted that the financial details will be disclosed after the final signing and that the investment opportunities currently in place constitute a source of financial income for the Authority. — ONA



Workshop highlights roles, sustainability of Omani journalism

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Information on Wednesday organised a workshop titled ‘Omani journalism: The reality and opportunities of sustainability’.

The workshop discussed options for the development of Omani press establishments and ensure their sustainability through an innovation programme espoused by the Ministry of Information.

The programme is envisaged to pursue a specific timeframe of follow-up and assessment procedures.

The workshop was held in

the presence of Mohammed bin Said bin Mohammed al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information, editors-in-chief, managers and editors in local press establishments, international experts, academics, university students specialised in journalism, representatives of Oman Press Association and representatives of advertising agencies.

The workshop discussed the outcome of the Unesco-affiliated “International Programme for Development Communication (IPDC)”, with the prime aim of seeking the IPDC’s support in



The workshop discussed options for the development of Omani press establishments and ensure their sustainability. — ONA

upgrading the Omani media and journalism sector and ensuring its sustainability at a global level.

The workshop also discussed the challenges facing press establishments in the Sultanate of Oman. Five sessions were held as part of the workshop.

The first session of the workshop was entitled ‘An overview of the challenges facing journalism globally’. The session touched on the findings of a Unesco research on the challenges posed to media institutions around the world. It looked into

the IPDC’s recommendations to orient the media sector towards independence and sustainability.

The 2nd session was titled ‘Diagnosing reality and challenges facing private press establishments in the Sultanate of Oman’.

The 3rd session focused on the role of the government in supporting the sustainability of private press establishments..

The 4th session was titled ‘The Role of Journalism Institutions in Developing More Sustainable Business Models’.

The 5th session explored prospects of technical

development and the extent to which journalism establishments are capable of adapting to change and espousing future trends. Al Balushi said in a statement that this workshop was held to upgrade the status of local journalism to help it address emerging domestic and global challenges.

He pointed out that the Ministry of Information conferred with a group of Arab and international researchers, as well as specialists and academics in Oman to help shape a vision that serves journalism practice and elevate its standards. — ONA

Professional associations play key role in sustainable development

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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The inaugural forum on ‘Partnership and Networking’ emphasised the pivotal role of professional associations in sustainable development across diverse sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.

The forum was opened on Wednesday under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Ma’amari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The Ministry of Social Development organised the event in collaboration with various professional associations and supported by the Oman Liquefied Natural Gas Company (LNG) and be’ah.

Dr Mohammed bin Mubarak al Araimi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Journalists Association, highlighted the forum’s timing, which aligned with the nation’s pursuit of the “Oman 2040” vision. He underscored the significance of community institutions, including professional associations, as vital links between the government and citizens, instrumental in



The forum, attended by 250 participants, provided a platform for exchanging dialogue and addressing professional associations’ challenges

effective community participation and international representation.

Emphasising the role of civil society associations in supporting sustainable development, Al Araimi noted their contributions to economic and social goals outlined in the “Oman 2040” vision. These include fostering cognitive and societal awareness, promoting innovation, nurturing youth, and representing Oman on regional and global platforms. Notably, the Omani Journalists Association’s success in obtaining key positions in international journalism is evidence of global confidence in Omani capabilities.

The forum, attended by 250 participants, provided

a platform for exchanging dialogue, sharing experiences and addressing professional associations’ challenges. Eight working papers were presented, focusing on themes such as “Civil Society Organizations and Voluntary Work” and “National Achievements of Professional Associations — Successful Experiences.” In the first session, Mohammed al Muqimi discussed the Ministry of Social Development’s role in strengthening professional associations. Talib bin Saif al Dhubari, in his paper, highlighted the significance of civil society institutions, using the Omani Journalists Association as a

model.

The second session showcased successful experiences, with Maryam al Amriyah detailing the efforts of the Omani Society for Human Resources. The paper covered empowerment services, improving human resource efficiency and adapting to labour market changes.

Additionally, the forum delved into the digital transformation of civil society institutions, with Faisal al Balushi shedding light on challenges and solutions. Engineer Mohammed bin Hashel al Riyami presented the fourth working paper on the Omani Society of Engineers, providing insights into its strategic pillars and objectives, including enhancing engineering practices, contributing to legislation, ensuring quality outputs and fostering innovation in various engineering sectors.

The forum catalysed fostering collaboration between the government and professional associations, aligning their efforts with national development goals and reaffirming the crucial role of these associations in shaping Oman’s future.



RNO COMMANDER RECEIVES PAK NAVAL REPRESENTATIVES

MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday the representatives of the talks between the Oman-Pakistan navies. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest. They also reviewed means of enhancing bilateral cooperation in naval fields. — ONA

Health ministry inks three agreements to fund projects

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health signed on Wednesday three agreements with Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) to fund health projects for several hospitals and health centres in various governorates.

The agreements aim to support the health sector and boost the healthcare system.

The first agreement deals with funding the construction and equipping of the radiology

department in Al Awabi Health Centre.

The second agreement provides funds for devices for mental health treatment and rehabilitation in Al Masarraha Hospital.

Moreover, the third agreement is related to funding the purchase of medical devices and equipment for Sinaw Hospital and Al Qabil Health Centre.

— ONA



The agreements aim to support sector and boost healthcare system. — ONA

Unesco recognises iftar, harees as ‘intangible heritage’

FROM PAGE 1

Unesco also added seven Arab traditions to its Intangible Cultural Heritage list, one of which is harees, a staple in the Gulf region. Harees was added to the list after a joint application by the Sultanate of Oman, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

As Unesco notes of the symbolic dish: “Preparing

and serving harees is viewed as a sign of hospitality and generosity. A means of promoting social connection, the practice strengthens bonds between people and communities while enhancing cultural affinity in the societies concerned.”

The dish is especially popular during Ramadhan, as it is nourishing and easy to digest, as well as filling, making it an ideal go-to during iftar or suhoor for

those fasting.

The name harees comes from the Arabic word harasa, which means to mash or to squash. Just as the name suggests, in the preparation of harees wheat is ground with goat meat or mutton, and then cooked over low heat until it gets creamy. Harees is present in many social and cultural elements such as folk stories, sayings and poetry.

— Agencies

Travel time is back, but hard to get ‘good’ fares

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The year-end is around so is the travel season because of the pleasant weather across the Northern Hemisphere.

For the employed class, several firms do not allow the staff to carry forward the pending leaves to the new year, which force them to go on a forced vacation.

While leaves are available, booking flight tickets can be a challenge as most airlines hike up prices in their winter schedule.

Speaking to the Observer, Anuj D, an Indian resident said, “My boss cleared my vacation application only a few days ago, but it seems too late because fares are expensive for almost all days that I would prefer to travel. Days are running out for me and I hope there will be some discount days in the coming days.”

Some travel agents told the Observer that people have gathered unconfirmed opinions that online bookings are cheaper compared to taking tickets from agents.

“Sometimes it can be the



While leaves are available, booking flight tickets can be a challenge as most airlines hike up prices in their winter schedule

other way as several websites have hidden fees as convenience charges, service charges or the

forced add-ons, though optional, that are quietly imposed on the customers,” one travel executive

said.

Jamal al Balushi, a frequent flyer, said, “There are no clear tips to book tickets, but for holidays I would suggest booking in advance the flexible fare options (free date change available) and avoid waiting for visas or passport renewals till the last moment.”

Across the Internet, there are several tips that travellers can look for while searching for cheap tickets, a few ones are common across the board.

According to the portal Skyscanner, destinations with multiple airports give itineraries

and price options.

Sometimes, it will be advisable to book two separate one-way tickets, and some websites allow people to mix and match airlines or the price trends for all days and weeks of a month.

Though less desirable, red-eye flights offer fewer tickets as few people prefer to travel around those hours of the day.

Some suggestions include booking flights as early as possible ensuring the lowest price and better seat options, allowing for early booking of other aspects of the trip, and avoiding weekends.



ME airlines display robust growth

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Airlines operating in the Middle Eastern countries, including Oman, have displayed spectacular performance, according to the latest report of the International Air Transport Association (IATA). The total traffic in October 2023 rose 31.2 per cent compared to the same period last year, complementing the global traffic, which is now at 98.2 per cent of pre-Covid levels.

Airlines in almost all countries have continued recovering the passenger demand in October, with 24.1 per cent growth in October 2023 traffic over the previous year. Capacity rose 22.2 per cent, and load factor climbed 1.2 percentage points to 80.6 per cent.

International traffic climbed 29.7 per cent compared to the same month a year ago. All markets saw double-digit percentage gains year-on-year, and international RPKs (revenue passenger kilometres) reached 94.4 per cent of October 2019 levels.

“October’s strong result brings the industry closer to completing the post-pandemic traffic recovery. While domestic markets remain above pre-Covid levels, international demand is recovering slowly. Asia Pacific carriers’ international demand is 19.5 per cent behind 2019.



Airlines in almost all countries have continued recovering the passenger demand in October, with 24.1 per cent growth in October 2023 traffic over the previous year

This could reflect the late lifting of Covid restrictions in parts of the region, commercial developments, and political tensions,” said Willie Walsh, Director General of IATA.

On the other hand, during the same period, the Asia-Pacific airlines saw an 80.3 per cent increase in October 2023 traffic compared to October 2022, while European carriers’ October 2023 traffic rose 16.1per cent, North American carriers had a 17.5per cent traffic rise, Latin American airlines by 21.2per cent, and African airlines posted a 25.3 per cent traffic increase.

Sunil Dsouza, CEO of Travel Point Group, attributes the key reasons for the positive

performance of ME carriers to steady demand for passenger airlines due to higher pax counts and per seat revenue count and to the high demand for cargo in the region as growth has picked up since the aftermath of Covid-19.

“Overall, Q3 of 2023 is promising for airlines in the ME region and have been posting positive trends and good numbers. Going forward, 2024 is expected to be better than 2023, provided the disturbances in the ME region get settled down soon enough,” He said.

Cargo movement by the Middle Eastern carriers remained robust in October 2023, with a 10.9 per cent year-on-year increase. It significantly improved from the

previous month’s performance (+2.5 per cent). Carriers in the region benefited from growth in the Middle East–Asia (+10.3 per cent) and Middle East–Europe markets (+17.1 per cent). Capacity increased by 15 per cent compared to October 2022.

Europe and Asia airlines showed an increase of 8.5 per cent, while available capacity for the region’s airlines increased by 30 per cent compared to October 2022 as more belly capacity came online from the passenger side of the business.

The North American carriers had the weakest performance in October, with a 1.8 per cent decrease (YoY) in cargo volumes, while European carriers saw their air cargo volumes increase by 1.0 per cent.

Venkat, Sales Manager at Singapore Airlines, said there are many reasons for the increase in numbers. “Middle East Airlines experienced growth in Revenue Passenger Kilometres (RPK) thanks to robust leisure traffic across the region. European travellers began venturing beyond Europe, notably to the Middle East, post-pandemic recovery.

Carriers like Edelweiss from Europe have introduced winter schedules for Oman, specifically targeting leisure traffic. This trend will grow in the coming months as existing demands fuel it,” adds Venkat.

Tour DE Cop takes part in COP28

KABEER YOUSUF
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The Tour De COP team, a journey of cyclists supporting UN’s sustainable developments goals for a brighter future which began in Muscat two weeks ago, is attending the COP28 which is currently underway in the emirates, along with the representatives from the Sultanate of Oman, sharing remarkable contribution of protecting the environment and creating awareness on the importance of preserving the nature for the generations to come.

Speaking to the Observer from Dubai, from the main venue of the global climate summit, Yusef Ahmed, Initiator of the Tour DE Cop said that the team is able to share its experiences from the COP28 summit, a pivotal event in the global sustainability calendar. “Our participation this year has been profoundly enriching and enlightening, offering us a unique perspective on the intricacies of energy transition and sustainable practices as at COP28, the value of connecting with diverse professionals was unmistakable.

The environment at COP28 was vibrant and invigorating, filled with engaging encounters and thought-provoking exchanges. It was a powerful reminder of how collective action and shared knowledge are instrumental in shaping a sustainable future,” he said, adding that each moment at COP28 was a testament to the dynamic energy and commitment shared by everyone present. We were united in our goal to drive meaningful global action towards a more sustainable future. It was a privilege to be part of such a seminal event, and I am more motivated than ever to contribute to the ongoing efforts in this critical area.

Tour De Cop team, comprising cyclists from various backgrounds including students, professionals, and environmental enthusiasts includes notable figures such as renowned long distance cyclist Ambassador Mohamed Elewa, German cycling pioneer Wolfgang Hohmann alias Wolfi, and visibly impaired Egyptian triathlete Ibrahim Hafez, exemplifying the spirit of inclusivity and determination that drives the TOUR DE COP.



Yusef Ahmed, Initiator of the Tour DE Cop said that the team was able to share its experiences from the COP28 summit

AL MADINA CEMENT PRODUCTS LLC (MCP) TOWARDS A GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The industry is a cornerstone of the economy of several nations, and it serves as a key enabler of an overall development process covering all areas.

Despite the significance of industry in the well-being of every individual in society so they can reach their full potential and achieve social development, it brings about different adverse effects, such as environmental pollution, large-scale depletion of natural resources, and increased rates of various industrial wastes.

As part of the Omani government’s steadfast commitment to attain sustainable development, perfectly aligned with Oman Vision 2040, which calls for the completion of several projects in an ideally clean environment.

Al Madina Cement Products LLC (MCP) as a leading Company in manufacturing of a wide array of high-quality cement products in Oman is required to meet its Corporate environmental responsibility (CER), with a core focus on taking a full range of actions and measures to play down the drawbacks so that MCP can go “green”, “eco-friendly” and “sustainable” in order to mitigate environmental risks.

These actions can be summed up in terms of planting more than 100 trees in various factory yards and implementing the ISO 14001- the international standard for environmental



management systems (EMS). As a result, MCP has been awarded the ISO 14001 Environmental Management System Certification, and reducing electrical energy consumption, recycling and re-use of materials, using renewable energy sources and going paperless at the workplace, producing power-saving products, and integrating environmentally-friendly practices into the MCP policies and bylaws.

It would be noted that MCP is rated as a top leading cement company in Oman. It provides high-quality and power-saving cement products by using the cutting-edge building material technology available in the construction industry, out of its concern for the environment.

Since its inception, MCP has striven to play a vital role in driving sustainable economic growth in Oman and building upon concepts and adhering to the requirements of addressing environmental and climate affairs at all levels, and paving the way for a promising future of sustainable industrial development so that Oman will always go green and sustainable.

Conference on dermatology on Friday

MUSCAT: The Omani Association of Dermatology, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, will inaugurate the seventh International Conference and Exhibition on Dermatology in Oman on Friday.

This event serves as the main scientific forum to highlight the latest diagnostic and therapeutic approaches for various dermatological, cosmetic, and laser-related conditions in Oman.

The conference will be opened by Dr Hilal bin Ali bin Hilal al Sabti, Minister of Health, at the Grand

Millennium Muscat Hotel. The seventh International Conference and Exhibition on Dermatology in Oman, spanning two days, will provide significant opportunities to showcase and introduce the latest products and services related to dermatology and cosmetic medicine.

The conference will cover various topics, including acne, the latest developments in biological treatments for psoriasis, atopic dermatitis, vitiligo, and alopecia; nail diseases and their treatment methods; paediatric dermatology;

skin pigmentation and its treatment; pigment cell transplantation for vitiligo patients; state-of-the-art techniques for hair transplantation; skin allergies; cosmetic medicine; dermatologic surgery, and laser therapy.

The Target Audience are Pediatricians, Aesthetic & Aging Medicine Physicians, Dermatologists, Plastic Surgeons, Family Physicians, General Practitioners, Medical Student, Allied Health Professionals and Residents, Pharmacists, Allergy and Immunology specialists.

Recall

FORD BRONCO

Recall Date: 07/12/2023

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	Number of Affected Commodities
FORD BRONCO	September 23, 2020 - May 9, 2023	29

*Not all vehicles in this production period, are affected.

Recall consequence

The affected vehicles do not conform to the "Latch Plate Access" compliance requirement in S7.4.4 of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) No. 208, "Occupant Crash Protection." If the first row seat(s) is in a certain position, the driver and/or passenger may have difficulty accessing the seat belt latch and therefore may not put it on. The customer may experience some dissatisfaction or be discouraged if they are unable to easily access the seat belt latch in its stowed position. Driving without the use of a seatbelt increases the risk of injury in a crash.

Recall Action

Install Seatbelt Sliding Clip on front driver and passenger seatbelts, and print the Owner's Manual Addendum and place in glove box of the vehicle.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.go>

Arabian Car Marketing Co. LLC
C.R. 1052055
Contact details: Toll free - 80073111
Working days: Sunday - Thursday
Working Time: 8:00 - 17:00 hrs.

خط المستهلك
Consumer line
80079009
80077997



Italy exits China’s Belt and Road project

ROME: Italy has withdrawn from China’s vast Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, more than four years after becoming the only G7 nation to sign up, a government source said on Wednesday.

The long-expected decision was communicated to Beijing three days ago, according to Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera. Neither side has published an official communication, but an Italian government source confirmed to AFP that Rome had pulled out.

The source gave no details beyond saying it was done in such a way as to “keep channels of political dialogue open”.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has long been opposed to Italy’s participation in an initiative viewed by many as an attempt by Beijing to buy political influence -- and whose benefits to Rome were limited.

The deal was due to automatically renew in March 2024 unless Italy opted out by the end of this year. But Meloni and her hard-right government were also wary of provoking Beijing and risking retaliation against Italian companies.

She told reporters at the G20 summit in Delhi in September that should Rome leave the project, it “would not compromise relations with China”. Beijing says upwards of 150 countries stretching from Uruguay to Sri Lanka have signed up to the initiative, a central pillar of President Xi Jinping’s bid to expand China’s clout overseas.

Beijing says it has inked over two trillion dollars in contracts around the world, from high-speed rail tracks crisscrossing South East Asia and massive transport, energy and infrastructure works through Central Asia.. — AFP



AFTERMATH OF CYCLONE MICHAUNG

A woman along with her belongings, wades through a flooded street after heavy rains in Chennai on Wednesday. Chest-high water surged down the streets of India’s southern city Chennai on December 5, with eight people killed in intense floods as Cyclone Michaung made landfall on the southeast coast. — AFP

Putin arrives in Middle East to talk oil

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin will travel to Saudi Arabia on Wednesday to meet Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, a rare trip abroad to discuss oil production, OPEC+ and the wars in the Gaza Strip and Ukraine.

Putin’s meeting with the prince, known as MbS, comes after oil prices fell despite a pledge by OPEC+, which groups the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies led by Russia, to further cut output.

Putin arrived in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday for talks President Shaikh Mohammed Bin Zayed al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi. He is due to then travel to Saudi Arabia for his first face-to-face meeting with MbS since October 2019.

The Kremlin said they would discuss energy cooperation, including as part of OPEC+, whose members pump more than 40 per cent of the world’s oil.

“Close Russian-Saudi coordination in this format is a reliable guarantee of maintaining a stable and predictable situation in the global oil market,” the Kremlin said.

The Kremlin’s chief’s last visit to



President Vladimir Putin and UAE President Shaikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday. — AFP

the region was in July 2022, when he met Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Iran.

It was not immediately clear what Putin, who has rarely left Russia since the start of the Ukraine war, intends to discuss with the crown prince of the world’s largest oil exporter, just days after disagreements delayed a key OPEC+ meeting.

They will also discuss the war between Israel and Hamas militants, the situation in Syria and Yemen, and broader issues like ensuring stability in the Gulf, the Kremlin said. A Kremlin aide said Ukraine would also be discussed. — Reuters

Zelenskiy assures Ukrainians of victory

KYIV: President Volodymyr Zelenskiy told Ukrainians on Wednesday that Kyiv would defeat Russia and win a fair peace “against all odds” as the future of vital US military and financial aid hung in the balance.

Zelenskiy delivered his defiant message in an unusual early-morning video that showed him walking through Kyiv on his way to pay his respects to fallen soldiers on what Ukraine marks as Armed Forces Day.

“It has been difficult, but we have persevered,” said Zelenskiy, who filmed himself on a mobile phone as he walked from his office down the central Hrushevskoho street towards central Kyiv’s “wall of remembrance”.

“It is not easy now, but we are moving. No matter how difficult it is, we will get there. To our borders, to our people. To our peace. Fair peace. Free peace. Against all odds.”

His remarks appeared to respond to uncertainty over



Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskiy poses for a picture with an injured Ukrainian serviceman in a hospital in Kyiv on Wednesday. — Reuters

the future of a \$60-billion aid package being debated in US Congress that has been stuck for weeks.

On Tuesday, Zelenskiy cancelled plans to address US lawmakers to appeal directly for the aid as Congress wrangles over Republican demands to tie

the assistance to a revamp of US immigration and border policies.

Kyiv has relied heavily on assistance from its Western allies against Russia’s much bigger army in the biggest war in Europe since World War Two, now in its 22nd month.

A proposed European Union military aid package has also run into resistance from some members of the bloc.

BIG RISK

In one of the bleakest assessments yet by a senior Ukrainian official, Zelenskiy’s chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, said on Tuesday that postponement of the US aid created a “big risk” that Ukraine would lose the war.

Moscow controls about 17.5 per cent of Ukraine’s territory, and Ukrainian forces are now facing a new Russian offensive on the eastern front, with especially fierce fighting around the towns of Avdiivka and Mariinka. — Reuters

Taylor Swift named Time person of the year

NEW YORK: Time magazine named US pop superstar Taylor Swift as its person of the year on Wednesday, calling the musical force of nature the “hero of her own story.”

“Taylor Swift found a way to transcend borders and be a source of light... Swift is the rare person who is both the writer and hero of her own story,” Time editor-in-chief Sam Jacobs wrote in a statement.

“Much of what Swift accomplished in 2023 exists beyond measurement. She mapped her journey and shared the results with the world: She committed to validating the dreams, feelings, and experiences of people, especially women, who felt overlooked and regularly underestimated.”

The huge \$92.8 million opening earlier this year of Taylor Swift’s “The Eras Tour” film set the tone for the “Cruel Summer” singer’s 2023.

Advance ticket sales for the movie topped \$100 million worldwide, theatre operator AMC said, making it the best-selling feature-length concert film in history.

This year, Swift’s blossoming romance with Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce has also brought the NFL a whole new wave of fans as her hundreds of millions of social media followers checked out her new squeeze.

“For building a world of her own that made a place for so many, for spinning her story into a global legend, for bringing joy to a society desperately in need of it, Taylor



The cover of Time magazine announcing the 2023 Person of the Year with US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift. — AFP

Swift is TIME’s 2023 Person of the Year,” Jacobs said.

The “Eras” tour currently has more than 145 dates.

According to Pollstar, the industry magazine covering the performing arts, each concert generates \$13 million in revenue, which would bring the tour total to around \$1.9 billion.

No artist or group has previously crossed the symbolic billion-dollar threshold.

Swift’s defining tool has proved to be social media, through which she regularly

interacts with fans.

Born in Pennsylvania, Swift started writing country songs on guitar in her early teens.

Her father shifted his job in financial services to the country music capital of Nashville to allow her a chance in the industry.

After winning a growing mainstream audience for her introspective country songs, Swift switched to a thoroughly pop direction for her fifth studio album -- “1989,” named after her year of birth.

“What makes Swift a cultural phenomenon is not only her musical prowess and versatility but the trademark authenticity she puts on each note and verse,” Forbes magazine said in an article published in October.

“Taylor effect,” as politicians from Thailand, Hungary, and Chile implored her to play their countries. Cities, stadiums, and streets were renamed for her.

Every time she came to a new place, a mini economic boom took place as hotels and restaurants saw a surge of visitors. In releasing her concert movie, Swift bypassed studios and streamers, instead forging an unusual pact with AMC, giving the theatre chain its highest single-day ticket sales in history.

There are at least 10 college classes devoted to her, including one at Harvard; the professor, Stephanie Burt, tells TIME she plans to compare Swift’s work to that of the poet William Wordsworth. — AFP

TENDER NOTICE

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries
Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders:-

Tender No.	Description	Tender documents price (R.O)	Class	Last date for collection of documents	Last date for Submission of documents
440/2023/ MAFWR/ HQ-35 - Recall - 1	REHABILITATION AND MAINTENANCE AT KUMZAR FISHERY HARBOUR IN MUSANDAM GOVERNORATE	50/-	Excellent	Wednesday 13/12/2023	Sunday 24/12/2023
484/2023/ MAFWR/ HQ-43 - Recall - 1	DESIGN AND BUILD SERVICES OF FISH LANDING CENTRE 'MARFA' AT HADBIN IN SADAH WILAYAT	270/-	Excellent	Wednesday 13/12/2023	Sunday 24/12/2023

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- Preference will be given to companies whose bid includes the largest percentage of Omanization and possible purchase of national products.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration (regarding the exemption from submitting a bid bond in tenders).
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

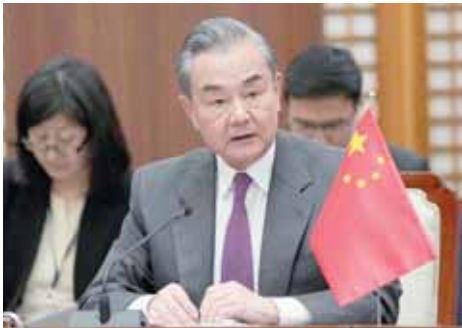


TOP CHINA, US DIPLOMATS DISCUSS WAR

BEIJING: The top diplomats from China and the United States discussed the Israel-Hamas conflict in a call on Wednesday, Beijing and Washington said, agreeing on the need to de-escalate the war. Secretary of State Antony Blinken “reiterated the imperative of all parties working to prevent the conflict from spreading”, according to the US State Department.

Beijing said Foreign Minister Wang Yi (**pictured**) stressed in turn that, regarding the conflict between Israel and Hamas, “the top priority is to cease fire and end the war as soon as possible”. “Major countries must adhere to fairness and justice, uphold objectivity and impartiality, demonstrate calm and rationality, and make every effort to cool down the situation and prevent larger-scale humanitarian disasters,” Wang said, according to the foreign ministry.

He reiterated Beijing’s calls for a two-state solution to the conflict, stressing that “any arrangement involving the future of Palestine must reflect the will of the Palestinian people”. — **Reuters**



10th trilateral foreign ministers' meeting in Busan

JAPAN PM TELLS NETANYAHU CIVILIAN CASUALTIES SHOULD BE MINIMISED



TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu over the phone on Wednesday that it was important to minimise civilian casualties in the conflict with Hamas, the Japanese government said.

“Prime Minister Kishida stated continued growth in the number of civilian casualties should be avoided, and that it is important

to calm the situation swiftly, minimise civilian casualties and observe international law including international humanitarian law,” a Foreign Ministry announcement said.

In response, Netanyahu set out Israel’s position on the military operation in Gaza, the announcement said, without elaborating.

— **Reuters**

SAUDI ARABIA SEEKS TO CONTAIN FALL-OUT

RIYADH/DUBAI: Saudi Arabia has asked the United States to show restraint in responding to attacks by Yemen’s Ansar Allah against ships in the Red Sea, two sources familiar with Saudi thinking said, as Riyadh seeks to contain spillover from the Hamas-Israel war. The Ansar Allah have waded into the conflict that has spread around the Middle East since war erupted on October 7, attacking vessels in vital shipping lanes and firing drones and missiles at Israel itself.

The group which rules much of Yemen says its attacks are a show of support for the Palestinians and has vowed they will continue until Israel stops its offensive on the Gaza Strip — more than 1,000 miles from their seat of power in Sanaa.

The Ansar Allah and other groups’ role has added to the conflict’s regional risks, threatening sea lanes through which much of the world’s oil shipped, and worrying states on the Red Sea as Ansar Allah rockets and drones fly towards Israel.

Riyadh, the world’s top oil exporter, has watched with alarm as missiles have been fired over its territory.

With the Ansar Allah stepping up attacks on shipping over the past weeks, two sources said Riyadh’s message of restraint to Washington aimed to avoid further escalation. Riyadh was so far pleased with the way the United States was handling the situation, the sources added.

“They pressed the Americans about this and why the Gaza conflict should stop,” one of the sources said.

The White House declined to comment.

The Saudi government did not respond to an e-mailed request for a comment on the discussions.

As Saudi Arabia presses for a ceasefire to halt what it has called a “barbaric war” in Gaza, its diplomacy reflects a wider policy aimed at promoting regional stability after years of confrontation with Iran and its allies.

— **Reuters**

COMBAT IN IN KHAN

GAZA: Israeli forces battled Hamas in Gaza’s main southern city on Wednesday in some of the most intense combat of the two-month-old war sparked by the October 7 attacks.

The focus of the conflict has shifted into the besieged territory’s south following fierce fighting and bombardment that reduced much of the north to rubble and forced 1.9 million people to flee.

Israeli troops, tanks, armoured personnel carriers and bulldozers have rolled into Khan Younis in the south, Gaza’s second biggest city, forcing already displaced civilians to pack up and flee again, witnesses said.

“Our forces are now encircling the Khan Younis area in the southern Gaza Strip,” Israel’s army chief Herzi Halevi said.

“We have secured many Hamas strongholds in the northern Gaza Strip, and now we are operating against its strongholds in the south.”

The fighting was “the most intense day since the beginning of the ground operation” in late October, said the army’s Southern Command chief Major General Yaron Finkelman.

The streets of Khan Younis were almost empty on Wednesday as residents tried to take shelter from shelling and artillery fire, said AFP journalists, while the dead and wounded continued to pour into the city’s hospitals.

The latest toll from the government media office said 16,248 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, had been killed.

Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas and free 138 hostages still held after scores were released during a short-lived truce.

In a morning briefing, the army said it had struck about 250 targets in the Gaza Strip over the past day and that troops were “continuing to locate weapons, underground shafts, explosives and additional military infrastructure”.

The civilian mass casualties in Gaza have sparked global concern, heightened by dire shortages brought by an Israeli siege that has seen only limited supplies

“The so-called safe zones... are not scientific, they are not rational, they are not possible, and I think the authorities are aware of this

JAMES ELDER
Spokesman, UNICEF



A woman sits with children outside, as displaced Palestinians, who fled their houses due to I

of food, water, fuel and medicines enter.

Hassan Al Qadi, a displaced Khan Younis resident, said “the whole city is suffering from destruction and relentless shelling.

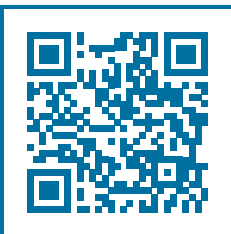
“Many people arriving from northern Gaza are facing dire circumstances. Many are homeless and some are searching for their missing children.”

“We are not mere he said, speaking in

The violence in C worst assaults on an and age”, charged a Council, which also threat of the appoa



Palestinians inspect the site of Israeli strikes in Khan Younis on Wednesday. – **Reuters**



INTENSIFIES IN YOUNIS



Israeli strike, shelter in a camp in Rafah on Wednesday. — Reuters

the numbers. We are human beings,”
the southern city of Rafah.
Gaza “now ranks amongst the
civilian population in our time
group the Norwegian Refugee
warned of the dire public health
chilling winter.

Several Hamas commanders were killed in an air
strike near the Indonesian Hospital in northern Gaza,
the Israeli military said early on Wednesday on social
media platform X.
Sources in Hamas and Islamic Jihad, another
Palestinian militant group, said their fighters were
battling Israeli troops early on Wednesday in a bid

to prevent them from breaking into Khan Yunis and
surrounding areas.
As the war expands, Israel has told people to move
even further south, sparking “panic, fear and anxiety”,
according to Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN
agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA.
People were being pushed into an area that is less
than one-third of the Gaza Strip, with roads to the
south clogged, he said.
International aid groups have condemned the
succession of orders to flee from one area to another,
saying that civilians were running out of options.
“Nowhere is safe in Gaza,” said United Nations
humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths. “Not hospital,
not shelters, not refugee camps. No one is safe.”
Following demands to create areas where civilians
could shelter, Israel’s army published a map it said was
intended to enable Gazans to “evacuate from specific
places for their safety if required”.
But the UN criticised the map, saying it was
impossible to create safe zones for civilians to flee to
inside Gaza.
“The so-called safe zones... are not scientific, they
are not rational, they are not possible, and I think
the authorities are aware of this,” said James Elder,
spokesman for the UN children’s agency UNICEF.
An estimated 1.9 million people are displaced
in Gaza — roughly 80 per cent of the population,
according to UN figures.
Gazans, their belongings piled onto donkey carts,
battered vehicles and camels, have headed further
south to try to escape the expanding Israeli offensive.
In northern Gaza, the Israeli military said it had
encircled the Jabalia refugee camp and also raided
a Hamas Internal Security Forces command and
control centre. It said on Wednesday that the number
of Israeli soldiers killed inside Gaza since the war
began had risen to 83.
Fighting resumed after the collapse on Friday of a
Qatar-mediated truce that saw scores of Israeli and
other hostages released in exchange for Palestinian
prisoners.
The war has sparked fears of a wider regional
conflict, with frequent exchanges of fire with Iran-
backed Hezbollah across Israel’s border with Lebanon.
A Lebanese soldier was killed by Israeli fire on a
military post near the country’s southern border on
Tuesday, the army said.
The occupied West Bank has also seen an upsurge
in violence. — AFP

TURKEY REJECTS ‘BUFFER ZONE’ PLAN FOR GAZA



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan

ANKARA: Turkey rejects plans to establish a
post-war buffer zone in Gaza because it would
be disrespectful to Palestinians, President Tayyip
Erdogan was quoted as saying on Wednesday.
Reuters reported last week that Israel had
conveyed plans for the buffer zone to several Arab
states and Turkey.
Speaking to reporters on a flight from Doha,
Erdogan said Gaza’s governance and future after the
war would be decided by Palestinians alone.
“I consider even the debating of this (buffer-zone)
plan as disrespectful to my Palestinian siblings. For
us, this is not a plan that can be debated, considered,
or discussed,” Erdogan’s office quoted him as saying.
Calling for Israel to hand back territories it
occupies and end settlements in those territories, he
said: “Israel must remove the terrorists — which it
markets to the world as settlers — from those houses
and those lands, and think about how it can build a
peaceful future with Palestinians.”
Ankara has sharply criticised Israel’s military
campaign in Gaza, supports a two-state solution
to the Israel-Palestinian conflict and hosts some
members of the Palestinian militant group Hamas.
Unlike most of its NATO allies and some Arab states,
it does not view Hamas as a terrorist group.
Erdogan said Israel had become “the West’s
spoiled child”, and blamed Western support for Israel
for the situation in the region.
Asked about reports that Israeli officials want
to hunt down Hamas members in other countries,
Erdogan said carrying out such an operation in Turkey
would have “very serious” consequences.
“In the event they carry out such a mistake, they
should know that they will pay the price for this very,
very heavily,” he said.
Erdogan said Turkey and Qatar wanted to rebuild
Gaza and that Turkey was ready to act as a guarantor
or host a peace conference. — Reuters

US restricts visas on extremist Israeli settlers

WASHINGTON: The United States
said on Tuesday it would refuse visas for
extremist Israeli settlers behind a wave
of violence against Palestinians in the
West Bank, as it also asked Israel to do
more to spare civilians in Gaza.
The visa measures amount to a rare
concrete repercussion by the United
States against Israelis in the nearly two-
month-old war, in which President Joe
Biden has nudged the US ally privately
but also promised strong support.
“We have underscored to the Israeli
government the need to do more to
hold accountable extremist settlers
who have committed violent attacks
against Palestinians in the West Bank,”
Secretary of State Antony Blinken said
in a statement.
“As President Biden has repeatedly
said, those attacks are unacceptable,” he
said.
Blinken said the United States
would refuse entry to anyone involved
in “undermining peace, security or
stability in the West Bank” or who
takes actions that “unduly restrict
civilians’ access to essential services
and basic necessities.”

“Instability in the West Bank both
harms the Israeli and Palestinian people
and threatens Israel’s national security
interests. Those responsible for it must
be held accountable,” Blinken said.
State Department spokesman
Matthew Miller said that dozens of
settlers, who were not publicly named,
would be affected. The visa ban also
applies to their immediate family
members.
Restrictions on entering the United
States will not apply to extremist settlers
who are US citizens.
Some 250 Palestinians have been
killed there by Israeli soldiers and
settlers since October 7, according to a
Palestinian government tally.
The Palestinian Authority holds
limited autonomy in the West Bank
where Palestinians have complained of
impunity over attacks and harassment
carried out by settlers, some of whom
have been serving in the Israeli military
as forces are shifted to Gaza.
Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
is in a coalition with far-right parties
that strongly support Jewish settlement
of lands seized in 1967, construction



A Palestinian checks a car burned in Israeli settlers raid near Salfit in the West Bank. — Reuters file photo

that is considered illegal under
international law.
Blinken visited both Israel and the
West Bank last week just as a pause
ended between Hamas and Israel.
The State Department said that Israel
has shown “improvement” in targeting
its strikes in Gaza as it voiced concern
about a repeat of the widespread
bombing at the start of the war.
“We will continue to monitor what’s
happening and will continue to press
them to do everything they can to
minimise civilian harm,” said Miller, the
State Department spokesman.
The United States has also
promised more than \$100 million in
humanitarian aid to the Palestinians but

has faced strong criticism in much of
the Arab world for its diplomatic and
military support of Israel.
J Street, the left-leaning pro-Israel
US group that is frequently critical of
Netanyahu, praised the visa restrictions
as an “important first step.”
It said that the Biden administration
should specifically restrict two far-
right ministers in Netanyahu’s cabinet,
Minister for National Security Itamar
Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel
Smotrich.
Before entering politics, Ben-Gvir
hung a portrait in his living room of
Baruch Goldstein, the US-born settler
who killed 29 Palestinian worshippers
at a mosque in the West Bank city of
Hebron.
The Biden administration has
returned to the traditional US and
international position of opposing
settlements, although until now its
stance has largely been rhetorical.
Former president Donald Trump
switched course, with Blinken’s
predecessor Mike Pompeo dropping
objections to settlements and visiting
one late in his term. — AFP

Engaging in community dialogue...

Engaging in community dialogue and bridging the divide between the state agencies and society are still essential in finding common ground for modernisation and growth we envision for our country. These approaches are based on wide national perspectives that include all societal groups and taken into consideration all real national voices to build the homeland by contributing opinions, ideas, proposals and kind words.

As an embodiment of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Muscat Governorate is translating this into reality through conversations with various social groups and by paying attention to the hopes and dreams of the younger generation for a better future.

As part of strategy to elevate the Omani capital, which is the centre of attention, there is a sincere effort to establish a foundation for community dialogue that seeks to reach a path for developing the governorate and adding a human sense to the cities. Such endeavours are being pursued on the basis of realistic foundations built on various standards to construct a thriving Muscat that will be as majestic and high as its mountains.

The capital boosts unique natural features that Allah has bestowed upon it, and which are scarcely found in many capitals around the world. Dialogue for Muscat is not like all other conversations, and adding aesthetics to the city's glamour makes it even harder to successfully fulfil this mission.

Opting for what fits well with the Muscat's glory and history requires deeper thoughts than merely manifesting those traits. Therefore, the dialogue was launched by the Minister of State and Governor of Muscat as a public survey on what should be added to Muscat. This requires the participants and community groups in Muscat to support this approach and



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DIALOGUE FOR MUSCAT IS NOT LIKE ALL OTHER CONVERSATIONS, AND ADDING AESTHETICS TO THE CITY'S GLAMOUR MAKES IT EVEN HARDER TO SUCCESSFULLY FULFIL THIS MISSION

dialogue on what the capital needs.

There is no doubt that the community dialogue pursued by the state authorities to reach common visions for building Oman extends to the methodologies of participation in decision-making in the country and is an extension of the democratic experiences in running the country's affairs. It is not unusual that dialogues with the community groups in Muscat are part of this approach and these directives that are fully translated into reality for the advancement of this country on the basis of public participation, leading to solutions which satisfy all groups, and taking all opinions into account and building on the steps agreed by everybody. We are glad to see this embodies a major societal experience and to see it gaining such momentum and attention across the board.

Maybe the talks held by the Muscat Governorate on humanisation of cities, the entertainment sector, and innovation opportunities convey the governorate's goals and future aspirations to keep developing new entertainment areas, developing different locations, and utilising the topography or geography of the area to add beauty to any modernisation project that makes Muscat an ideal place.

The talks could also be an opportunity for putting forward the future development plans aiming for converting the capital into a smart and environmentally-friendly city adopting latest technology in buildings, construction and urbanisation standards worldwide in order to achieve the desired goals to make Muscat the world's premier capital that beholds everything and pleases the soul and eye.

Such plans would also envisage making use of the environmental aspects and harnessing them to serve the country's tourist objectives, which adds another aesthetic dimension to the beauty of Muscat.

SEAGULL AND SUNSET!



This photograph shows a seagull standing on a chimney at sunset in central Rome, Italy, on Wednesday. – AFP

Global South's debt crisis thwarting climate ambition

This year's United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28), currently under way in Dubai, will be decisive for the Loss and Damage Fund established at COP27, because governments must agree on how the new fund will be operationalised and financed. But equally important is the first global stocktake (GST), which will assess countries' progress towards achieving the goals of the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

A preliminary report on the GST, released in October, is underwhelming, while the most recent World Energy Outlook from the International Energy Agency found that global carbon dioxide levels have yet to peak. This implies that if we want to achieve our climate targets, we must fast-track the clean-energy transition and urgently slash greenhouse-gas emissions. But while this will undoubtedly require closing the massive climate financing gap, policymakers must overcome widespread sovereign-debt distress.

The Debt Relief for a Green and Inclusive Recovery Project, using data from the UN Development Programme and the International Monetary Fund, estimates that 69 countries need immediate debt relief, of which 61 have at least \$812 billion in debt that must be restructured across all creditor classes. Moreover, an IMF working paper calculated that only seven of 29 low-



María Fernanda Espinosa,
a former president of the UN General Assembly, is Executive Director of GWL Voices



Rishikesh Ram Bhandary
is Assistant Director of the Global Economic Governance Initiative at the Boston University Global Development Policy Centre

income countries that submitted estimates of their adaptation needs had sufficient fiscal space to meet those needs and achieve their emissions-reduction targets, also known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs). With debt-service costs set to increase in 2024, many countries will spend more on interest payments than on health or education.

As long as the debt crisis in the Global South grinds on, many emerging-market and developing economies will be unable to invest in gender-sensitive low-carbon development. This, in turn, would make these countries more vulnerable to climate shocks and fiscal instability, and would also foreclose the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5° Celsius, the target set by the Paris climate agreement.

To address the debt-climate nexus at COP28 and beyond, policymakers should focus on three objectives: a more inclusive and efficient debt-restructuring process; more concessional finance; and expansion of the size and remit of multilateral development banks (MDBs).

For starters, the G20's Common Framework must be reformed to ensure that all climate-vulnerable countries, including middle-income countries, are eligible for debt treatment. While

the Common Framework has started providing relief, recent debt-restructuring deals have been modest in scope and came at the cost of protracted negotiations that only exacerbated the problem. Future deals must ensure significant relief measures that enable countries to kickstart economic growth and achieve climate goals, rather than merely returning them to previous levels of austerity or helping them stave off the next crisis.

Second, the need for more concessional finance has never been clearer. In October, at the annual meetings of the World Bank and the IMF in Marrakesh, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva noted that interest

rates were in a "higher-for-longer era." This comes at the same time that countries must accelerate the deployment of renewables, which are highly sensitive to the cost of capital.

Moreover, climate vulnerability has been found to drive up the cost of debt and restrict access to financing.

But there is ample room to scale up concessional finance. From 2021 to 2022, low-cost project-level debt and grants accounted for only 11 per cent of total climate finance, according to the Climate Policy Initiative. The World Bank, as part of its "Evolution Roadmap" initiative, has indicated that it will expand concessional lending beyond the poorest

countries to fund necessary climate investments. Other MDBs should emulate this approach, and their shareholders should inject more capital to facilitate it, so that governments can access affordable financing that does not crowd out other priorities.

Moreover, MDBs must become bigger and better-equipped to supply the low-cost, long-term finance that climate-vulnerable countries need. While the World Bank has taken a step in this direction by implementing balance-sheet-optimisation measures to increase the scale of its lending by \$50 billion over the next ten years, it is not enough. Other MDBs should devise concrete plans for capital increases and, when presenting it to their boards, outline how a fresh injection of funds will enable them to provide low-cost finance to developing countries and make bolder bets on transformational investments.

In addition to increasing their lending capacity, MDBs must reform the debt architecture. For example, the World Bank has advanced a debt-pause clause in new and existing lending agreements that permits 45 small islands and states facing qualifying events to postpone their interest and principal payments.



IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva noted that interest rates were in a "higher-for-longer era."

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AL SEEB TAKE AL NAHDA IN SUPER CUP TIE



AL SEEB



AL NAHDA

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 6

The defending champions of HM Cup and Omantel league champions, Al Nahda will lock horns with former HM Cup Champions Al Seeb in the 2023 Super Cup clash on Thursday. The match will start at 6:30 pm at the Suhar Sports Complex. Al Seeb will be part of the Super Cup match after Al Suwaiq, runners up of the previous league season, hold their football activity in the club for this season.

The scenario is repeating again from the last season, as both teams met in the previous year in Salalah at Al Saada Stadium. The match was ended for Al Seeb through Marwan al Siyabi and Salah al Yahyaei

goals. It was a perfect season for Muscat based team as they had clinched three titles including the HM Cup, top tier league and Super Cup. Al Nahda won the title two times in 2009 and 2014 and they will look for another triumph this season as Al Buraimi representative team producing top efforts this season. Al Nahda progressed recently to the semis of the HM Cup Championship after stunning Al Seeb in the overall matches in the quarterfinals. The first leg match ended for Al Nahda at 2-1 on November 2, at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, while the second leg match ended in a goalless draw at Al Buraimi Sports Complex on December 2. At AFC Cup level, coach Hamed al Azani's side showing very solid display as they moved



to the semis of the West Zone. They are currently topping the group stage with 12 points from four victories and suffered to one defeat. Al Nahda's battalion featured from many top names including Harib al Saadi, Salah al Yahyaei, Abdullah Fawaz, Omar al Malki and the rest of the team's players. On the other side, Al Seeb players will look to retain the title and ensure their domination at Super Cup level. Al Seeb's coaching staff headed by Jorvan Vieira will depend on Mohsin al Ghassani, Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Zaher al Aghbari and beside other stars. It is expected a tight tie among the both teams. The head coach Al Nahda team, Hamed al Azzani, voiced confidently that his team in best shape to play the match. "This

is a final match and the winner will lift the title. Our hope will be always to win and crowned champions of the Super Cup. AS a team, we will target for a perfect show and I hope to see a continuation in the team's technical level and physical side of the players. All the players are fit for the game expect Omar al Salti and the professional player Junior," he ended. The Brazilian Jorvan Vieira, head coach of Al Seeb team, the team are in best situation to show top game. "It is a tight tie and one of the crucial domestic finals. My team's goal is to capture the title. This match will be different than all the previous games we had. I respect all the fan's criticism but I hope to see their support for the team in the complex," he concluded.

Oman Sail's brightest prospects take to the water

MUSCAT: Oman Sail's Musannah Sailing School was the venue for the final Ranking Race of 2023 as 73 sailors from all three sailing schools competed across Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6 and Windsurfing events during December 1, 2. The Ranking Race gives the sailors more competitive experience and helps Oman Sail's coaches evaluate the progress throughout the year and select the best performing sailors to represent the nation. Ahmed bin Nasser al Qasmi, Oman Sail's Head of Sailing Schools, commented, "The Ranking Races are valuable tools in assessing the development of our sailors, how they perform in a competitive environment and where each school stands in terms of coaching the next generation of Omani sailors." "Throughout the year we encourage our young sailors to enjoy learning, put the lessons into practice and have fun while racing, but with national team places to be decided at the end of the year this is an opportunity to perform to the best of their abilities," he added. The Youth Optimist competition featured the largest fleet of the event with 34 sailors, boys and girls, taking part and strong competition within the top 10. Khalid al Sarihi from the Musannah Sailing School finished first after managing to



Youth club winners

hang on to a narrow lead ahead of Umran al Alawi from Sur and Firas al Mujaini, also from Musannah Sailing School, in third. Fatma al Harthy from Al Mouj Muscat finished as the highest-ranking girl, fifth overall, with teammate Reem al Numani finishing seventh overall. The youth event is open to boys and girls aged between 8 and 18 years of age and represents the first level of sailing at Oman Sail's Sailing Schools. From there, the sailors progress to Junior level — ages 8 to 10 — and Senior from age 11 to 14, after which they are eligible to join Oman Sail's teams and gain experience on a variety of boats while competing in national, regional and international competition. In the Senior Boys Optimist



Windsurfing race winners



Photo from ILKA races

competition, Tamim al Balushi from the Musannah Sailing School finished top of the group, with teammates Saud al Shaqsi in third, Firas al Nabhani in

fifth and Hood al Nofli in sixth. Abdulrahman al Hadi from the Al Mouj Muscat school finished second, just a point behind the winner, and Khamis

al Mushaikhi from Sur finished fourth. The Senior Girls Optimist competition featured three sailors from the Musannah Sailing School. Hadeel al Mushaifri and Tarteel al Hasani finished level at the top after trading first and second places across the four races. Hadeel finished 10th overall and took first place by two points overall, with Tarteel finishing 11th overall. Abeer al Zakwani, in the Junior category, finished third in the Girls category and a very creditable 16th overall, out of 22 sailors. The highest ranked sailor in the Junior Optimist race was Harib al Busaidy from Al Mouj Muscat, finishing ninth overall. The ILCA 4 race was won by Abdulatif al Qasmi of the Musannah Sailing School who

won three of the four races. Teammates Saleh al Balushi and Mashari al Hadhrami finished second and third respectively, with just a single point separating them. Al Mutasim al Farsi won the ILCA 6 competition with three wins from the four races to finish three points ahead of Zakariya al Wahhabi in second and Ahmed al Balushi in third a further two points behind. All seven of the sailors in the race came from the Musannah Sailing School. The Windsurf competition proved highly competitive with all four sailors taking turns in the podium positions. Nadir al Mujaini from the Musannah Sailing School won three of the four races to take first place from Ahmad al Kazarooni in second and Khattab al Mujaini in third. Salah al Ghafri finished fourth and showed huge improvement as the competition progressed. Ahmed bin Nasser al Qasmi, added, "We are very pleased with the progress made by the sailors at all three schools this year. The sailors in the senior categories have shown they will soon be ready to sail alongside adults, and the junior sailors are able to compete with their older peers. Our youth team has also shown that the building blocks of competitive sailing are very strong at the Oman Sail Sailing Schools, and we have a bright future ahead of us on the water."

JAMES AND LAKERS DOWN SUNS WHILE BUCKS ROMP PAST KNICKS

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James scored 31 points as the Los Angeles Lakers won a thrilling duel with the Phoenix Suns 106-103 on Tuesday to advance to the semifinals of the NBA's in-season tournament.

James produced a trademark clutch fourth quarter performance with 15 points in a victory that sends the Lakers into a last-four showdown with the New Orleans Pelicans in Las Vegas on Thursday.

In Tuesday's other quarterfinal, Giannis Antetokounmpo and Damian Lillard combined for 63 points as the Milwaukee Bucks advanced to the semifinals with a 146-122 rout of the New York Knicks.

But the game of the night was unquestionably in Los Angeles, where James and the Lakers held off a ferocious second-half fightback from Kevin Durant and the Suns to prevail in a classic.

The Lakers dominated the first half to lead by 12 at the break, up 59-47.

But the Suns roared back in the third quarter, outscoring the Lakers 35-24 to make it a one-point game heading into the fourth.

The 38-year-old James though was in no mood to surrender victory and found his scoring touch to shepherd the Lakers over the line.

Austin Reaves nailed a superb three-pointer to give the Lakers



LeBron James (23) moves to the basket against Nassir (25) Grayson Allen (8) and Drew Eubanks (14) . – USA TODAY Sports

a four-point advantage with 15 seconds on the clock.

Durant cut the gap to two points with a reverse layup but missed with a last-gasp attempted buzzer beater that would have forced overtime.

"I've been there a lot in my career and I understand the assignment," James said of his ruthless fourth-quarter display.

"I was happy I was able to make a couple of plays, but the big shot came from AR (Austin Reaves) to take us up by four... that was big-time."

James finished with 31 points from 12-of-25 shooting, with 11 assists and five rebounds. Anthony Davis added 27 points with 15 rebounds while Reaves added 20 points in a scintillating cameo from the bench.

Durant led the Phoenix scoring with 31 points while Grayson Allen and Devin Booker finished with 21 points apiece for the Suns.

- Giannis, Lillard shine - Milwaukee advanced to a showdown against the Indiana Pacers in Thursday's other semifinal after pulling clear of the Knicks with a huge third quarter.

Antetokounmpo led the Milwaukee scorers with 35 points while Lillard weighed in with 28 points, including 5-of-7 from three-point distance.

Antetokounmpo finished with 10 assists and eight rebounds.

Malik Beasley (18 points),

Khris Middleton (14), Bobby Portis (13) and Cameron Payne (12) all made double figures for Milwaukee.

Antetokounmpo was heartened by a display which provided more evidence that the former NBA Most Valuable Player's blockbuster partnership with summer signing Lillard is starting to gel.

"Game by game we are getting more comfortable," Antetokounmpo said of his on-court chemistry with Lillard. "We have a lot of games ahead of us."

New York were led by a 41-point display from Julius Randle while Jalen Brunson finished with 24 points.

A Payne three-pointer put Milwaukee 20 points ahead at 125-105 midway through the fourth quarter and the Bucks cruised home to seal their last-four berth.

— AFP



Brook (11) looks to pass against Robinson (23) . – USA TODAY Sports

OC to send all-Omani team for Asian Games, Olympics



All Omani Team Photo

MUSCAT: The Oman cricket team at the 2026 Asian Games in Japan or an all-Omani national squad at the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 2028. Well, it could be a reality as Oman Cricket (OC) embarks on their latest endeavour to build an elite all-Omani team.

The initiative launched recently has seen OC handpick a group of promising 16 Omani cricketers, with the aim to have a pool of 20, who will be nurtured and groomed by expert coaches for competing at the global level.

With cricket's inclusion in the Asian Games and the upcoming 2028 Olympics, the focus of Oman Cricket board is now to build a team comprised entirely of Omani talent.

It's noteworthy that with cricket's inclusion in the Asian Games and the upcoming Los Angeles Olympics in 2028, eligibility to participate is limited to national players or passport holders. This contrasts with ICC events, where expatriates become

eligible to represent the national team after completing a specific period of residence in the respective country.

Duleep Mendis, Oman Cricket's Chief Development Officer, expressed confidence in this venture: "Our aim is to cultivate a national team composed solely of Omani players. We've meticulously chosen this initial group of 16 individuals with an aim to have a pool of 20. We will be providing them with the same resources and opportunities available to our national senior team. We have started this mission to have an Omani team play at the Asian Games and at the Olympics in future."

Mendis emphasised the long-term goal: "Preparing these players for the international stage will require dedicated effort and time. We aspire for them to not just participate but to compete at a high level. Their progress will be closely monitored, and their commitment to learning and adapting swiftly will be crucial in their selection."

Ahli Sidab beat Oman Club in Basketball League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 6

Ahli Sidab Club defeated Oman Club with a score of 58-49 at the sub-court of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, as part of the second round of the Oman Basketball League for the 2023-24 season.

The match was characterised by varying levels, with both teams sharing control and some relative parity that allowed Oman Club to equalise. However, Ahli Sidab managed the game well and succeeded in securing the victory despite losing in the fourth quarter, where the point difference in the third quarter had the most significant impact on Ahli Sidab's win.

Ahli Sidab took control of the game with players such as Wael Gellaty, Hameer al Hasani, and Khaled al Hashmi leading the charge. The match began with Ahli Sidab taking the lead, with Wael Gellaty and Khaled al Hashmi shots, advancing the team to 11-4. Later, Oman Club's Bassam al Musalmi scored a three-pointer, reducing the gap to four points. Ahli Sidab responded with two points from Wael Gellaty. Two mistakes by Mazen al Hadidi and Fahad al Ajmi added four points to Oman Club, bringing the score to 11-13. The first quarter ended with Ahli Sidab leading 18-13.

The second quarter witnessed a return to parity with a slight advantage for Ahli Sidab. Oman Club attempted to close the gap with a shot from Fahad al Ajmi, scoring two points. Ahli Sidab responded with two points from Khamees al Hasani. Oman Club's



Oman Club against Ahli Sidab Club

Mazen al Hadidi then scored two points, narrowing the gap to 17-20. The excitement continued with both teams scoring, and Oman Club managed to equalise at 26-26. The first half ended with Ahli Sidab leading 30-28.

In the third quarter, Ahli Sidab regained its offensive momentum, while its defence thwarted most of Oman Club's attacks. Ahli Sidab expanded the lead with shots from its players Sami al Ghilani and Wael

Gellaty, making the score 37-28. Ahli Sidab continued its offensive effectiveness with two points from Khamees al Hasani and a point from a mistake, along with a new three-pointer from his teammate Khaled al Hashmi, widening the gap to 43-30. Both teams continued their attempts with more attacks, and the third quarter ended with Ahli Sidab leading Oman Club 51-34.

The fourth quarter saw a

resurgence from Oman Club, which managed to score 15 points. However, Ahli Sidab's strategic plays and resilience scored 7 points and secured a 58-49 victory.

The match was officiated by international referees Essam al Siyabi as the first referee, Ahmed al Khseibi as the second referee, and Wafa al Sumairi as the third referee. Mahmoud al Ajmi, Fatima al Harthy, and Mariam al Zadjali were on the table.

GOALS

GALORE IN ARSENAL'S LAST-GASP WIN

ANDY JALIL
LUTON, DEC 6

With a headed goal in desperation in the dying seconds of this thrilling encounter, Arsenal completed a 4-3 win at Luton which keeps them at the top of the Premier League. It was a game that saw the balance of play keep swinging in favour of one side and then the other.

A relieved Arsenal manager, Mikel Arteta said: "Incredible evening, the players were incredible, they wanted it so much and they refused to give up. So happy. We knew it would be a big battle here, we made it hard for ourselves the way we conceded the goals."

He added: "The spirit of the team, how we fought, showed our quality in the right moments and we never gave up. We went for it and got our rewards today. Credit to Luton. Their delivery was excellent, the finishing was excellent and sometimes you have to credit the opponents. Big compliments to them. It was a tough night."

It wasn't until midway through the first half that the game livened up with Arsenal opening the scoring. Gabriel Jesus chased down a pass back to Thomas Kaminsky and the goalkeeper put the ball out of play. Jesus took the throw quickly to Bukayo Saka who passed to Martinelli and the Brazilian drove into the bottom corner.

Within five minutes Luton were on level terms with Gabe Osho timing his jump perfectly to firmly head in from a corner. But on the stroke of halftime the visitor's lead was restored. Saka and Ben White combined on the right and White put in a lovely cross for the unmarked Jesus to head into the net.

Five minutes into the second half, Luton equalised for the second time. Once again the goal came from a corner taken by Alfie Doughty. David Raya came out to collect the ball but the tall Elijah Adebayo rose above him to head the ball home.

Luton went into the lead in the 57th minute with Ross Barclay running past Martin Odegaard just inside Arsenal's half and doing a one-two pass with Andros Townsend and beating Ben White on the run

before driving a low shot which went under Raya and into the goal. It was another bad mistake by the Arsenal goalkeeper.

Luton's joy wasn't to last for long as the Gunners hit back within three minutes and made it 3-3 when Jesus chased a long ball sent across by Saka and passed to Kai Havertz for him to prod past the goalkeeper.

It was a hectic last half hour with the two sides looking to get ahead again. It finally happened in added time with a 97th minute winning goal. Oleksandr Zinchenko passed to Odegaard who promptly crossed for Declan Rice, Arsenal's £105 million signing from West Ham, to rescue his club with a header into the bottom corner.

Luton's disappointed manager, Rob Edwards said: "We thought we'd have a go, that's what our supporters want. That's our identity. Arsenal wanted a game of order and we made it chaotic at times. I'm really flat for everyone. I'm so proud of the lads."



The spirit of the team, how we fought, showed our quality in the right moments and we never gave up. We went for it and got our rewards today

MIKEL ARTETA
Arsenal manager

Arsenal's Declan Rice celebrates scoring their fourth goal. – Reuters

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Major boost for shrimp farming in Oman

MUSCAT: Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) will celebrate on December 7 the opening of its shrimp farming project at Al Khuwaymah in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali – a venture that will contribute significantly to Oman’s food security goals.

According to Eng Bilarab bin Omar al Battashi, Project Engineer, the farm is being built on an area of 2 million m2 with an investment of RO 16 million. Production is targeted to reach 3,700 tonnes of white-legged shrimp annually in 2024, rising to 4,000 tonnes per annum eventually. Experimental production, which began in March, has so far yielded around 500 tonnes of shrimp.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Al Battashi said the shrimp farm features a hatchery



FDO’s Al Khuwaymah shrimp farming project will make a significant contribution to Oman’s food security strategy.

unit, 48 primary nursery ponds, 126 external grow-out ponds, a main feeding channel with a length of 1,500 metres, main suction channel, ice factory of 25 tonnes per day capacity, water desalination plant of 150 m3/day capacity, maintenance workshops,

pre-treatment and packaging facilities, administrative offices, warehouses, laboratory, maintenance workshops and staff accommodation. The project farms white-legged shrimp of their demand, quality and suitability for Oman’s weather conditions. Out of 170 workers employed by operating company Oriental Shrimp Farming, Omanisation has reached 35 per cent.

According to the Aquaculture Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Al Khuwaymah Shrimp Farming Project will support the growth of fisheries in line with Oman Vision 2040. It will also create opportunities for Omani traders and SMEs to venture into shrimp marketing and exports. — ONA

Italian firms win major order from Oman’s green steel project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 6

A pair of Italian based metal industry engineering firms has won an order for the fabrication and supply of a Direct Reduction Iron (DRI) plant, which will be the centrepiece of a landmark green steel project construction work on which was launched at Duqm Special Economic Zone last month.

Tenova and Danieli, both leading providers of engineering solutions for the metals and mining industries, have announced that they have been contracted to supply their proprietary Energiron technology for the new hydrogen-ready DRI plant of Vulcan Green Steel (VGS), wholly owned by Indian power and steel giant Jindal Group.

On November 27, Vulcan Green Steel broke ground on its

Duqm SEZ Breaks Ground on \$3 Billion Green Steel Project with Italian Engineering Firms at the Helm

\$3 billion project at Duqm SEZ, which at full capacity will produce 5 million tonnes per annum of green steel based entirely on the use of green hydrogen and renewable energy as fuel resources.

The new Energiron DRI plant, based on innovative technology jointly developed by Tenova and Danieli, will initially be powered by natural gas before hydrogen is used as a blend when green hydrogen becomes available on site.

According to Danieli, the



single-module, zero-reformer Energiron plant will hot charge the Electric Arc Furnace (EAF) with direct reduction iron (DRI) at temperatures higher than 600°C, allowing energy savings for steelmaking. The plant will also be capable of producing Hot Briquetted Iron (HBI) for storage or export.

“Hybrid by design, hydrogen-ready Energiron technology makes it possible to use natural gas as reducing agent with the possibility to use hydrogen up to 100 per cent, or any mix of these, according to hydrogen availability. Actually, the use of some natural gas during the Direct Reduction process is appropriate for adding a minimum of carbon to the DRI, needed during melting,” Danieli added in a statement.

Significantly, Energiron technology has the capability to capture the CO2 from the direct reduction process and utilise it for other applications, thereby contributing to carbon reductions from the overall operation. Utilisation of this captured CO2 will also create a new source of revenue for the company, it noted.

Completion of the DRI plant at Vulcan Green Steel’s Duqm complex is targeted during 2026.

3rd Green Hydrogen Summit Oman to launch on Dec 12

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 6

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals is hosting the launch of the third edition of the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO), scheduled to take place from December 12 to 14, 2023, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Organised by Birba, the event aims together industry leaders, policymakers, and innovators in joint discussion sessions to present the latest policies, legislation, and modern technology aimed at accelerating the pace of energy transition and promoting sustainable energy solutions.

Oman aspires to become one of the world’s largest hydrogen producers by 2030, leveraging its



human, natural, and geographic resources to lead in this promising sector. This initiative aims to achieve optimal benefits from the hydrogen sector’s sustainability, contributing to emission reduction and fulfilling Oman’s commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

The summit aligns with Oman’s Vision 2040, supporting energy transition and sustainable development. Oman is working towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, with green hydrogen playing a vital role in this energy transition.

The summit will feature a diverse range of sessions covering key topics in the hydrogen sector. Several workshops will provide participants with the opportunity to engage with vital aspects of hydrogen, ranging from fundamentals to project feasibility, certification programmes, and local value addition. Additionally, the summit will serve as a platform for leading discussions on green hydrogen markets, green financing, and sustainable mobility.

The Oman Green Hydrogen Summit is expected to attract distinguished participants at both the local and international levels. Major corporations such as Hydrom, OQ, PTTER, IEA, Asyad, Bloomberg, NEOM, Nasdaq, CNN, BMW, Vulcan Steel, Engie, BP, CNBC, Alsharq

with Bloomberg, and other prominent companies will be participating.

On the sidelines of the summit, on December 10, 2023, the organisers will arrange a tour featuring BMW hydrogen-powered vehicles, starting from Dubai to Muscat. This initiative aims to showcase the latest advancements in modern technology supporting the concept of the future of green energy. Participants will have the opportunity to experience driving the BMW iX5 hydrogen-powered car.

Furthermore, an executive energy circle (EEC) discussion session will take place, gathering global energy leaders for advanced discussions, coinciding with the conclusion of the COP 28 in Dubai.

DME achieves new milestone in Omani crude oil trades



A total of 20 billion barrels of Omani crude oil have traded on the DME since inception in June 2007 (Picture credit: Reuters)

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 6

Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) on Wednesday, December 6, 2023, reached the highest physical delivery volume since September 2018, with more than 24 million barrels to be delivered in January 2024. Open Interest on November 2023 reached 24,053 contracts compared to 23,228 contracts during the expiry process in October 2018.

A total of 20 billion barrels of Omani crude oil have traded on the exchange since inception in June 2007, while 3 billion barrels have been delivered via the DME’s physical delivery mechanism over the same period.

Raid al Salami, Managing Director, DME, said: “These records underline the increased appetite for customers to hedge, trade and get their crude oil delivered through DME due to its regulated and transparent trading platform and its state-of-the-art delivery mechanism.”

These milestones come after DME registered an increase in trading volumes and physical delivery in the first half of 2023, 15 per cent and 18 per cent consecutively, compared to the same period of 2022.

“We are committed to fostering a collaborative partnership with crude oil market participants to develop a healthy energy derivatives market in the region through ongoing dialogue and a shared commitment to excellence. We seek to build lasting relationships that drive mutual success, promote market integrity, and advance the evolution of the price discovery mechanism we provide, to enable participants to hedge their exposure in the dynamic and volatile crude oil market,” he added.

“Our consistent growth in volumes highlights the confidence of global players in the DME’s value proposition and the trust granted by major crude oil producers in the region, to price their crude exports to the East of Suez market.”

Sohar International launches unified banking platform

MUSCAT: Traditional banking methods may no longer suffice in today's fast-paced business environment.

The demand for digital transformation in the corporate world is rapidly increasing, with businesses recognising the potential for cost savings, increased revenue, improved customer experience, and better risk management. Considering global trends and as financial partners to our government and corporate clients, Sohar International has invested in and rolled out a Unified Transaction Banking Platform that facilitates cash & liquidity management and trade finance solutions driven optimised collections, capitalisation on timely FX rates, enhanced payments processing, efficient liquidity management, effective supply chain, and digitised trade finance applications.

Sohar International has showcased its commitment to innovative approaches by offering paperless trade and supply chain finance options, aiming to eliminate the lengthy and inefficient paper-based processes. By adopting these new solutions, customers can benefit from faster processing times and enhance their business operations. Moreover, the integration of structured receivable and payment solutions is further expected to diversify clients' tools for the management of liquidity and working capital finance.

The adaptability of technology



is not a one-off step; it is a constant and consistent process, a journey. Being farsighted is vital to timely adaptability, where Sohar International's Unified Transaction Banking Platform with globally benchmarked services can be cited as a case in point. Using its fast-paced, strategic approach to digitalisation, the Bank offers cutting-edge solutions revolutionising how businesses bank and prosper.

The Unified Transaction Banking Platform is a suite of innovative solutions that simplify banking operations and enhance security. Here's a closer look at what it offers:

- From the convenience of your office or home, you can make

all your payments like salary, utilities, local/international vendor payments, and even digitise your cheque issuance process.

- You can also experience the power of customised & consolidated collections solutions vide Virtual Accounts, Point of Sale (POS), and Remote Deposition of Cheques (RDC).
- You can swiftly avail trade facilities like Letters of Credit, Guarantees, Bill discounting, Loan against Trust Receipts (LTR), and Invoice Financing in a paperless & entirely digital manner.
- You can undertake Foreign Exchange transactions online for your Payments,

Receivables, or Trade transactions and avail of special FX rates.

- You can Pool or Control the balances across various group companies, optimise the interest costs, and have an automatic reconciliation with your system, thereby saving on administrative time & cost.
- You can have a Supply Chain Framework, connecting your vendors and customers and creating a digital Eco-system for easy access & control.

With the Digital Trade Finance solutions and Comprehensive Cashflow Management suite, YOU can achieve more in a single day. You may transact on Sohar International Digital platforms using Web access or direct integration of your ERP with our out-of-the-box Host to Host integration solution. With Sohar International, you would receive online real-time transaction status and outstanding facilities for You to make better-informed decisions.

The Bank's commitment to investing in cutting-edge technology and providing continuous training and development for its staff has resulted in a team equipped with the skills necessary to implement and execute such advancements accurately. Technology integration with a well-trained workforce has consistently enabled the Bank to exceed customer expectations, providing a seamless banking experience.

FDO showcases sustainability at 5th Oman AgroFood Expo

MUSCAT: Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), a pivotal entity in Oman's fisheries and aquaculture sector, is set to participate in the highly anticipated 5th Oman AgroFood Exhibition and Conference. This event, taking place from December 4 to 6, 2023 (Friday to Sunday) at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), Muscat, aligns with FDO's commitment to sustainable growth and supporting the economic diversification goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

FDO, along with its subsidiary companies Blue Waters, Natural Shrimp Aquaculture Company (NSA), and Oriental Shrimp Aquaculture Company (ORA), will showcase a range of products, including White Pacific Shrimp and Seabream, demonstrating its dedication to quality and innovation. Representatives will be available for discussions, explaining the product range and exploring business expansion opportunities with visitors. Other FDO subsidiaries present at the event include Blue Waters, specialising in finfish operations, and Shrimp Aquaculture Company, focusing on developing shrimp aquaculture projects and processing facilities.

Live cooking sessions during the event, conducted by FDO, will provide visitors with a taste of fresh Omani seafood products, fostering engagement and exploring business expansion opportunities with suppliers and distributors.

Under the patronage of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources, the 5th Oman AgroFood Exhibition and Conference brings together key decision-makers, thought leaders, and technology providers, highlighting Oman's stable economy, robust infrastructure, and commitment to expanding non-oil sectors in line with Oman Vision 2040.

As an investment and development group, FDO actively contributes to Oman's economic landscape through diversified investments and infrastructure development. FDO and its subsidiaries engage in fishing fresh Horse



Mackerel and a local mackerel species in the Arabian Sea area. Additionally, the company is involved in aquaculture, producing shrimp, shellfish, and other aquatic animals. FDO's participation in the event aims to introduce fresh catch to the Omani market, catering to both retail and businesses.

Khalid al Balushi, Sales Manager at Natural Shrimp Aquaculture Company (NSA), an FDO subsidiary, emphasised the significance of their participation, stating, "Our involvement in the Oman AgroFood Exhibition and Conference is crucial. It provides an opportunity to engage with

FDO actively contributes to Oman's economic landscape through diversified investments and infrastructure development

local traders, enhance FDO's standing in regional and global markets, and cultivate collaborations. Our primary goal is to finalise significant deals and draw investments into the fisheries and aquaculture sector, in addition to popularising fresh catch in the local market."

In addition to showcasing current endeavours, Khalid al Balushi shared plans for growth, including exploring opportunities in aquaculture projects and expanding into modern boats and coastal fleets in the fisheries sector.

Enjoy the ultimate safety and power with Chery

MUSCAT: Based on the T1X platform, TIGGO 8 PRO MAX is built with an overall design provided by internationally renowned supplier Bosch and Benteler. In terms of powertrain, TIGGO 8 PRO MAX is equipped with 2.0TGDI engine, which was once awarded the title of "China Best Ten Engine". Thanks to advanced technologies, including second generation "i-HEC" combustion system, super transient response powertrain system, new generation intelligent thermal management system, and all dimensional integrated ultra-low friction reduction technology, it can achieve outstanding performances with a



maximum power of 145kW, a peak torque of 375N m, and ultra-low fuel consumption of

7.39L per 100km.

Furthermore, with the 7DCT high-efficiency transmission, it can achieve the ultimate acceleration performance of only 7 seconds in terms of 0-100km acceleration. Notably, TIGGO 8 PRO MAX is equipped with the new generation of intelligent 4WD system of electronic control - Chery's All Scene 4WD System of Intelligent Control, which provides 6 driving modes, including economical, ordinary, sports, mud, dessert, and snow, covering various travel scenarios, offering users the superb ability on getting out of tough road conditions at

BankDhofar debuts Diebold Nixdorf's RM4V cash recycling engine

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 6

Diebold Nixdorf, a world-leading banking solutions and retail technology systems, has announced that BankDhofar is the first bank in the Middle East to utilise its RM4V cash recycling engine in its DN Series ATMs and cash dispensing machines (CDMs). The implementation offers customers additional banking services and is managed in collaboration with CNS, Diebold Nixdorf's partner in Oman.

This launch puts BankDhofar at the forefront of customer centricity and innovation. The DN Series Recycler ATM/CDM has the capacity to dispense 300 banknotes more than the usual 50 banknotes and complies with the

Central Bank of Oman's cash and fraud detection protocols. Cash recycling reduces cash management costs for the bank by accepting, storing and recirculating cash that's deposited in the ATM. Creating a closed-loop recycling environment that automatically moves money through the system provides the additional advantages of extending cash-in-transit (CIT) intervals and drastically reducing CO2 emissions.

The RM4V technology optimises the cash storage solutions within the ATM and is based on a vertical design configuration of the cassettes without compromising the small footprint of the DN series. The cash recycling engine also provides: Multi-denomination capabilities; Larger capacity for more banknotes; More secure transport of banknotes; and Flexible configuration options



for dispensing, depositing and recycling.

One of the most important advantages of the Recycler ATM/CDM is that it functions like a

24x7 mini cashier, which caters to the diverse needs of individual, medium and large corporate customers. Apart from NFC-enabled technology that enhances

customer experience through secure and convenient contactless transactions, customers can increase their withdrawal limits via the BankDhofar mobile app, thereby gaining access to higher withdrawals.

Amjad bin Iqbal al Lawati, Chief Retail Banking Officer, at BankDhofar said: "Customer experience is at the heart of everything we do. Investing in improving technology for a key banking channel such as ATMs/CDMs will make everyday banking more convenient. We are proud to announce a significant enhancement in our operational efficiency, resulting in an even more seamless and accessible experience for our customers when conducting withdrawals. This advancement is accompanied by a heightened

focus on ensuring a secure environment for all transactions. Furthermore, our dedicated team remains committed to actively engaging with customers, fostering interactions, comprehending their needs, and providing thoughtful recommendations for tailored financial solutions."

Joe Myers, executive vice president, Global Banking at Diebold Nixdorf said: "We are excited that our long-term partner BankDhofar is the first bank in the Middle East to utilise our RM4V cash recycling engine. This technology is driving the recycling market in many countries. The high level of availability of the DN Series, along with its security and efficiency, continue to make it the best solution on the market for cash recycling."



Negotiations heat up at COP28 over the future of fossil fuels

DUBAI: As Europe's climate monitor confirms 2023 as the hottest year on record, the temperature is also rising on negotiators deliberating the contentious issue of fossil fuels at COP28 in Dubai.

Pressure for progress is intensifying as the UN climate talks approach the end of their first week. The latest draft of a global climate agreement is expected on Wednesday, with finalisation slated for December 12, according to observers.

The fate of oil, gas and coal, the primary contributors to human-induced planetary heating, has emerged as a major point of contention. Divisions around their future dominate the conference, with negotiators representing nearly 200 countries engaged in discussions over the text responding to a critical assessment of progress in limiting warming.

The main debate revolves around whether to "phase out" or "phase down" fossil fuels. A potential consensus candidate involves committing to an "orderly and just" phase-out, allowing countries' different timelines for emission reduction based on their developmental stage and reliance on hydrocarbons.

However, another option under consideration is no mention of fossil fuels at all, reflecting opposition from countries including Saudi Arabia, Russia and China. India has also voiced opposition to naming specific sectors or energy sources.

Saudi Arabia's chief climate negotiator, Khalid Almhaidi,



People walk at the venue of the COP28 United Nations climate summit in Dubai on December 6, 2023. A record almost 2,500 fossil fuel lobbyists have been accredited for UN climate talks in Dubai. — AFP

referred to the challenge of maintaining the success achieved with the Paris Agreement in 2015. He emphasised the kingdom's objection to phasing down fossil fuels.

However, some of the countries most vulnerable to climate change are urging a stronger stance on fossil fuels. The Alliance of Small Islands States called for major emitters to enhance their commitments, leading the way on fossil fuel phase-out and halving emissions by 2030.

As the draft agreement stands,

it includes options to phase out fossil fuels or not address the issue, setting the stage for challenging negotiations in the coming week. Climate experts warn that breaching the 1.5 degrees Celsius Paris deal limit is imminent if emissions are not reduced.

While COP28 unfolds, 2023 has experienced a series of extreme weather events linked to climate change. Europe's climate monitor confirms this year as the hottest in recorded history, with November marking the sixth consecutive record-breaking

month.

Last month's global average temperature reached 1.46 degrees Celsius warmer than pre-industrial levels. Samantha Burgess, deputy head of the Copernicus service, highlighted the unprecedented nature of two days in November being 2C warmer than pre-industrial levels.

Carlo Buontempo, head of Copernicus, emphasised that as long as greenhouse gas concentrations rise, the temperature and the impacts of heatwaves and droughts will continue to increase.

Hydrom backs Green Hydrogen Summit Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 6

Hydrom, the master-planner of Oman's green hydrogen sector, has underscored its commitment to grow low-carbon hydrogen production in the country as Strategic Partners of the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO). Set to make history as the largest gathering of its kind in the MENA region, GHSO brings together government officials, policy makers, energy experts and industries to advance global collaboration and action towards a clean-energy future.

"The expansion of our green hydrogen industry serves multiple strategic objectives for Hydrom and Oman, including ensuring energy security for the Sultanate and developing a value chain that supports the comprehensive ambitions of Vision 2040," said Abdulaziz al Shidhani, Managing Director of Hydrom. "The GHSO provides a key opportunity to bring the international community together and share Oman's unique advantages to support the global energy transition and create sustainable, virtuous economies for the future."

Oman have set out a bold green hydrogen agenda, targeting production of one million tonnes annually by 2030. Established by Royal directives in 2022, Hydrom is mandated to orchestrate the country's ambitious plans to become a key producer of green hydrogen. With significant renewables potential — including some of the world's strongest winds and year-round solar — 50,000 km² land earmarked for green hydrogen production and localised



Abdulaziz al Shidhani, Managing Director of Hydrom.

infrastructure that supports a robust logistics hub, Oman is uniquely positioned to leverage the global energy transition and bolster commercial opportunity across industries.

Hydrom has made huge strides since launching, signing commercial terms with six legacy initiatives while remaining legacy initiative projects are expected to be awarded by December 2023 and second bid round projects awarded by Q1 2024. The ongoing bid rounds and investments totalling over \$30 billion of the round 1 signed agreements underscore Oman's commitment to generate a green economy that paves the road to Net-Zero and emerge as a pivotal participant in the worldwide hydrogen market — a key takeaway from last year's GHSO.

The Green Hydrogen Summit Oman is taking place from December 12-14 at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. It marks a crucial milestone in Oman's commitment to sustainability, promoting its potential to develop a fully-integrated hydrogen ecosystem and enable the delivery of projects competitively, and at scale, for the world.

SOHAR POWER PUTS PLANT EQUIPMENT UP FOR SALE

NASRULAH AL AJMI

MUSCAT, DEC 6

Sohar Power Company SAOG, the owner of the Sohar Power and Desalination Plant, has officially opened the doors for interested parties to participate in the tender for the acquisition of its plant equipment.

It follows a decision by the financially beleaguered company to pursue further legal remedies following the rejection of its bankruptcy application by Al Seeb Primary Court on November 13, 2023. Earlier this week, publicly traded Sohar Power announced the filing of an appeal with the Seeb Appeals Court against the earlier verdict.

Nestled within the industrial hub of Sohar Industrial Port, the Sohar Power and Desalination Plant features three Siemens 2000E-SGT5 gas turbines, each paired with a Heat Recovery Steam Generator (HRSG). Manufactured by Doosan Heavy Industries, the dual-pressure natural circulation HRSGs harness gas turbine exhaust to



generate both high-pressure and low-pressure steam. Total power generation capacity is 585 MW. This steam is then utilised in a dual-cycle configuration, supplying high-pressure steam to a steam turbine for condensation and extraction. The desalination arm of the plant includes four Multi-Stage Flash (MSF) distillation units.

Other components on auction include seawater pumping systems, water demineralisation stations, firewater systems, liquid waste treatment facilities, drinking water infrastructure,

emergency diesel generators, chemical dosing systems, fuel oil tanks, a fully-equipped laboratory, workshops, and more.

Sohar Energy LLC says it has a preference for buyers interested in acquiring the entire plant. This includes those with a vision to either continue operations at the existing site or dismantle the equipment for relocation to their business areas, ensuring maximum flexibility for private use.

Interested parties are invited to submit their bids by January 22, 2024.

Dollar steady, euro soft as traders wager rate cuts to begin in Q1

LONDON: The dollar remained close to a two-week high on Wednesday, while the euro faced weakness across the board as markets increasingly bet on the European Central Bank cutting interest rates as early as March.

The euro dipped 0.1 per cent against the dollar, reaching \$1.0783, after touching a three-week low of \$1.0775. This shift comes as markets adjust rate expectations downward following soft data and dovish central bank commentary. The single currency also hit a three-month low against the pound, a five-week low versus the yen, and a 6-1/2 week low against the Swiss franc.

Niels Christensen, chief analyst at Nordea, noted, "The story in currency markets is mostly about a softer euro. Yesterday's comments from ECB's Schnabel supported the market view of early rate cuts." Influential policy-maker Isabel Schnabel suggested on Tuesday that further interest rate hikes could be off the table due to a "remarkable" fall in inflation. Markets now project an 85-per cent chance of the ECB cutting interest rates at the March meeting, with almost 150 basis points of cuts priced by the end of next year.

The ECB will set interest rates on Thursday next week and is



Bank staff shows US hundred dollars bills at AYA Bank's money changer in Yangon

expected to leave them at the current record high of 4 per cent. The Federal Reserve and Bank of England are also likely to hold rates steady next Wednesday and Thursday, respectively.

As Fed officials enter a blackout period ahead of the December 12-13 meeting, traders have priced around a 60-per cent chance of the central bank cutting rates in March, according to CME's FedWatch tool. Investors have been reassessing US rate cut expectations, contributing to a lift in the dollar.

Aninda Mitra, Head of Asia Macro and Investment Strategy at BNY Mellon Investment

Management, cautioned that markets might have gone overboard in pricing a very aggressive path of rate cuts through next year. Mitra believes the Fed might hold off until the second quarter, and even then, the cuts would likely be shallower than what the market anticipates.

The expected rate cuts from the Fed could result in the dollar loosening its grip on other G10 currencies next year, according to a Reuters poll of foreign exchange strategists. The dollar index, measuring the currency against six other majors, remained little changed at 103.94.

— Reuters

Industrialists lament penalties for minor infractions



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com
The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI

There is still a large gap between us and a number of industrialised countries in the world in the field of manufacturing. The Sultanate of Oman ranked 56th globally in the industrial sector, according to the data of the competitive industrial report for the year 2023 issued recently by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

Although we are making a rapid leap in developing this vital sector in which Oman has made good leaps over the past seven years, rising from 72nd place in 2016 to 56th place in 2023, we need to provide more facilities, show flexibility, and provide services to the industrial sector in order to empower Omani industrialists to have the desire to continue to achieve more progress and to continue pumping new investments into other factories. Industrialists in Oman, and

despite the passage of these many years of working in this sector, they still hope that the concerned authorities will deal with them and their industrial conditions they face with ease, and not by issuing violations and sending sudden inspection teams to factories to confirm and find out whether the factory is complying with all necessary transactions.

No factory can be established except with an industrial permit and in accordance with the requirements and standards agreed upon by the concerned authorities. However, the matter sometimes requires showing some flexibility, especially in the absence of foreign technicians and specialised workers, so that others can follow up on these works until they are properly settled.

What I would like to say here is that a group of industrialists are complaining about the campaigns carried out by the Ministry of Labour while workers are performing their work in

WE ARE MAKING A RAPID LEAP IN DEVELOPING THIS VITAL SECTOR IN WHICH OMAN HAS MADE GOOD LEAPS OVER THE PAST SEVEN YEARS, RISING FROM 72ND PLACE IN 2016 TO 56TH PLACE IN 2023, WE NEED TO PROVIDE MORE FACILITIES, SHOW FLEXIBILITY, AND PROVIDE SERVICES TO THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

offices and manufacturing places. Sometimes the inspector issues a violation to the factory or its owner for a simple breach, which leads to an increase in the factory's costs, and to the reluctance of some of those working people to continue in that factory.

The lack of flexibility in such sectors will exacerbate problems for industrialists, especially if they need some manual specialisations that are sometimes not available in the local market. These factories primarily provide job opportunities for Omanis in various specialisations.

The salaries that factories pay to local workers are much higher than what similar factories outside Oman pay to expatriate workers because they are not obligated to employ a large number of national workers, which does not give small and medium factories and their products a great opportunity to compete in many global markets.

Therefore, any closure of the local factory will exacerbate the

problem of laid-off local workers in the country, and this is what the authorities must take into account and avoid, while qualifying and training local workers to supply factories with them.

The improvement witnessed by the industrial sector in recent years was achieved as a result of the services provided by the concerned authorities, along with the exemptions and other facilities provided by the government to this sector.

The current stage requires more flexibility in manufacturing. This sector is not like other economic sectors, because it needs cadres and competencies in various technical specialisations that are sometimes not available in the local market, but rather are brought from abroad.

While continuing to understand the issues related to the industry and industrialists, this will lead to diversifying industrial activities and increasing the added value of the sector.

Confidence in Chinese assets could deteriorate further, say analysts

Moody's negative outlook on China has intensified Beijing's battle with market bears, raising pressure on the government for more forceful measures to prop up sinking stocks and stabilise the yuan as investor confidence deteriorates.

In its Tuesday announcement, the ratings agency flagged weakening growth prospects, adding to mounting global concerns that China's economic miracle is over, potentially leaving the world's second-largest economy stuck in a middle-income trap.

While keeping China's sovereign rating at A1, Moody's cut its outlook to negative from stable, citing surging municipal debt and property market woes. Such concerns have prompted other institutions to draw comparisons with Japan's similar macroeconomic symptoms before its "lost decades" of stagnation.

Even though China's rising debt levels and over-reliance on property have long been part of the conversation, the voice of a ratings agency carried enough weight to renew a sell-off in Chinese assets and prompt state bank actions in markets.

"This is a financial war," said Yuan Yuwei, founder and CIO of Water Wisdom Asset Management.

Moody's move "would trigger foreign reduction in Chinese assets, and would also push up China's funding costs, potentially leading to deterioration in asset quality." Authorities have taken a raft of economic support measures and targeted steps to prop up the stock market, including cutting stamp duty, slowing the pace of listings and getting state-backed funds to buy stocks.

In an apparent effort to calm the market, the official Shanghai Securities News reported on Wednesday that China's securities watchdog will promote reforms to attract more long-term capital into the market.

MOODY'S OUTLOOK CUT COMPLICATES BEIJING'S 'WAR' AGAINST MARKET BEARS

MOODY'S MOVE RAISES PRESSURE ON GOVT TO DO MORE TO SUPPORT MARKETS

CONFIDENCE IN CHINESE ASSETS COULD DETERIORATE FURTHER, ANALYSTS

BEIJING'S STEPS TO BOLSTER ECONOMY, MARKETS HAVE HAD MODEST EFFECT SO FAR



People walk at a shopping compound in Beijing

And last week, state-owned China Reform Holdings Corp said it had started buying index funds to support the market, following a similar move by sovereign fund Central Huijin Investment.

But, on the other side of the trade, the weakening prospects for the Chinese economy could prove hard to shake off as confidence remains low.

"The pressures on Chinese stocks and the economy more generally are likely to increase if the cost of insuring the sovereign debt continues to rise and bailouts begin," said Ryan Yonk, economist at the American Institute for Economic Research.

Rob Carnell, Asia-Pacific Head of Research at ING said that China has used many tools already to drive up demand but with limited effect, "so getting people to regain confidence in this market is going to be really hard." Ultimately, analysts warn, sentiment can only stabilise sustainably if China delivers a credible longer-term road-map for solving the structural weaknesses that are curbing its growth potential.

"The priority for China now is to stabilize growth momentum and raise confidence for the future," said Calvin Zhang, senior portfolio manager at Federated Hermes.

China should increase fiscal spending and address local governments' hidden debt, Zhang said.

In October, China unveiled a plan to issue 1 trillion yuan (\$139 billion) in sovereign bonds by the end of the year, raising the 2023 budget deficit target to 3.8% of gross domestic product (GDP) from the original 3%.

YUAN WORRIES China's blue-chip index hit its lowest level in

nearly five years on Wednesday.

Major state-owned banks also stepped up US dollar selling very forcefully on Tuesday, and again on Wednesday. China's central bank has used various tools in recent months to stem the yuan's slide, including stronger fixings before the market open. Still, outflow pressure remains high.

China recorded its first-ever quarterly deficit in foreign direct investment in July-September, while Goldman Sachs data showed outflows from China reached \$75 billion in September, the biggest monthly exodus since 2016.

Moody's outlook cut could raise the stakes further, analysts said.

"This is a blow to the already low investor confidence in China," said Qi Wang, chief investment officer of UOB Kay Hian's wealth management division in Hong Kong.

Sovereign credit is the foundation of Chinese assets, so the move "would certainly impact the yuan exchange rate, and reduce global investors' risk appetite." But not everyone is bearish.

Rival ratings agencies Fitch Ratings and S&P Global Ratings have made no changes to their respective China credit ratings. Fitch affirmed China's A+ rating with a stable outlook in August, while S&P Global said on Wednesday it has retained China's A+ rating with a 'stable' outlook.

Some market participants pointed to similar rating moves on the United States as having limited long-term market impact.

"Just as most people shrugged off the US downgrade, most investors will shrug off the China downgrade," said Jason Hsu, chief investment officer at Rayliant Global Advisors. — Reuters

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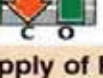
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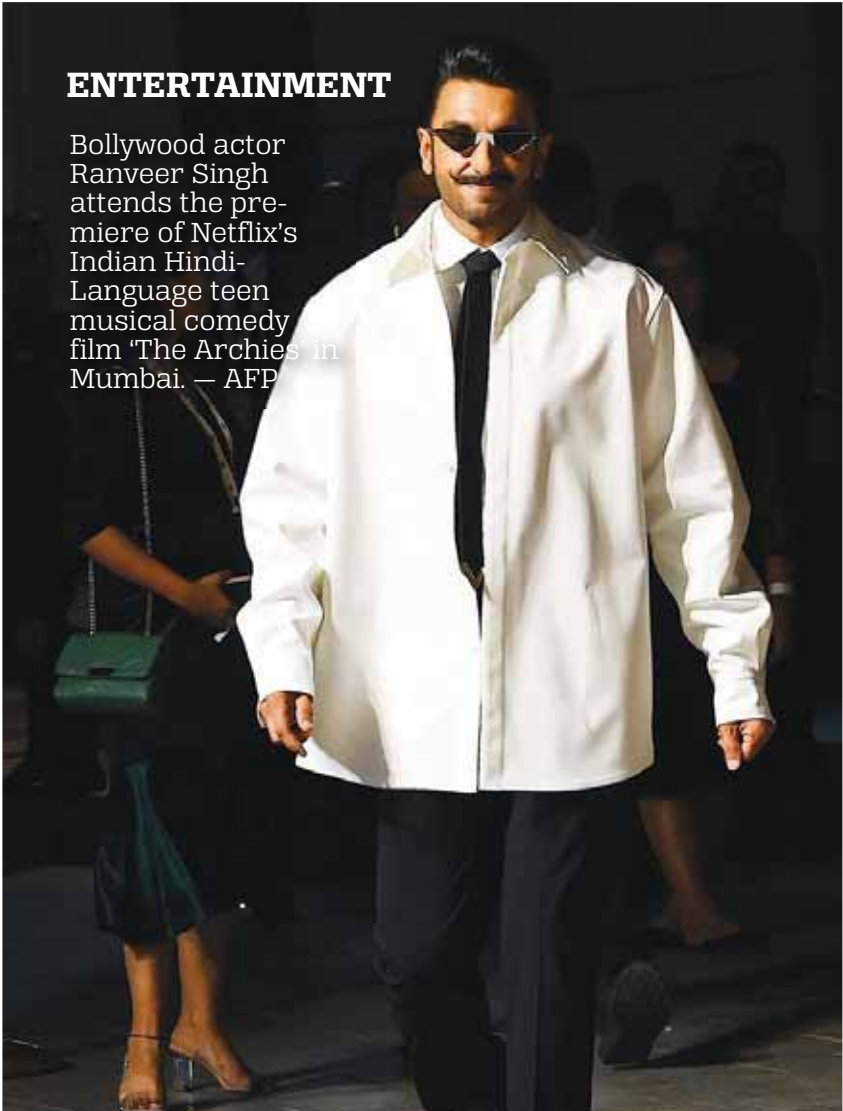
FASHION

A visitor looks at displays during the media preview of the Costume Institute “Women Dressing Women” exhibit, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. — AFP



MUSIC

English singer Gordon Matthew Thomas Sumner, aka Sting, performs at the Accor Arena in Paris. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actor Ranveer Singh attends the premiere of Netflix's Indian Hindi-Language teen musical comedy film “The Archies” in Mumbai. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

French oyster farmer Fanny Marie handles a crate of oysters in an oyster bed at her farm in the village of Les Boucholeurs in Yves, along the Atlantic Ocean, western France. — AFP



TRAVEL TALES

A helicopter flies past the Statue of Liberty at sunset in New York. Designed by French sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi and the metal framework built by Gustave Eiffel, the statue is now almost 150 years old. — AFP

art & life

THURSDAY | DECEMBER 7, 2023 | JUMADA AL ULA 23, 1445 AH



OMAN OBSERVER



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Canyon Quest: An explorer's expedition into Oman's spectacular wadis

Having waited for 14 years, this writer embarks on a long-awaited journey with some friends to explore Oman's canyon, encountering stunning landscapes, local hospitality and planning further explorations... **P20**

ART

Artist wins Turner Prize after turning roller coaster into mammoth

JESSE DARLING HAS been announced as the recipient of the 2023 Turner Prize. The Oxford-born artist, aged 41 and currently residing in Berlin, was honoured with the prestigious art award at Winter Garden in Eastbourne, East Sussex. Notable past winners of the prize include pottery maker and contemporary artist Sir Grayson Perry, film director and visual artist Sir Steve McQueen, and artist Damien Hirst.

This year's award, valued at £25,000 (\$31,500), took place adjacent to the gallery Towner Eastbourne, this year's hosts, and was presented by British rapper Tinie

Tempah.

Darling is renowned for their work with unconventional materials, such as welded barriers, hazard tape, office files and net curtains. They've notably transformed a full-sized roller coaster into the skeletal form of a woolly mammoth.

During their acceptance speech, Darling pulled out the Palestinian flag from their coat pocket and waved it in acknowledgment of the ongoing conflict in Gaza and Israel. They emphasised that art is something that resonates with the public and aids in developing various skills.

Darling criticised former UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher for reducing the teaching of art in schools, citing it as “not economically productive.” They highlighted Thatcher's influence in perpetuating the belief that art and culture are only accessible to specific socio-economic groups, urging the British public not to buy into this notion.

Described by the Turner Prize as presenting a “familiar yet delirious world,” Darling's exhibitions challenge perceived notions of labour, class, British identity and power dynamics.

Born in 1981, Darling studied at Central

Saint Martins, University of the Arts London, and completed a master's in fine art at University College London's Slade School of Fine Art in 2014. Their diverse artistic practice spans sculpture, installation, video, drawing, sound, text and performance. In 2021, they released a collection of poetry titled “Virgins.”

Darling was initially nominated for the prize for their expansive showcase “No Medals, No Ribbons” at Modern Art Oxford. This exhibition featured plastic bags positioned on steel legs resembling soldiers and creatively shaped mobility aids.

Further recognition came for their exhibition “Enclosures” at Camden Art Centre, examining the historical fencing off of com-



mon land through The Inclosure Acts.

Darling has curated solo exhibitions like “Miserere” at St James's Piccadilly, London in 2022, “Gravity Road” at Kunstverein Freiburg in Germany in 2020, “Creve at Triangle - Asterides” in Marseille in 2019,

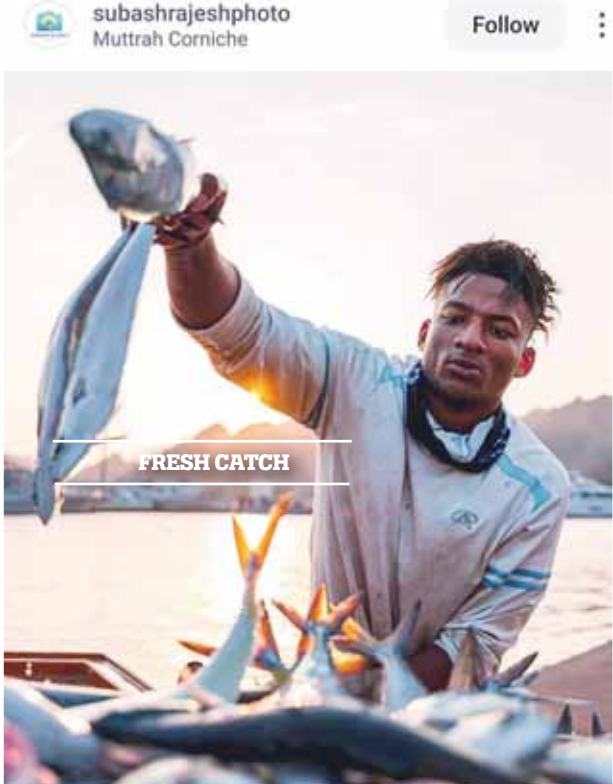
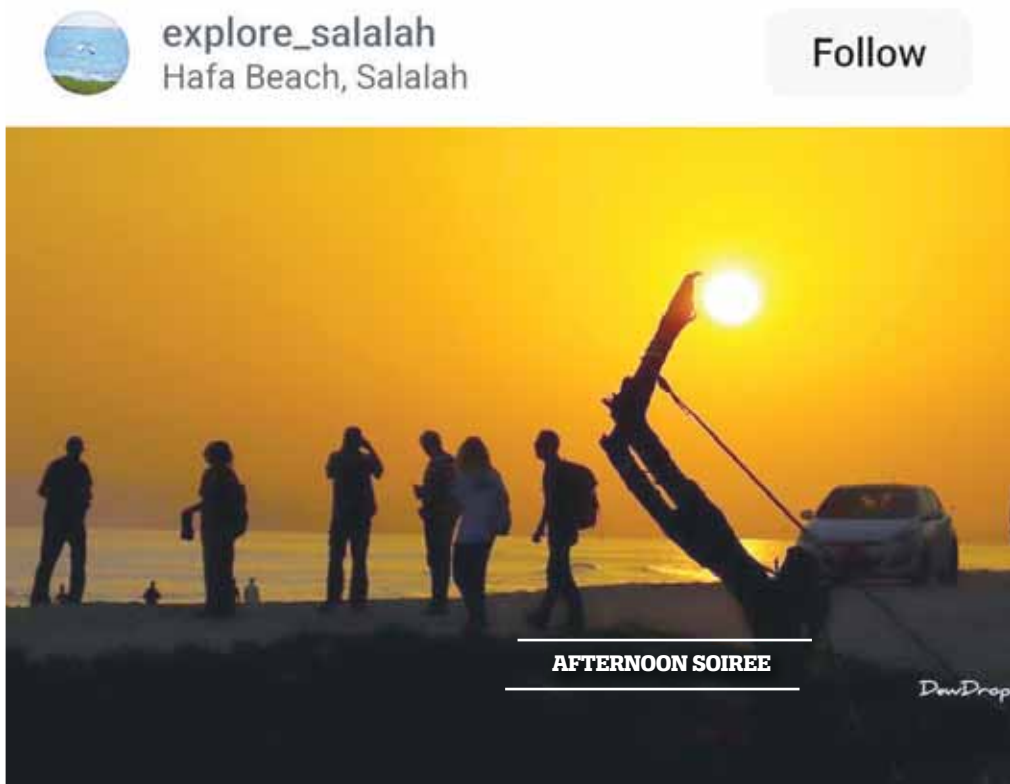
and “The Ballad of Saint Jerome” at Tate Britain London in 2018.

They secured the Turner Prize victory over other finalists, including Ghislaine Leung, presenting an exhibition featuring water pouring into the exhibition space; Rory Pilgrim, who delivered a live performance at Cadogan Hall in London; and Barbara Walker, shedding light on families affected by the Windrush scandal.

The 2023 jury, chaired by Tate Britain director Alex Farquharson, comprised Martin Clark, director of Camden Art Centre, Cedric Fauq, chief curator of Capc musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Melanie Keen, director of London museum Wellcome Collection, and Helen Nisbet, chief executive and artistic director at gallery Cromwell Place.

The Turner Prize is awarded to an artist born or based in the UK for an exceptional exhibition or presentation of their work within the past 12 months. Next year, the prize will celebrate its 40th anniversary and return to Tate Britain for the first time since 2018. The exhibition showcasing the Turner Prize shortlisted artists will be on display at Towner Eastbourne until April 14, 2024. — AFP

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Iraq's marshes are dying, and a civilisation with them

MOHAMMED HAMID NOUR is only 23, but he is already nostalgic for how Iraq's Mesopotamian marshes once were before drought dried them up, decimating his herd of water buffaloes.

Even at their centre in Chibayish, only a few expanses of the ancient waterways -- home to a Marsh Arab culture that goes back millennia -- survive, linked by channels that snake through the reeds.

Pull back further and the water gives way to a parched landscape of bald and cracked earth.

Mohammed has lost three-quarters of his herd to the drought that is now ravaging the marshes for a fourth-consecutive year. The United Nations said it is the worst in 40 years, describing the situation as "alarming", with "70 per cent of the marshes devoid of water".

"I beg you Allah, have mercy!" Mohammed implored, keffiyah on his head as he contemplated the disaster under the unforgiving blue of a cloudless sky.

The buffaloes of the marshes produce the milk for the thick clotted "geymar" cream Iraqis love to have with honey for breakfast.

As the marshes dry out, the water gets

salty until it starts killing the buffaloes. Many of Mohammed's herd died like this, others he was forced to sell before they too perished.

"If the drought continues and the government doesn't help us, the others will also die," said the young herder, who has no other income.

Both the Mesopotamian marshes, and the culture of the Marsh Arabs -- or Ma'adan -- like Mohammed who live in them, have Unesco world heritage status. The Ma'adan have hunted and fished there for 5,000 years, building houses from woven reeds on floating reed islands where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers come together before pouring into the Gulf.

Even their beautifully intricate mosques were made of reeds.

But the marshlands have shrunk from 20,000 square kilometres in the early 1990s to 4,000 km by latest estimates -- choked by dams on the great rivers upstream in Türkiye and Syria and the soaring temperatures of climate change. Only a few thousand of the quarter million Ma'adan who lived in the marshes in the early 1990s remain.

Experts say that Iraq's management of

the waters has not helped.

50 DEGREES CENTIGRADE

AFP crisscrossed the central Chibayish marshes at the end of June, where at dawn it was already 35 degrees Centigrade before temperatures shot towards 50.

Iraq is one of the five countries most touched by some effects of climate change, according to the United Nations. Rainfall is rarer and rarer, and in the next 25 years the World Bank said the temperature will go up by an average of 2.5 degrees.

Water levels in the central marshlands and the Euphrates which feeds it are "dropping by half a centimetre a day", said engineer Jassim al Assadi, of Nature Iraq, the country's leading conservation group.

That will get worse "over the next two months as the temperatures rise and more and more water evaporates," he added.

To draw water for his remaining buffaloes, Mohammed Hamid Nour takes his canoe out into deeper water, where salt levels are lower.

He rolled up his sleeves to fill a water tank on the canoe revealing a tattoo of the Zulfikar, the sword of Imam Ali. He got it for "baraka" or blessing, he smiled. He needs all the help he can get. — AFP

FASHION

Loewe designer Anderson and model Elssesser win at Fashion Awards

SPANISH LUXURY BRAND Loewe's creative director Jonathan Anderson won designer of the year at Britain's annual Fashion Awards on Monday, where industry leaders and young creative talent were honoured.

Top models, designers and celebrity guests including Anne Hathaway, Lewis Hamilton and Amal Clooney gathered at the glitzy gala held at London's Royal Albert Hall.

Anderson, who founded the fashion label JW Anderson, arrived accompanied by actress Taylor Russell.

Italian designer Valentino



Garavani, known to the world simply as Valentino, was honoured with this year's outstanding achievement award. Founder of the eponymous brand, the 91-year-old has dressed the rich and famous, created a business empire and introduced a new colour to the fashion world, the so-called "Valentino Red".

American Paloma Elsesser was named model of the year, while Edward Enninful, the outgoing editor-in-chief of British Vogue, received the Trailblazer Award.

The 2023 edition of the award show was hosted by British television presenter Maya Jama and musician Kojey Radical and featured a performance by singer Sam Smith.

Stars attending the event also included actors Gwyneth Paltrow, Tessa Thompson and Pamela Anderson and model Kate Moss.

The show is a fundraiser for the British Fashion Council (BFC) Foundation which focuses on supporting the growth and success of the UK's fashion industry. — Reuters

MUSIC

All Blackpink members renew contracts with label YG

ALL MEMBERS OF THE megastar girl group BLACKPINK renewed their contracts with YG Entertainment on Wednesday, the company said, ending speculation around their future and driving up shares in the leading K-pop label by over 20 per cent.

Rumours surrounding BLACKPINK -- one of K-pop's most successful girl groups -- and their potential future plans have abounded since the quartet's original contracts expired in August, with local reports even claiming in September that member Lisa rejected YG's renewal offer.

But YG announced on Wednesday that all members --



Jenny, Lisa, Jisoo and Rose -- had renewed their contracts with the company for "group activities".

"After careful discussion with BLACKPINK, we signed an exclusive contract for group activities based on deep trust," the label said in a statement sent to AFP.

"With YG's full support, BLACKPINK plans to repay the love of fans around the world with activities commensurate with their global status, including the release of a new album and a large-scale world tour," it added.

BLACKPINK, who first emerged out of South Korea's wildly popular K-pop scene in 2016, has also been recognised

for the group's efforts on climate advocacy.

Last month, the members were given one of Britain's most prestigious honours by King Charles III, for their work for the COP26 climate summit in 2021.

Their official YouTube channel has a staggering 92.3 million subscribers, making them one of the most subscribed artists in the world on the platform.

BLACKPINK's other achievements include being the first-ever K-pop girl group to reach the top of the US Billboard 200 chart, and the first Asian artists to headline prestigious music events such as Coachella. — AFP

Canyon Quest: An explorer's expedition into Oman's spectacular wadis

BY KHALID ABDUL MALAK

A few months ago, a team of French friends and canyon explorers returned to Oman for the fourth time to join me in the inaugural exploration of one of the major wadis in the Sultanate, starting in Jabal Al Sarah. I had been anticipating this moment for more than fourteen years.

Back in 2009, I noticed a green mark on Google Earth images, along with several trails leading to it. The trails I observed start at the tip of the canyon in the village of Yiqā, situated on the road between Al Rustaq and Ibri, approximately one and a half hours from Muscat.

My first exploration trip to study the canyon, commencing from the mountain and proceeding downstream, was in May 2022, accompanied by two friends, Rigel and Mona. We departed Muscat early in the morning on Friday for Jabal Shams. It took us around three hours to reach Aaqabat al Mashbek, the last village accessible by car and close to the beginning of the canyon in Jabal Al Sarah. An additional hour of hiking was necessary to reach the spot where we could see the green mark I had spotted on the satellite pictures. It is situated hundreds of metres below the massive cliff on which we were standing. I could not measure the exact drop that day because I forgot my range finder at home, but the images on Google Earth depicted a height difference of more than 500 metres.

Oman's mountains stand as silent sentinels, etched against the sky, inviting travellers to explore their heights. Al Hajar mountain range, dominating the country's northeastern landscape, boasts peaks reaching over 3,000 metres, offering a playground for hikers, climbers and nature lovers. Jabal Shams,

the country's highest peak, proudly showcases its grandeur, attracting daredevils seeking the thrill of scaling its precipitous cliffs and relishing panoramic vistas that stretch for miles.

It's not just the mountains that captivate explorers; Oman's wadis add another layer of allure to its natural splendour. Wadis, or dry riverbeds, transform into paradisiacal oases during the rainy season, revealing crystal-clear pools and lush vegetation hidden within their rocky confines.

The allure of Oman's mountains and wadis extends beyond their sheer beauty. These landscapes hold significant cultural and historical value, embedded in the country's heritage. Locals often recount ancient tales and legends associated with these rugged terrains, adding a mystical charm to the already enchanting scenery.

We captured numerous pictures of this breathtaking place we just explored that overlooked the canyon below. By the time we finished our photo session, it was already 1 pm. Subsequently, we opted to sit in the shade of a magnificent juniper tree for lunch.

After our break, we retraced our steps to the village where we encountered some locals who invited us for some "Kahwa" and dates. They were all surprised when I mentioned our plan to cross the canyon all the way down to Yiqā someday.

We encountered a villager named Mohamed and his grandson sitting in the shade of a tree, crafting "Iqals" from the wool of their goats. "We sell them to Emirati tourists when they come to Jabal Shams," he informed us. The day was excessively hot, and when I requested water, Mohamed's grandson guided me

to their "cold water dispenser." There it was — a waterskin hanging on a tree in the centre of the village square.

"Could you show me how to drink from this container?" I asked the young boy. He untied a rope at one end of the skin bottle and instructed me to lift the back of it with one hand, letting the water flow into my other hand to drink from it. It wasn't very easy

at first, but after a couple of attempts, I succeeded, and despite the May heat, the water was remarkably fresh. "It's made from goat skin," explained the young lad, "It keeps the water fresh in summer."

As it was getting late and our journey back to Muscat was long,

we expressed gratitude to our hosts for their warm hospitality and drove back home. Mentally, I was already planning my next trip to study the canyon, this time starting from the other end of the wadi in Yiqā and going upstream.

(To be continued).

