

P13

OMAN'S TOURISM SECTOR EXPERIENCES STEADY GROWTH



P18

CELEBRATING OMANI HERITAGE: 'ALZEEJ' SHINES AT THE KURDADA AFRICAN FILM FESTIVAL



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MEHIDY STARS AS BANGLADESH BEAT AFGHANISTAN IN WORLD CUP



MUSCAT

EA SURVEY OF SOOTY FALCON

The Environment Authority continues conducting a survey of the sooty falcon which aims to determine their numbers by attaching rings on them and taking accurate measurements of their nests. The survey aims at following up and identifying the life of the sooty falcon as well as obtaining information and data regarding its numbers, reproduction, food, and the threats they are facing. **SEE ALSO P4**

DOHA

OMAN PAVILION ATTRACTS VISITORS

The aesthetically designed Oman Pavilion at Doha Expo 2023 in Qatar, held under the theme 'Green Desert, Better Environment', has been a major crowd puller as it is providing a window to see, experience and feel the country for many residents as well as tourists. Oman is participating in the Expo 2023 Doha along with over 68 countries and international organisations. **DETAILS ON P4**

OMAN CALLS FOR RESTRAINT

SCORES DEAD IN ISRAEL AND GAZA AFTER HAMAS SHOCK ATTACKS

MUSCAT/GAZA: The Sultanate of Oman has been following with great concern the ongoing escalation between the Palestinian and Israeli sides as a result of continued illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the constant Israeli aggression in Palestinian cities and villages, which portend serious repercussions and an escalation in intensity of violence.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Saturday, Oman calls on both parties to exercise utmost levels of restraint, stressing the importance of protecting civilians.

Oman also affirms that the international community and the parties backing efforts to resume the peace process must intervene immediately to stop the ongoing escalation and resort to the rules of international law, while reiterating the strategic necessity to find a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian cause on the basis of the two-state solution and the right of self-determination for the Palestinian people to establish their independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

SURPRISE ATTACK

The Palestinian group Hamas launched a large-scale surprise attack against Israel on Saturday, firing thousands of rockets from Gaza and sending ground units to kill or abduct people as Israel retaliated with air strikes.



Smoke and flames billow after Israeli forces struck a high-rise tower in Gaza City on Saturday. – Reuters

At least 70 people were reported killed in Israel, while Gaza authorities released a death toll of 198 in the bloodiest escalation in the wider conflict since May 2021, with hundreds more wounded on both sides.

“We are at war,” said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as the military launched a series of air strikes

against targets of Hamas in the blockaded coastal enclave where black smoke billowed into the sky.

The group started the surprise attack around 6:30 am (0330 GMT) with thousands of rockets aimed as far as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, some bypassing the Iron Dome defence system and hitting buildings.

Hamas fighters — travelling in vehicles, boats and even using motorised paragliders — breached Gaza’s security barrier and attacked nearby Israeli towns and military posts, sparking gun battles as panicked residents hid out in bunkers. Bodies were seen lying on the streets of the town of Sderot near Gaza.

“Send help, please!” one Israeli

woman sheltering with her two-year-old child pleaded as fighters outside opened fire at her house and tried to break into their safe room, Israeli media reported.

Journalists witnessed gunmen gathered around an Israeli tank that was on fire, and others driving a seized Israeli Humvee into Gaza.

MORE REPORTS ON P5

UN SECURITY COUNCIL SET TO MEET ON SUNDAY

EGYPT AND FRANCE WARN AGAINST GAZA ESCALATION

UN ENVOY WARNS OF ‘PRECIPICE’ AS CONFLICT GROWS

GERMANY SAYS RISK OF ‘MAJOR REGIONAL WAR’

Musandam gets first international bus service

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The first international bus route from Musandam Governorate to neighbouring Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) emirate in the UAE commenced on October 6. The service is operated by Ras Al Khaimah Transport Authority (RAKTA). Two trips have been scheduled from both sides at 8 am and 6 pm on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, with a total travel time of around 3 hours.

It may be noted that the UAE residents have to pay RO 5 for visa on arrival in Oman, and should also provide a valid Emirates ID and passport. Omani residents will be required (barring some exceptions) to get a UAE e-visa (multi-entry or single entry) before the start of the trip.

Besides its rugged mountains,



Officials welcome the inaugural bus service in Khasab on Friday.

Musandam is known for its serene beaches. It is a destination for scuba divers because of clear waters. Ismail bin Hassan

al Balushi, Director-General of RAKTA, said that the service was launched based on the directives of the leadership of both countries

to enhance tourism movement and facilitate the movement of individuals, both residents and tourists, by road.

The municipality of Musandam Governorate held a ceremony to receive the first international trip for mass transportation by buses, where they were received by Hamad bin Ibrahim al Shehhi, assistant director of the Municipality Department in the Wilayat of Khasab. Last month, RAKTA signed an agreement for direct international bus service between the Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) emirate and Musandam Governorate.

Nasser al Hosani, Director-General of the municipality of Musandam Governorate, signed the cooperation agreement with Ismail bin Hassan al Balushi, Director-General of Ras Al Khaimah Transport Authority.

TURN TO P2

2 investment opportunities for ‘Sorouh’ project in Dakhiliyah

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning announced through its electronic platform ‘Tatweer’ the offering of two investment opportunities for the National Initiative for Integrated Residential Neighbourhoods (Sorouh project) in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The first investment opportunity is located in the Wilayat of Bahla, on an area of more than 452,000 square metres, to provide about 600 residential lands, while the second opportunity is in the Wilayat of Samayil, on an area exceeding 137,000 square metres, and it is expected to provide 400 residential units.

Masoud al Hashemi, Director-General of Real Estate Development at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, confirmed that these efforts come to ensure the provision of diverse housing options to those eligible, among 5 other options, including the integrated residential neighbourhoods ‘Sorouh’, ‘choose your land, acquire your land’, and ‘plans for your land and future cities’, to achieve the ministry’s vision towards sustainable urban development. In a statement, he said the title deeds were delivered to the first batch of those eligible to own property in the integrated residential neighbourhoods project ‘Sorouh’ in Al Naseem neighbourhood in Halban, which represents 6 per cent of the housing units ready for immediate delivery, amounting to 220 residential units within the first phase of the project. **SEE ALSO P13**



SAYYID THEYAZIN ATTENDS CONCERT IN RIYADH



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, attended the concert of the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra at the Red Hall Theatre of Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University (PNU) in Riyadh, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on Saturday. The Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra performed several musical pieces that are part of the Omani musical culture. The event was attended by a number of Their Highnesses, ministers and senior officials from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It coincides with the Sultanate of Oman's participation in the Riyadh International Book Fair 2023 as a guest of honour. — ONA

Musandam gets first int'l bus service

FROM P1

Al Balushi emphasised that the signing of this agreement marks the starting point for future collaboration between the two parties and the implementation of joint projects in the fields of public and tourist transportation that serve the citizens, residents and tourists in both countries. Under the agreement, RAKTA operates its buses starting from the main bus station located in the Al Dhait South area, with the bus route concluding in the Wilayat of Khasab in the Governorate of Musandam. It's worth mentioning that the bus route includes several stops within the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah (Rams area, Sha'am area) and (Harf area, Qadaa area, Wilayat of Bukha and Tibaat area) within the Governorate of Musandam.



Oman's literature and culture a big draw at Riyadh book fair

RIYADH: Oman pavilion at the Riyadh International Book Fair, which ended on Saturday, drew hundreds of visitors eager to know about civilisation, culture and history of the Sultanate of Oman. They are also interested in buying and reading Omani novels and publications, according to officials and representatives of various entities at the pavilion. The Sultanate of Oman is the guest of honour of the fair with the participation of 15 governmental and private entities.

Jassim bin Mohammed al Riyami of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth said: "The demand from visitors to the exhibition is very large, adding that there is a passion among Saudi readers to learn about the history of the Sultanate of Oman, especially its relationship with Zanzibar."

Abdulaziz bin Mubarak al Rahbi from the Omani Society of Writers and literati confirmed that there is a great interest from the Saudi public in learning about the Omani history and purchasing novels by Omani writers.

Al Azhar bin Yousef al Rashidi from the Oman Memory Centre said the centre is concerned with Omani historical studies and research and is under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

He said a large number of readers from Saudi Arabia flocked to the centre's pavilion to learn about Oman's values of



Crowds throng Oman pavilion at the Riyadh International Book Fair



A girl checks out VR at Oman's pavilion.



A girl reads a book at the fair.

coexistence and tolerance.

Ahmed bin Mubarak al Rawahi, an Omani publisher, said there was a great demand from visitors to the Riyadh International Book Fair to purchase Omani publications, especially those related to religion, culture and history.

On the sidelines of the book fair, a poetry recital was held with the participation of a number of poets, including Fahd al Saadi, Saqr bin Abdullah al

Mazrouei, Saleh al Shadi, and Sulaiman al Mana. The evening was moderated by Noura al Badiyah.

In "Life Through the Lens" symposium, Omani photographer Haitham bin Khamis al Farsi participated along with a number of Saudi photographers. It highlighted the history of the camera in the Arab world, the skills necessary to learn professional photography, and its importance. — ONA

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Tender floated for flood protection scheme in Muttrah



FILE PICTURE: Muttrah souq during floods.

MUSCAT: A tender has been floated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for consultancy services for a feasibility study, detailed design and construction, and supervision of the flood protection scheme in Muttrah.

The last date for submitting the bid is November 12. After every heavy rain, Muttrah Souq, a popular tourist destination, faces floods, resulting in heavy losses for the shop owners.

The scope of work for the consultancy services shall cover the Muttrah area and the study shall comprise a comprehensive technical, economic, financial, environmental and social analysis. The study includes all possible options to achieve the project objectives, these options include, but are not limited to the construction of the flood protection dam, designing/ modification of drainage improvement of the wadi courses, and new artificial water channels to avoid massive relocations.

The other infrastructure includes development-related flood protection works such as culverts and other infrastructure.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

INTERNATIONAL TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee in Ministry of Information announces its Tenders for the following works:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
2/2023 (2023/223/ و.ع.ر - 12 (43403) at E-Tendering	SUPPLY, DELIVERY, INSTALLATION AND COMMISSIONING OF A PLAYOUT AUTOMATION SYSTEM	Excellent Frst	21/10/2023	19/11/2023	47.500/-
3/2023 (2023/222/ و.ع.ر - 11 (43283) at E-Tendering	SUPPLY, DELIVERY, INSTALLATION AND COMMISSIONING OF (4K) SHOULDER-MOUNT CAMCORDERS AND ACCESSORIES	Excellent Frst	21/10/2023	19/11/2023	25/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

2. Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.

(For more information, please see the original circular issued by the Tender Board on the Isnad platform.)

Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am. Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically.

You are requested to provide 2 hard copies for your offer after the submission in Projects Department at Ministry of Information.

3. The Ministry has the right to:

- 1) Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.
- 2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone : 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)



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GCC tourism to get a boost with new initiatives

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The GCC states are keen to make an environment conducive to the movement of local and international tourists within the six countries, according to officials and ministers who took part in the seventh meeting of GCC ministers of tourism. The meeting chaired by Oman was held at Oman Across the Ages Museum in the Wilayat

of Manah, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, on Thursday

It may be noted that the percentage of intra-GCC tourism among the total international tourists was 29.7 per cent, with a growth rate of 98.8 per cent compared to 2021.

As per The Gulf Tourism Strategy (2023-30), the number of inbound visits must increase by 7 per cent annually until 2030, which will lead to an increase in

tourist spending by eight per cent and that by local GCC tourists by 2.4 per cent.

The ministers also agreed to help members, including Bahrain and the UAE, nominate Manama and Abu Dhabi as tourism capitals for the years 2024 and 2025.

Speaking on the occasion, Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, said that the meeting sought to enhance

cooperation, integration, and empowerment for tourism development in the GCC by adopting common initiatives and programmes, which should be necessarily implemented as per a timetable.

Jassim Mohammed al Budawi, Secretary-General of the GCC, said, "The GCC has so far registered more than 17 sites on the World Heritage List of UNESCO, and the total number

of visitors to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries reached 39.8 million visitors in 2022, achieving a growth rate of 136.6 per cent compared to the previous year, and spending of inbound visitors to the GCC countries was \$85.9 billion, with a growth rate of 101.2 per cent compared to the 2021 figures.

The GCC seeks to increase the contribution of the tourist sector to the GDP by 7 per cent annually by 2030.



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■ OMAN, QATAR CARRY OUT JOINT NAVAL DRILL



The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) and the Qatari Emiri Navy (QEN) carried out the joint naval exercise ‘Crossing’ on Al Batinah Naval Zone. The naval drill comprised a number of military applications and simulation in accordance with the plan. The drill comes as part of the RNO’s training plan that aims at sustaining high levels of competence and readiness. It is part of the annual training programmes carried out with the navies of brotherly and friendly countries.

Anglo-Omani Society holds annual luncheon

LONDON: The Anglo-Omani Society held its annual luncheon in London.

Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthi, Political Affairs Under-Secretary at the Foreign Ministry, was the guest of honour from the Omani side and Lord Gerry Grimstone was the guest of honour from the British side.

The under-secretary delivered a speech praising the historic and distinguished relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom.

Al Harthi touched on the Sultanate of Oman’s keenness on bolstering its economic relations with Britain, thanking the Society members for the efforts they are making to foster relations between the two friendly countries.

For his part, Lord Germiston spoke about the importance his country attaches to its relationship with the Sultanate of Oman and its appreciation for the role it plays in the region.

The event was attended by Badr bin Mohammed al Mantheri,



Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthi speaks during the luncheon in London.

Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Kingdom, retired Major-General Richard Stanford, Chairman of the Anglo-Omani Society, members of the Society and diplomats from the embassy. — ONA

EA conducts survey of sooty falcon

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority continues conducting a survey of the sooty falcon which aims to determine their numbers by attaching rings on them and taking accurate measurements of their nests.

The survey aims at following up and identifying the life of the sooty falcon as well as obtaining information and data regarding its numbers, reproduction, food, and the threats they are facing. The survey is conducted in cooperation with specialised local and international organisations. The sooty falcon is a near-threatened bird as their numbers are declining globally. It lives in the Middle East and northeastern Africa region and spends the winter on the southeastern coast of Africa and the Republic of Madagascar. — ONA



Oman pavilion in Doha Expo draws thousands of visitors

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The aesthetically designed Oman pavilion at the Doha Expo 2023 in Qatar, held under the theme ‘Green Desert, Better Environment’, has been a major crowd puller as it is providing a window to see, experience and feel the country.

Oman is participating in the Expo along with over 68 countries and international organisations.

“Mainly, four of Oman’s sustainability initiatives are on display and they form part of the national drive towards protecting the environment, traditional technology, innovation and modern farming,” says Aysha al Khatri, a volunteer at the Expo.

“We are attempting to show the four major aspects of the sustainability policy of the country, Oman’s natural resources, frankincense, baobab trees, Green Hydrogen and the aflaj,” she said.

The pavilion has frankincense trees and its products are on sale along with other made-in-Oman products.

Periodate rocks with their dense, coarse-grained igneous appearance consisting mostly of the silicate minerals, olivine and pyroxene which have the power to absorb CO2 from the atmosphere and store it for future and protect the ozone layer are also on display.

A range of exhibits of the Oman Botanic Garden and a fountain made of high-density peridotite rocks are yet another attraction.

The Oman pavilion features 1,600 specimens of native trees and plants transported from the Oman Botanic Garden. They represent the unique plant diversity abound in mountains stretching from Musandam to Dhofar.

The pavilion presents different



Oman pavilion at the International Horticultural Expo 2023 Doha

types of Omani environments. It offers a simulation of the terrace farms of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in Al Dakhiliyah and the khareef in Dhofar. It also presents some perennial species of Oman, including the frankincense and the baobab found in Dhofar – the last habitat of existence of such plants in the Arabian Peninsula.

Another attraction is Oman’s aflaj which are used in irrigation.

A visitor enters Oman’s pavilion with fragrance of Oman’s

traditional halwa.

Saleh bin Nisar al Musalhi, a young entrepreneur who is treating the visitors with a rare recipe of the Omani halwa, said the sweetmeat has evoked a sense of culinary curiosity among the visitors that comprise people from many countries.

Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, praised the efforts made by Qatar in hosting and organising the International

Horticultural Expo 2023 Doha. He said that this major global event brought together countries of diverse climates from around the world in one place to exchange experiences and share ideas and lessons learned in the field of agriculture and agricultural systems.

He noted that the Sultanate of Oman is participating in the exhibition with a variety of plants that thrive in different environments, whether in desert, mountainous, or coastal regions, and are resilient to water scarcity, and capable of adapting and growing in the Gulf environment.

The minister praised the topics being discussed at the Expo under the theme “Green Desert, Better Environment” and their importance to the entire world, particularly those related to food security and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

He underlined that organising this event in a desert region serves as an invitation to combat desertification and optimise resource utilisation, and paves the way for greening and prosperity of the world.



SDEROT: Palestinian group Hamas launched a large-scale surprise attack against Israel on Saturday, firing thousands of rockets from Gaza and sending ground units to kill or abduct people as Israel retaliated with air strikes.

At least 40 people were reported killed in Israel, while Gaza authorities reported a death toll of 198 in the bloodiest escalation in the Israel-Palestinian conflict since May 2021.

“We are at war,” said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as the military launched a series of strikes against targets of Hamas in the blockaded coastal enclave.

“The enemy will pay an unprecedented price,” the right-wing veteran premier vowed after Hamas launched its first such combined air, ground and sea offensive, on half a century after the outbreak of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

Hamas started the surprise attack around 6:30 am with thousands of rockets aimed at towns and cities as far as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, some bypassing the Iron Dome defence system and hitting buildings.

Hamas fighters —travelling in vehicles, boats and even using motorised paragliders —breached blockaded Gaza’s security barrier and attacked nearby Israeli towns



We announce Operation Al Aqsa Flood and we fired, in the first strike of 20 minutes, more than 5,000 rockets.

THE EZZEDINE
AL QASSAM BRIGADES

and military posts, sparking gun battles as panicked residents hid out in bunkers.

Bodies were seen lying on the streets of the town of Sderot near Gaza.

Israeli army Major General Ghasan Alyan warned Hamas had “opened the gates of hell” and would “pay for its deeds”.

The army said its forces were fighting Palestinian fighters on the ground in several locations near the Gaza Strip, in a defensive operation labelled “Swords of Iron”.

Israeli authorities said 10 people in Israel were killed by rocket fire and 30 by gunfire.

Hamas claimed to have captured several Israelis —raising the spectre of a far wider escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as international concern mounted.

The group released a video showing its fighters holding three men who were labelled “enemy soldiers” in the video caption.

The escalation follows months of rising bloodshed between Israeli forces and Palestinians, mostly in the occupied West Bank, and tensions around Gaza’s border and at contested holy sites in Jerusalem.

Hamas labelled its attack Operation Al-Aqsa Flood and called on “resistance fighters in the West Bank” to join the battle, in a statement posted on Telegram. — AFP

ISRAEL ‘AT WAR’ AFTER HAMAS LAUNCHES SURPRISE ATTACK



Smoke plumes rise over Gaza City during Israeli air strikes. – AFP



Smoke billows over Gaza City following an Israeli air strikes. – AFP

Palestinians react as an Israeli military vehicle burns after it was hit by Palestinian gunmen who infiltrated areas of southern Israel, at the Israeli side of Israel-Gaza border. – Reuters



Palestinians move towards the border fence with Israel from Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP



Egypt urges Palestinians, Israelis to ‘exercise restraint’

CAIRO: Egypt urged the Palestinians and Israel to “exercise restraint” after Hamas fighters launched a deadly air, land and sea assault on Saturday from Gaza against Israel which responded with air strikes.

Historically a key mediator in conflicts between the two sides, Egypt warned of the “dire danger of ongoing escalation”.

The Egyptian foreign ministry in a statement appealed to “both the Palestinian and Israeli sides to exercise the highest degrees of restraint”.

Top diplomat Sameh Shoukry made a series of calls on Saturday in an attempt to rally “international actors” to “intervene immediately”.

In a call with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, both ministers “expressed their deep concern about the progressive and



The Egyptian foreign ministry in a statement appealed to “both the Palestinian and Israeli sides to exercise the highest degrees of restraint”

dangerous deterioration of events”.

In a separate statement, Safadi warned of the “volatility” of the situation, “particularly in light of what cities and areas of the West Bank are witnessing of Israeli attacks and violations against the Palestinian people.”

The Hamas assault follows months of surging violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with fatalities in the occupied West

Bank hitting a scale not seen in years. Jordan and Egypt were the first two countries in the region to forge peace deals with Israel, before a wave of United States-backed diplomatic normalisation since 2020, including the United Arab Emirates.

Egypt’s Shoukry called UAE Foreign Minister Shaikh Abdullah Bin Zayed on Saturday, to discuss “the gravity of the current situation and the need to make every effort to prevent the security situation from getting out of control.”

In a call with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, Shoukry stressed the “importance of stopping the escalation and all sides’ exercising restraint”.

Egypt also called on the international community to “urge Israel to stop the attacks and provocative actions against the Palestinian people and to adhere to the principles of international humanitarian law with regard to the responsibilities of an occupying state.” — AFP

PREVIOUS ISRAEL-GAZA WARS IN 15 YEARS

Israel has already fought four wars with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip since its forces and settlers withdrew from the coastal territory in 2005 –in 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2021.

December 2008: Israel launches a campaign of air strikes against groups in Gaza, dubbed Operation Cast Lead.

November 2012: Israel launches Operation Pillar of Defence with a missile strike that kills top Hamas commander Ahmed Jaabari.

July 2014: Israel launches Operation Protective Edge, with the stated goal of stopping Palestinian rocket fire and destroying tunnels used by fighting groups to infiltrate Israel.

May 2021: Israel responds to a barrage of Hamas rocket fire with an 11-day campaign of air and artillery strikes that kill at least 248 people in Gaza, including 66 children.

May 2023: Five days of fighting between Israel and Gaza’s other fighting groups leave 33 dead in Gaza and two in Israel.

WORLD REACTIONS

UNITED NATIONS

US Middle East peace envoy Tor Wennesland said: “This is a dangerous precipice, and I appeal to all to pull back from the brink.”

PALESTINE

President Mahmoud Abbas: The Palestinian people have the right to defend themselves against the “settlers and occupation troops”.

IRAN

Yahya Rahim Safavi, an adviser to Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei: “We will stand by the Palestinian fighters until the liberation of Palestine and Jerusalem.”

GERMANY

Chancellor Olaf Scholz: “Terrifying news reaches us today from Israel. We are deeply shocked by the rocket fire from Gaza and the escalating violence.

FRANCE

President Emmanuel Macron: “I express my full solidarity with the victims, and their families and those close to them.”

SAUDI ARABIA

The foreign ministry called for an “immediate cessation of violence”.

TÜRKIYE

President Tayyip Erdogan: “We call for restraint from all parties,” .

QATAR

The foreign ministry said Israel alone was responsible for the ongoing escalation of violence with the Palestinian people, and called for both sides to show restraint.

RUSSIA

Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov: Russia is in contact with Israel, the Palestinians and Arab countries in connection with the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict urging restraint.

KUWAIT

Kuwait expressed its “grave concern” over developments between Israel and the Palestinians, blaming Israel for what it called its “blatant attacks”.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

“The UAE calls for the exercise of maximum restraint and an immediate ceasefire to avoid serious repercussions.”



India flood toll hits 56, army warns on stray munitions

KOLKATA: At least 56 people are confirmed dead in floods that hit India's northeast as of Saturday, with the army warning munitions washed away by the deluge posed a public safety risk.

Violent torrents struck Sikkim state after the sudden bursting of a high-altitude glacial lake.

Climate scientists warn that similar disasters will become an increasing danger across the Himalayas as global temperatures rise and ice melts.

"So far 26 bodies have been found in Sikkim," state relief commissioner Anilraj Rai said.

Thirty more bodies had been recovered from the Teesta river basin by search and rescue teams downstream in neighbouring West Bengal state, Jalpaiguri district police superintendent K. Umesh Ganpat said.

"The river stretches up to 86 kilometres," he added. "The search operation is continuing."

Among the dead are seven Indian army soldiers posted in Sikkim, which sits on India's remote frontiers with Nepal and China. Sixteen soldiers are among the more than 100 people still missing.

India's defence ministry said in a statement that the floods had washed away "firearms and explosives" from military camps.

"The army has "established lookout teams all along the river" to recover loose ordnance, the ministry added.

Local media reports said that two people had been killed and four others injured by a mortar shell that exploded while flowing through the flood waters in West Bengal.

Roads, bridges and telephone lines have been destroyed across much of the state, complicating evacuations and efforts to communicate with thousands cut off from the rest of the country. — AFP



People walk along a street as a jeep is buried in the mud due to the flood at Teesta Bazaar in Kalimpong District, West Bengal, India. — Reuters file photo



US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer meets with Shanghai Party Secretary Chen Jining in Shanghai. — AFP

Delegation of US senators arrives in China seeking Xi meeting

SHANGHAI: A bipartisan delegation of US lawmakers led by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer arrived in China on Saturday, the latest high-level US officials to visit China as Washington seeks to ease tensions with Beijing.

Schumer is set to meet with senior officials in Shanghai before heading to Beijing, where his delegation is seeking a meeting with President Xi Jinping.

The delegation's plane landed early afternoon in Shanghai, China's economic powerhouse, where they were greeted by Ambassador Nicholas Burns.

Asked about his expectations for the visit, Schumer said he was hoping for "very productive discussions".

Accompanying Schumer is Republican Senator Mike

Crapo, who represents the state of Idaho -- home to chip giant Micron, currently in the crossfire of US-China disputes over semiconductors.

China has said it welcomes the delegation and that it hopes it enhances the lawmakers' "understanding" of the country.

Beijing's foreign ministry said the trip would "promote dialogue and exchanges between the legislative bodies of the two countries, and inject positive elements into the development of China-US relations".

US media reported the group will seek to raise issues ranging from the climate for US businesses in China to human rights.

The delegation will also stop off in South Korea and Japan. It is the latest in a series of

China has said it welcomes the delegation and that it hopes it enhances the lawmakers' "understanding" of the country.

visits by US officials to China, as both sides seek to defuse tensions across a range of security and economic issues that have been at their highest levels in years.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Treasury and Commerce Secretaries Janet Yellen and Gina Raimondo, as well as Climate Envoy John Kerry, have all visited China this year.

And President Joe Biden on Friday said he may meet Xi in

San Francisco in November as Washington and Beijing push to reset ties, but added that nothing is scheduled yet.

"There has been no such meeting set up, but it is a possibility," Biden told journalists after reports that they were set to meet during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco.

Biden is set to host leaders from across the region on November 16 and 17 in the California city, and speculation has mounted that it could be the venue for a rapprochement.

The White House had begun making plans for a meeting on the sidelines of the summit in a bid to stabilise relations, The Washington Post reported, quoting one official as saying "it's pretty firm". — AFP

Spain launches private rocket in milestone for Europe

MADRID: Spanish company PLD Space launched its recoverable Miura-1 rocket early on Saturday from a site in southwest Spain, carrying out Europe's first fully private rocket launch in a glimmer of hope for the region's stalled space ambitions.

The startup's test nighttime launch from Huelva came after two previous attempts were scrubbed. The Miura-1 rocket, named after a breed of fighting bull, is as tall as a three-storey building and has a 100-kg cargo capacity.

The launch carries a payload for test purposes, but this will not be released, the company said.

Mission control video

showed engineers cheering and congratulating one another as the rocket rose into the night sky.

"My voice is shot after so much shouting," said a triumphant Raul Torres, CEO of PLD Space, shortly after the launch.

He said all rocket systems worked "perfectly", adding that the company would now focus on tripling its workforce. "This is just the beginning."

Spain's acting Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez posted on social media: "The launch of the Miura 1, the first rocket with 100% Spanish technology, has been a success. A milestone that positions Spain's research and development at the forefront of



Spanish startup PLD Space's first suborbital reusable "Miura 1" rocket is being launched at El Arenosillo military facility in Huelva, Spain. — Reuters

space transportation."

The flight lasted 306 seconds. However, its maximum height of 46 kilometres was barely half the altitude its mission planners had hoped for, according to space.com.

The partly reusable launcher landed in the Atlantic Ocean and the company will recover it later on Saturday, it said in a statement.

A first attempt to launch the Miura-1 rocket in May was abandoned because of high-altitude winds. A second attempt in June failed when umbilical cables in the avionics bay did not all release in time, halting the lift-off as smoke and flames spewed from the rocket.

Airspace, areas of the sea and roads were closed around the high-security launch site ahead of the third lift-off attempt.

Saturday's mission on the Miura-1 demonstrator was the first of two scheduled suborbital missions. However, analysts say the most critical test will be the development of orbital services on the larger Miura-5, planned for 2025.

The small rocket launch took place under the shadow of recent disruption to Europe's mainstream space activities. The European Space Agency said last week that Vega-C would not return to service until the fourth quarter of 2024, following a failed mission last December. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

MEXICO CITY

18 migrants killed in Mexico bus crash

A bus carrying migrants overturned in southern Mexico, leaving at least 18 passengers dead and 27 injured, authorities said -- the latest fatal road crash involving US-bound migrants.

The dead were from Venezuela and Haiti, according to a statement from the prosecutor's office in Oaxaca state. The accident happened at around dawn on a highway linking Oaxaca and the neighbouring state of Puebla, it said. The injured were taken to



hospital for treatment.

Images released by state authorities showed the wreckage of the bus lying on its side on a highway winding through hills.

— AFP

MOSCOW

Putin launches gas shipments to Uzbekistan

Russian Vladimir Putin on Saturday announced the start of gas supplies to Uzbekistan via Kazakhstan, a boost for Russia's industry.

"This is the largest trilateral energy project" between the three ex-Soviet countries, Putin said, after formally launching the shipment.

He was hosting a meeting in Moscow with his Uzbek and Kazakh counterparts, Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. "The timely



implementation of such... project shows that Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan are capable of tackling the most complex and ambitious tasks," Putin said. — AFP

HERAT

6.3 earthquake kills at least 15 in west

A magnitude 6.3 earthquake hit western Afghanistan on Saturday killing 15 and injuring dozens more, officials said, predicting the toll could rise after reports of landslides and victims trapped under collapsed buildings.

The United States Geological Survey said the epicentre was 40 kilometres northwest of the region's largest city Herat, and was followed by seven aftershocks with magnitudes between 4.6 and 6.3.



Crowds of residents fled buildings in the city at around 11:00 am as the quakes began, lasting just under three hours.

— AFP

How Biden’s promises to reverse Trump’s immigration policies crumbled



Michael D Shear

The writer is the White House correspondent for NYT

Biden had previously adopted some of his predecessor’s policies, but those have still failed to slow illegal immigration

Immigration was dead simple when Joe Biden was campaigning for president: It was an easy way to attack Donald Trump as a racist, and it helped to rally Democrats with the promise of a more humane border policy.

Nothing worked better than Trump’s “big, beautiful wall” that he was building along the southern border. Its existence was as much a metaphor for the polarisation inside America as it was a largely ineffective barrier against foreigners fleeing to the United States from Central America.

“There will not be,” Biden proclaimed as he campaigned against Trump in the summer of 2020, “another foot of wall constructed.”

But a massive surge of migration in the Western Hemisphere has scrambled the dynamics of an issue that has vexed presidents for decades, and radically reshaped the political pressures on Biden and his administration.

Instead of becoming the president who quickly reversed his predecessor’s policies, Biden has repeatedly tried to curtail the migration of a record number of people — and the political fallout that has created — by embracing, or at least tolerating, some of Trump’s anti-immigrant approaches.

On Thursday, Biden administration officials formally sought to waive environmental regulations to allow construction of 20 additional miles of border wall in a part of Texas that is inundated by illegal migration. The move was a stunning reversal on a political and moral issue that had once galvanised Biden and Democrats like no other.

The funds for the wall had been approved by Congress during Trump’s tenure, and on Friday, the president said he had no power to block their use.

“The wall thing?” Biden asked reporters on Friday. “Yeah. Well, I was told that I had no choice — that I, you know, Congress passes legislation to build something, whether it’s an aircraft carrier wall or provide for a tax cut. I can’t say, ‘I don’t like it. I’m not going to do it.’”

White House officials said that they tried for years, without success, to get Congress to redirect the wall money to other border priorities. And they said Biden’s lawyers had advised that the only way to get around the Impoundment Control Act, which requires the president to spend money as Congress directs, was to file a lawsuit. The administration chose not to do so.

The money had to be spent by the end of December, the officials said.

Asked on Thursday whether he thought a border wall works, Biden — who has long said a wall would not be effective — said simply: “No.”

Still, human rights groups are furious, accusing the president of abandoning the principles on which he campaigned. They praise him for opening new, legal opportunities for some migrants, including thousands from Venezuela, but question his recent reversals on enforcement policy.

“It doesn’t help this administration politically, to continue policies that they were very clear they were against,” said Vanessa Cárdenas, executive director of America’s Voice, an immigrant rights organisation. “That muddles the message and undermines the contrast that they’re trying to make when it comes to Republicans.”

“This president came into office with a lot of moral



President Joe Biden walks with US Border Patrol agents along a stretch of the US-Mexico border in El Paso, Texas.

clarity about where the lines were,” she added.

Biden had previously adopted some of his predecessor’s policies, but those have still failed to slow illegal immigration. The issue has become incendiary inside his own party, driving wedges between Biden and some of the country’s most prominent Democratic governors and mayors, whose communities are being taxed by the cost of providing for the new arrivals.

Eric Adams, the Democratic mayor of New York, has blamed the administration for a situation that he says could destroy his city. J B Pritzker, the Democratic governor of Illinois and an ally of Biden, wrote this week in a letter to the president that a “lack of intervention and coordination” by Biden’s government at the border “has created an untenable situation for Illinois.”

In comments to reporters at an event opposing book banning, Pritzker said that he had recently “spoken with the White House” on the matter “to make sure that they heard us.”

The moment underscores the new reality for the president as he prepares to campaign for a second term. His handling of immigration has become one of his biggest

potential liabilities, with polls showing deep dissatisfaction among voters about how he deals with the new arrivals. With record numbers of migrants streaming across the border, he can no longer portray it in the simple terms he did a few years ago.

Since taking office, Biden has tried to balance his stated desire for a more humane approach with strict enforcement that aides believe is crucial to ensure that migrants do not believe the border is open to anyone.

This spring, the president announced new legal options for some migrants from several countries — Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and Haiti. He also has expanded protections for hundreds of thousands of migrants already in the United States, allowing more of them to work while they are in the country temporarily.

But the more welcoming policies have been balanced by tougher ones.

Biden this year approved a policy that had the effect of denying most immigrants the ability to seek asylum in the United States, a move that human rights groups noted was similar to an approach that Trump hailed as a way to “close the border” to immigrants he wanted to keep out.

Unheard tree felling: Uncovering the culprit



Rory Smith

The writer is a journalist, broadcaster and author

of Hadrian’s Wall — the northernmost boundary of the Roman Empire at its peak, constructed to distinguish the civilisation of England from the barbarism of what is now mostly Scotland.

The tree was iconic in a literal sense: Its silhouette had become a shorthand for the area as a whole. But it was also a living thing, and, as such, it was “finite,” Gates said.

The previous night, Storm Agnes had whipped across

northern England, bringing with it 60 mph winds. Gates assumed the tree, 70 feet tall and set in what is essentially a wind tunnel, had toppled in the storm, a sad but natural end. He dispatched a trail ranger to assess the damage.

It was when the ranger reported back that everything changed. The tree had not been brought down by natural forces. The cut was too clean. The trunk had been daubed with white paint. An incision known as a wedge cut had been made, designed to guide the tree’s fall. The ranger was unequivocal. “He said it was gone,” Gates remembered. “Someone had spoiled it.”

What followed, he said, was “overwhelming.” For many, both in the northeast of England and much farther afield, the loss of the tree represented what Gates called a “personal loss.”

“A lot of people felt a personal connection to it,” he added.

Many more, though, felt the pull of a pair of intertwined, irresistible mysteries. If a tree is felled and nobody is around to hear it, how does anyone begin to find out who was responsible? And, almost more intriguing still: What possible motive could there be for attacking a tree?

A few hours after the ranger’s report, when Gates arrived at the Sill, a glass-fronted information centre a mile or so from where the tree had stood, he found visitors in tears.

Now, children’s portraits of the tree line the walls of the swiftly established “celebration room” dedicated to the



The Sycamore Gap tree, near Hadrians Wall in Northumberland, England.

For many, both in the northeast of England and much farther afield, the loss of the tree represented a ‘personal loss’

tree. So many people wanted to offer tributes that the park authority set up a book of remembrance; it quickly filled up with memories and poems and messages of thanks. The Sill received phone calls from across the world.

At Herding Hill Farm, a campsite a couple of miles down the road, the owners, Phil and Sue Humphreys, received somewhere in the region of 3,500 comments about the tree on their Facebook page, messages from locals but also strangers in South Africa, the United States and Australia. “And that’s just us,” Phil Humphreys said. “There were so many that after a while we stopped counting.”

Over the days that followed, that sadness mutated. “There’s a lot more genuine anger now,” said Matt Brown, the chief brewer at Twice Brewed Brewing Co, which occupies the land next to the Sill. Its bestselling product, naturally, is an ale called Sycamore Gap. “You see the fury online, and you just presume that’s the Internet being an empathy filter. But people are saying those things out loud now, too, and they’re completely serious.”

Few of them believe that all of this is the result of a spontaneous act of wanton destruction. Felling a tree of that scale requires considerable expertise at any time, let alone in the middle of the night and in the middle of a storm.

Besides, although the tree was relatively easily accessible from both east and west, it was still at least a 20-minute walk from the nearest parking lot.

You should talk to someone



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

The book titled “Maybe You Should Talk to Someone” by the American therapist Lori Gottlieb describes the personal and professional difficulties she experienced when her long-term partner broke up with her.

This breakup led her to experience grief and symptoms of depression for which she was advised by her friends to see a therapist. Lori was very reluctant in the beginning mainly because, as a therapist herself she saw her job to help others and not to receive help.

Her first few sessions with the male therapist were not easy, as she described them, not just because she kept evaluating what he said but when he told her that ‘her negative emotions were not related to the loss of her partner but there are deep-rooted issues from her early life.’

The author takes us through her dual role as someone giving therapy to others while at the same time receiving therapy herself. This situation reminded me of other health professionals who require psychological support but find it difficult to seek help for fear of being judged or disqualified, or

because the therapist is younger and junior to them in terms of clinical experience.

This attitude can lead to difficulties in the doctor-patient (who is also a doctor) relationship.

A senior colleague once said that the most difficult patients are doctors because they don’t accept their new role, or they fail to admit that they need care.

Some doctors are so perfectionists that they refuse sick leave even if they need it. This could be because they believe it is their job to save others all the time and taking a sick leave means letting their patients down, others may- subconsciously- believe that work cannot be completed without them.

Whatever the exact reason, one needs to use special skills when counselling other doctors.

I always become mindful that doctors from other specialities may not be well informed about mental health problems and their treatment, just like when I needed a bladder operation, I went to see my surgeon colleague and let him explain things to me.

It also helps to remember that some doctors become more anxious about their health and medication side effects, so it is worth spending some

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time explaining this thoroughly and addressing any concerns.

The consequences of untreated mental health problems among doctors and other health workers can be dangerous as they may lead to medical errors and early retirement which means losing manpower.

Therefore, talking about mental health to all healthcare professionals is essential to encourage help-seeking behaviour and address any stigma related to mental health. Doctors need to understand that they are not immune from having physical and psychological problems and that addressing these issues has a positive impact on their well-being.

Stress and burnout are hot topics among healthcare workers that sometimes go unnoticed which eventually leads to frustration and lack of productivity and engagement. Studies from the west link early retirement from medical jobs to untreated burnout which kills the passion and makes a career just like any other job.

Finally, let us spread knowledge about the importance of mental health to all members of society and work on improving the quality of services we provide to them.

UN, Red Cross want bans, curbs on killer robots

The United Nations and the Red Cross this week issued a joint call for urgent new international rules to protect humanity from the potential “terrible consequences” of autonomous weapons.

UN secretary general Antonio Guterres and Mirjana Spoljaric, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, on Thursday said getting to grips with so-called killer robots was a global “humanitarian priority”.

They called on states to establish specific bans and restrictions on autonomous weapon systems by 2026, “to shield present and future generations from the consequences of their use”.

“In the current security landscape, setting clear international red lines will benefit all states,” they said. Autonomous weapon systems -- generally understood as weapon systems that select targets and apply force without human intervention — “pose serious humanitarian, legal, ethical and security concerns”, they said.

Guterres and Spoljaric said their development and proliferation had the potential to change the way wars are fought and thereby fuel global instability.

“By creating a perception of reduced risk to military forces and to civilians, they may lower the threshold for engaging in conflicts — inadvertently escalating violence,” they explained.

“We must act now to preserve human control over the use of force. Human control must be retained in life and death decisions. The autonomous targeting of humans by machines is a moral line that we must not cross.

“Machines with the power and discretion to take lives without human involvement should be prohibited by international law.”

The UN and ICRC chiefs said their concerns had been heightened by the increasing availability and sophistication of new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, which could be integrated into autonomous weapons.

The pair called for a ban on autonomous weapon systems which function in an unpredictable way — for example weapons controlled by machine-learning algorithms — calling them “an unacceptably dangerous proposition”.

The UN and ICRC heads also called for clear restrictions on all other types of autonomous weapons, including limits on their use, they type of targets they strike and the scale of force used.

While international law prohibits certain weapons and restricts the use of others, without a specific agreement on autonomous weapons, countries could hold “different views” on how these rules might apply. — AFP

A trip to Ukraine clarified the stakes. And they’re huge



Thomas L Friedman

The writer is an American political commentator and author

While visiting Kyiv this month, my first trip to Ukraine since Vladimir Putin’s attack in February 2022, I tried to get my exercise every morning by walking the grounds of St Michael’s Golden Domed Monastery. Its serenity, however, has been disrupted by a jarring exhibit of destroyed Russian tanks and armoured personnel carriers.

During my walks, I’d poke my head into these jagged, rocket-pierced hulks, wondering what a terrible death must have come to the Russian soldiers operating them.

But the shock of this tangled mass of rusting steel, sitting in the middle of this grand, whitish-stone piazza, evoked a different image in my mind’s eye: a meteor.

It looked as if a giant meteor had plummeted from space, disrupting life as we knew it — nearly eight decades without a “great power” war in Europe, a continent where centuries of attacks and conquest had given way to security and prosperity. Now we have this ugly pile sitting here in our midst, smouldering, and we, Ukrainians and the world community, are struggling with how to deal with it.

Nearly every Ukrainian I spoke to in Kyiv was at once exhausted by the war and passionately determined to recover every inch of their Russian-occupied territory — but no one had clear answers about the road ahead, the painful trade-offs that await, only certainty that defeat would mean an end to Ukraine’s democratic dream and a smashing of the post-World War II era that had produced a Europe more whole and free than ever before in its history.

What Putin is doing in Ukraine is not just reckless, not just a war of choice, not just an attack in a class of its own for overreach, mendacity, immorality and incompetence, all wrapped in a farrago of lies. What he is doing is evil.

He has trumped up any number of shifting justifications — one day it was removing a Nazi regime in power in



A destroyed overpass in Kupiansk, Ukraine.

Kyiv, the next it was preventing Nato expansion, the next it was fending off a Western cultural attack of Russia — for what ultimately was a personal flight of fancy that now requires his superpower army turning to North Korea for help. It’s like the biggest bank in town having

WHAT PUTIN IS DOING IN UKRAINE IS NOT JUST RECKLESS, NOT JUST A WAR OF CHOICE, NOT JUST AN ATTACK IN A CLASS OF ITS OWN FOR OVERREACH, MENDACITY, IMMORALITY AND INCOMPETENCE

to ask the local pawnshop for a loan. So much for Putin’s bare-chested virility.

What is so evil — beyond the death and pain and trauma and destruction he has inflicted on so many Ukrainians — is that at a time when climate change, famine, health crises and so much more are stressing planet Earth, the last thing humanity needed was to divert so much attention, collaborative

energy, money and lives to respond to Putin’s war to make Ukraine a Russian colony again.

Putin lately has stopped even bothering to justify the war — maybe because even he is too embarrassed to utter aloud the nihilism that his actions scream: If I can’t have Ukraine, I’ll make sure Ukrainians can’t have it, either.

“This is not a war in which the aggressor has some vision, some outline of the future. Rather, on the contrary, for them, everything is black, formless, and the only thing that matters is force,” Timothy Snyder, the Yale historian, remarked on a panel we did together at a conference in Kyiv last weekend.

Being in the city has been clarifying for me in three regards. I understand even better just how sick and disruptive this Russian attack is. I understand even better just how hard, maybe even impossible, it will be for Ukrainians to evict Putin’s army from every inch of their soil.

Perhaps most of all, I understand even better something that former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski observed almost 30 years ago: “Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, but with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an empire.” — **The New York Times**

Inspiring the new generation

I have often felt that, having reached an age of some maturity, one of my life passions is to be able to pass on my professional and life skills to the younger generation. It would be such a waste, if all of my hard word wasn't passed on. All my hard work, sometimes pain, to stop, and to pass, with me.

I'm certain that I'm not the only one of my ilk who has skills, knowledge and understanding that would make a young adult's transition from graduate to valued employee a more compassionate and less traumatic experience. In fact Pulitzer Prize winner David Mamet once wrote, "Old age and treachery will always beat youth and enthusiasm," which is scarily true.

The mentoring concept and practice has been with us for centuries, the 'passing of the baton,' in many ancient societies a treasured and celebrated process that has been relegated to the background by the irrevocable passage of time, and no little generational resistance. After all, they do 'know everything,' don't they?

Yet, as Kahlil Gibran, the noted Lebanese poet and author, wrote, "Knowledge of the self is the mother of all knowledge. So it is incumbent upon me to know myself, to know it completely, to know its minutiae, its characteristics, its subtleties..." and in doing so he reflected upon the excoriating need to know oneself, and who better to unveil the real you than a respected senior statesman or woman, in your specialty?

That 'push back' against mentorship has been accelerated during the twentieth century, nourished by the frustrating, or celebrated, ability of the new generations to master technology with almost indecent haste. However, it must be noted that technological ascendancy has come at a cost, as while technically, or scientifically adept beyond their predecessors, this generation lacks the integrated soft skills of communication, interaction, and genuine social skills.

Don't believe me! What is a nerd? And while being a nerd may have its benefits, few individuals can progress without knowing their subtleties, and recognising those of others.



Ray Petersen
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THE MENTORING CONCEPT AND PRACTICE HAS BEEN WITH US FOR CENTURIES

How one organises oneself, works as part of a team, interacts with work hierarchies and colleagues. How one deals with success, frustration, disappointment, discipline, and failure, are all critical in workplace or sector progression and job security. They are to be disregarded at the utmost peril, because you must implement marketplace and sector processes in the workplace, to be effective in the marketplace.

Corporate practices, and cultures must be learned, as regardless of the value of the individual and their potential, being assured in knowing how you are treated in the workplace contributes mightily to the individual's progression. Learning these pathways through trial and error can be eroded through mentoring.

Now, human nature being what it is, and knowing that today's youth know everything, and they are in a hurry, there would be resistance. That's okay, potential mentors are well-versed at understanding resistance, they know how to massage tender egos, they know how to resolve conflict, they have done all this, many times before. The vulnerability of youth also emerges in the gap between what employees are asked to do, and what they are capable of doing, and again, the mentor is the perfect profile of an adviser and confidant.

To this end, more organisations and institutions, whilst implementing age-based retirement policies, often a waste of intellectual capital, could easily implement mentoring programmes for those 'mothballed' employees. Such mentors could be offered as benefits for those who demonstrate potential, and either individually, or in groups, be mentored to meet key needs, as retaining that intellectual capital that could prove organisationally invaluable.

This is about keeping quality contributors, contributing: to workplaces and societies; to communities and industries; and growing society through its youth. Mentoring, the sharing of experience and enthusiasm, is surely a concept from the distant ages, yet of today, and priceless to the future.

A DRY RIVER!



Aerial view of a canoe navigating a canal from Puraquequara Lake in Manaus, Amazonas State, Brazil. The riverside population has suffered from the lack of water caused by the severe drought in the north of the country. The drought has dried up the rivers and made it difficult to travel between cities in the state of Amazonas. — AFP

What pandemic preparedness would look like

Humanity was caught off guard by the Covid-19 pandemic, even though we had effectively been warned by smaller-scale outbreaks — of Sars, Ebola, MERS, and avian flu — for decades. US President Barack Obama, recognising the true nature of the threat infectious diseases might pose, even created a Global Health Security and Biodefence unit within the National Security Council. But Donald Trump, in his infinite wisdom, shut it down.

Given the strong odds that we will face another pandemic sooner or later, the international community is rightly engaged in discussions about how to do better next time. Last month, a United Nations High-Level Meeting on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness, and Response produced a "political declaration" that was hailed as a landmark. The 14-page draft acknowledged that, as Carolyn Reynolds, co-founder of the Pandemic Action Network, has put it, PPPR "is so much more than a national health issue; it is a national and global security and economic issue. Like climate change, pandemics are a global systemic risk and existential threat to humanity, and we need to treat them as such."

But isn't this just stating the obvious? While some have hailed the agreement



JOSEPH E STIGLITZ

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GIVEN STRONG ODDS THAT WE WILL FACE ANOTHER PANDEMIC, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS RIGHTLY ENGAGED IN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT HOW TO DO BETTER NEXT TIME

as "historic," it was accompanied by no firm commitments from governments.

We already know what it will take to do better next time. After Covid-19 spread globally, millions of people in poor countries died for lack of access to medicines that were being hoarded in rich countries. We needed waivers on all intellectual property (IP) related to the pandemic pathogen — including vaccines, tests, personal protective equipment, and therapeutics — as well as commitments from everyone to share their technology and provide all the funds necessary to help poorer countries.

Yet during the Covid-19 crisis, we saw even the most powerful advocates of international governance, namely the United States, show little compunction about breaking rules and norms that were seen to conflict with their own immediate interests. While curtailing some movement of people to contain the spread of a virus was one thing; blocking exports of essential Covid-related products was another matter entirely. Moreover, thanks to a courageous freedom-of-information request in South Africa

and other confirmed leaks, we now know that big pharmaceutical companies stooped so low as to charge some developing countries more than they charged developed countries. Some also insisted that the bulk of their products be exported to Europe from the emerging markets where they were being manufactured, even though those countries' own citizens were desperate for medicines.

Worse, while developing-country governments were under strict contractual obligations, the companies themselves were

spared from even the minimal requirement to deliver the supplies they had promised in a timely fashion. And they insisted on secrecy — for reasons that are now clear — even in cases where that meant violating a country's transparency laws. Many developing-country governments thus were left to choose between saving their citizens' lives and preserving democratic values. As a compromise, at least one country chose to go to Russia for the vaccines. For others, China was the only possible source.

Any rational approach must start with the acknowledgment that controlling pandemics is in everyone's interest. Given rich, powerful countries' apparent inability to keep their commitments during a crisis, the reasonable solution is to ensure capacity to produce pandemic products everywhere, and to eliminate foreseeable impediments to countries doing so. That means agreeing to a strong IP waiver, and establishing stiff penalties for any drug company that wrongly interferes in another company's use of the specified IP, including in cases where production is being exported to third countries in the developing world.

To stay ahead of future threats, some of the relevant technology should be transferred now, and governments and companies must commit to facilitate any additional transfers that future pathogens might make necessary. Governments should have the tools and legal authority to force or induce firms within their jurisdictions to share such technology, and developing countries should have the right to sue if that does not happen.



Millions in poor countries died for lack of access to medicines.

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Salalah edge Ahli Sidab on penalties

AL KHABOURAH, IBRI AND AL MUDHAIBI REACH HM CUP LAST 16

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 7

In a thrilling match, Salalah qualified for the round of 16 of the His Majesty's Cup after winning the preliminary round match over Ahli Sidab on penalty kicks. The match was held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on Friday.

During the first half, the atmosphere was calm, and Salalah dominated possession without posing a threat to Ahli Sidab's goalkeeper. The 15th minute saw a strong shot from Ahli Sidab's Omar Nandung hit the post. However, in the 37th minute, Shabib Saleh from Salalah managed to score the first goal for his team.

Ahli Sidab equalised in the 40th minute through a splendid goal by Omar Nandung after a corner kick. In the second half, Salalah took the lead again with a well-placed shot by Larnest Ba Ohin in the 55th minute. However, Amjad al Faraji equalised for Ahli Sidab in the 69th minute after a fantastic corner kick.

The extra-time periods did not change the score, leading to a penalty shoot-out. Salalah succeeded in winning 7-6 on penalties. Thus, Salalah eliminated Ahli Sidab from the tournament to face Bahla in the round of 16.

AL KHABOURAH OUST
AL IT'TIHAD

In another Sultan's Cup preliminary round match held on Friday, Al Khabourah secured a 2-0 victory against Al Ittihad.

The first half of the match witnessed cautious play from both teams, with reserved attacks in the first 15 minutes and a back-and-forth in ball possession. In the 20th minute, Al Khabourah took the lead through a successful penalty kick by Mohammed Diallo to the left of Al Ittihad goalkeeper.

The second half began with attempts from Al Ittihad to make a comeback, and substitutions were made, but Al Khabourah maintained their control. In the 53rd minute, Ishad Aubeed scored the second goal for his team from another penalty kick, further



Al Ittihad club player shoots the ball

extending Al Khabourah's lead.

Despite Al Ittihad's attempts to attack and pressure Al Khabourah goal, they couldn't breach the opponent's defence. With this important win, Al Khabourah advanced to the round of 16 in the competition, knocking Al Ittihad out of the tournament and qualifying to face Fanja.

IBRI BEAT AL SHABAB
Ibri Club defeated Al Shabab on Friday with a score of 1-0 in the preliminary round at Ibri Sports Complex.

The match started with a strong performance from Ibri Club, attempting to score in the early minutes. The players missed several scoring opportunities, hitting the post in the fourth minute and shooting above the crossbar in the tenth minute.

The first half ended with a

goalless draw between the two teams. In the second half, Ibri intensified their efforts and managed to score the winning goal in the 56th minute through Kleber Calial, after an assist from his team-mate Faisal al Aghbari.

After the goal, the match became more competitive between the two teams, witnessing numerous missed opportunities and heroic saves by the goalkeepers. The match ended with a one-goal victory for Ibri Club, qualifying them to face Al Rustaq in the round of 16.

AL MUDHAIBI ADVANCE
In another thrilling preliminary round match, Al Mudhaibi defeated Qurayat 1-0 on Friday. Al Mudhaibi's goal was scored by Al Muhannad al Habsi, leading his team to qualify for the round of 16 to face Oman Club.



OMAN FACE BRAZIL, PORTUGAL AND MEXICO IN GROUP D

Oman drawn in tough group for 2024 Beach Soccer World Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 7

The Oman national beach soccer team will face a tough and challenging path in their fifth presence at the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup 2024 after the team was drawn in Group D along with heavyweights Brazil (record five-time champions), Portugal (champions of 2015 and 2019) and Mexico teams.

Group A featured hosts United Arab Emirates, Egypt, USA and Italy teams. Iran, defending champions of AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup held in Bangkok in March, will vie in the prestigious beach soccer event at Group B which comprised Argentina, Spain and Tahiti.

The third Asian representatives at UAE 2024, Japan, will face Senegal, Belarus and Colombia in Group C. The official draw was conducted at the Mohammed Bin Rashid Library in Dubai on Friday. The Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup in Dubai will be held from February 15 to 25, 2024.

Oman will commence their campaign with a tough encounter against the world champions Brazil on February 16. The match will start at 21:00 (Oman time). In the following match, Oman players

will take on Mexico on February 16 at 15:30. In the concluding match of the group stage, Oman will face former champions Portugal on February 20 and the match will kick off at 17:00.

The first two toppers from each group will move to quarterfinals which will be scheduled on February 22 while semifinals will take place on February 24. The third and fourth play-off and the final are scheduled for February 25.

DIFFERENT SHOW
Oman team players will aim for a different show in their fifth appearance at the 12th edition of Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup in UAE and move further from group stage to the knockout phase for the first time ever. Oman team will be led by national experienced coach Talib Hilal for the fifth time in history after 2011 (Italy), 2015 (Portugal), 2019 (Paraguay) and 2021 (Russia) at the World Cups.

According to the Fifa website, Oman's beach soccer team star Khalid al Oraimi stated that the draw has given us the hardest possible group with Brazil and Portugal, as well as Mexico. "Nothing is impossible in football. God willing, we will do ourselves proud at this tournament," he said. Oman team had registered a

historic win over Senegal 3-2 in their last Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup 2021 participation in Russia. The national team were drawn in Group D against Uruguay, Portugal and Senegal. Oman were defeated by Portugal in the opening match by 5-3 before they had suffered another loss against Uruguay 4-2 in the following game. Senegal had topped the group by six points with a goal advantage over Uruguay who ended as second with the same credit. Portugal and Oman were placed in the third and fourth positions respectively with three points to their credit.

Coach Talib Hilal's men's last appearance in official tournaments was in August as the team took part in the second CIS Games in Belarus. Oman beach soccer team had ended their campaign in the fourth place after they suffered a 7-3 defeat against Russia in the third and fourth play-off.

The last squad of the team featured from the following probables: Khalid al Araimi, Munthir al Araimi, Yahya al Murikhi, Amjad al Hamdani, Abdullah al Souti, Sami al Balushi, Nouh al Zadjali, Younis al Owaisi, Mishaal al Araimi, Al Yaqdhan al Hindasi, Ahmed al Owaisi and Nouh al Battashi.

57 horses qualify for endurance races in Barka

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, OCT 10

As many as 57 horses were able to qualify for the endurance races for the season 2023-24.

The race is being organised by the Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation and under the supervision of the International Equestrian Federation, at Al Mohamed Endurance Village in Barka. The number of participants reached 71 horses, divided into three races of 100 km, 80 km and 40 km.

16 horses out of 21 were able to qualify in 100 km race, 8 horses out of 9 successfully qualified in 80 km race and 33 from 41 horses

qualified in the 40 km race.

The veterinary examination was done for all horses to ensure their safety and readiness.

The 100 km international race included three stages: the first stage was given white colour for a distance of 40 km, the second stage was given red colour for a distance of 35 km, and the third stage was given blue colour for a distance of 25 km. The heart rate was 64 beats per minute and the minimum speed was 14 km per hour.

The 80 km qualifying race also included two stages, the first stage for 40 km and given the white colour, and the second stage for 40 km and given the white colour.



Part of the competition in the 100 km race



Sayyid Munther bin Saif al Busaidi and Hamoud bin Ali al Nasiri in the General Assembly of the Asian Equestrian Federation in China.

The highest speed was 16 km/hour and the minimum speed was 12 km/hour, and the age of the horse was not less than five years.

On the other hand, Sayyid Munther bin Saif bin Hamad al Busaidi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Equestrian Federation, and Hamoud bin Ali bin Saif al Nasiri, OEF Secretary, participated in the General Assembly of the Asian Equestrian Federation in China, where the Board of Directors of the Asian Equestrian Federation was elected and specialised sports committees were formed. This visit also included attendance at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou.



Mehidy stars as Bangladesh overwhelm Afghanistan in World Cup

DHARAMSALA: Mehidy Hasan Miraz starred with both bat and ball as Bangladesh launched their World Cup campaign with a dominant six-wicket win over Afghanistan in Dharamsala on Saturday.

The off-spinner took 3-25 as Afghanistan were bowled out for just 156.

Mehidy then made 57 after being dropped twice, with fellow 25-year-old Nojmul Hossain Shanto finishing on 59 not out as Bangladesh won with more than 15 overs to spare.

This match also saw Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan inflict more World Cup damage on Afghanistan, the left-arm spinner taking 3-30 while his bowling changes yielded wickets.

Afghanistan, relatively well-placed at 47-1 and 112-2 after being sent into bat by Shakib, lost their last eight wickets for 44 runs.

"It's a great moment for me," said man of the match Mehidy at the presentation ceremony.

"I was a little bit cautious in my mind early on while bowling but the captain (Shakib) told me to bowl at the right areas and told me to be consistent and that gave me confidence so credit goes to the captain."

As for his batting, he said: "I always play at number eight so it was a great opportunity to bat in the top order...it's a great moment for me to perform."

Shakib added: "I am happy to contribute with my bowling..all our five bowlers chipped in, they contributed."

"Mehidy, Shanto...these are our inform players -- they are always confident and want to do well for the team."

Afghanistan captain Hashmatullah Shahidi was left to rue his side's collapse.

Saturday's defeat comes after Afghanistan lost all nine matches at the 2019 World Cup.

- 'Bad shot selection' - "We had a good start but at the middle after fall of first wicket, we had bad shot selection, but their bowlers bowled very tight. I think we fought well (in the field) but the score wasn't enough," said Shahidi.

Shakib, who in the corresponding World Cup fixture four years ago took 5-29 in Bangladesh's 62-run win, made the initial breakthrough on Saturday when he had Ibrahim Zadran caught on the sweep.

Several Afghanistan batsmen gave their wickets away, with only opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz (47) offering much resistance.

But Gurbaz, who made 145 in a one-day international against Bangladesh in July, fell when, seemingly frustrated at the lack of support from the other end, he holed out off paceman Mustafizur Rahman to Tanzid Hasan in the covers. — AFP

Record-setting South Africa defeat Sri Lanka by 102 runs

NEW DELHI: South Africa defeated Sri Lanka by 102 runs at the Cricket World Cup on Saturday after posting the highest total in the history of the tournament of 428-5. Aiden Markram (106) made history by smashing the fastest World Cup century, reaching the milestone in just 49 balls.

Rassie van der Dussen (108) and Quinton de Kock (100) also hit centuries in the first World Cup match to feature three tons in the same innings. In reply, Sri Lanka battled bravely before being dismissed for 326 with Charith Asalanka (79), Kusal Mendis (76) and skipper Dasun Shanaka (68) rescuing a little pride for the 1996 champions.

South Africa rewrote the record books on Saturday as they posted the highest ever World Cup total of 428 while Aiden Markram clubbed the fastest tournament century in just 49 balls against a shell-shocked Sri Lanka.

The Proteas bettered the previous World Cup best of 417 made by Australia against Afghanistan at Perth in 2015. Their 428-5 was also the ninth highest total in all one-day internationals.

Markram, who went on to make 106, beat the previous record for fastest World Cup century which was claimed by Ireland's Kevin O'Brien off 50 balls against England at Bengaluru in 2011.

Rassie van der Dussen (108) and Quinton de Kock (100) also hit centuries in the first World Cup match to feature three tons in the same innings.

"It was a perfect day for for us with the bat. We had to work hard up front up against the swinging ball and then well into the middle overs," said Van der Dussen.

"We have a blueprint to set it up for the guys in the middle order. Aiden Markram when he plays like that is incredible to watch."

For Sri Lanka, the figures made for grim reading with two of their bowlers — Matheesha Pathirana (1-95) and Kasun Rajitha (1-90) — conceding more than 180 runs from 20 overs.

It was a remarkable display of big-hitting by a South African side who were skittled out for just 99



South Africa's Keshav Maharaj celebrates after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka's Dasun Shanaka. — Reuters

the last time they played at Delhi's Arun Jaitley Stadium in October 2022. De Kock, who is playing in his final international tournament, hit his 18th ODI century off 83 balls with 12 fours and three sixes.

De Kock put on 204 runs for the second wicket with Van der Dussen before being dismissed off the next ball he faced after reaching 100, top edging a delivery from Pathirana to Dhananjaya de Silva at mid-on.

Van der Dussen soon reached his

fifth century in the format off 103 balls with 12 fours and three sixes. The 34-year-old, playing in his 50th ODI, was out in the 38th over when Sadeera Samarawickrama took a catch on the long-on boundary. De Kock and Van der Dussen came together at the fall of the first wicket when skipper Temba Bavuma was trapped lbw by Dilshan Madushanka for just eight in the second over.

Van der Dussen was first to his

half-century, the 13th of his ODI career, doing it in some style with a driven boundary off Pathirana.

De Kock followed, bringing up his 31st ODI fifty from 61 balls with four boundaries and a six with a reverse sweep off Dunith Wellalage.

Markram gave Sri Lanka no respite, racing to his half-century from 34 balls before he and Heinrich Klaasen (32) took the Proteas past the 350 mark in the 44th over. — AFP

INDIA-AUSTRALIA GAME TO KICK START CUP FEVER

Five matches into the 15th edition of the World Cup but it has not yet kicked off with all games being one sided and sadly no crowd to see any of the matches which gave a sorry sight that is the World Cup happening that too in India.

But come Sunday, when hosts India clash with five times champions Australia, it should be a full house as all tickets have been sold out and we should have a cracker of a game.

There is already drama before the match has started with wonder boy Shubman Gill down with fever and looks unlikely to play even though he



has not been ruled out by head coach Rahul Dravid who said in the press conference that Gill is recovering well. But if Gill does not take the field, India will suffer a huge blow as he has been the stand out player this year for Team India in the ODI format scoring 1,230 runs in 20 innings at a staggering average of 72.32 with five hundreds and five half centuries. Both Rohit Sharma and Gill have given good starts with the bat for India when opening the batting together.

Australia too will breathe a sigh of relief if Gill is not playing as in the last two ODIs, he had scored a hundred and 74 and looked at ease against all

the Australian pace bowlers and taken the Aussie spinners to the cleaners with ease. Moreover, Gill will also be missed as a fielder as he is excellent in the slip cordon having hands of a bucket.

India do have pocket dynamo Ishan Kishan to replace Gill to partner Rohit and this will definitely test the character of the 25-year-old wicketkeeper batsman. One advantage of having Kishan is that he is left-handed to negate Adam Zampa but for that he needs to survive the Australian brutal pace attack first of Mitchell Starc, captain Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood.

That the match is played in Chennai, India will play home boy Ravichandran Ashwin who has a good record against the Aussies and will be handy in spin friendly conditions of Chennai. India had beaten Australia when they last met in the World Cup in their first game at the Oval, but Australia will have good memories of the last match they played at Chennai when they beat India to win the series. The India-Australia match is the right starter to kick off the World Cup just before the big game on October 14 between India and Pakistan and one hopes that the match goes to the wire to give this World cup the right push.



Competition hall for kick off the competition

OTTA set for thrilling action at 2023 Muscat WTT Contender

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 7

The Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) is all set for seven days of thrilling action when the 2023 Muscat WTT Contender event will kick off on Sunday in presence of top paddlers across the world. Nearly 150 paddlers representing 34 countries will take part in the tournament which will begin on Thursday by preliminary qualifications of men's singles, women's singles.

All the logistics and technical arrangement arranged as the competitions will begin on Sunday at the indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sport Complex. The hall is set with four main tables that will featured four matches at the same time beside two warm up areas for the paddlers ahead of their competitions start.

The event will offer a total cash prize of \$75,000 in five different disciplines including men's and women's singles and doubles beside the mixed doubles.

Six paddlers from Oman will represent the hosts in this top-class event namely Muhannad al Balushi, Asaad al Raisi, Ahmed al Riyami, Badar al Jassasi,

Mohammed al Mutawa and Loqman al Farsi.

In the Men's singles qualification, Oman's Muhannad al Balushi will meet Huang Yan-cheng from Chinese Taipei in round two while Asad al Raisi will take on Li Hon Ming from Hong Kong from round one. Mohammed al Mutawa will face Chan Baldwin from Hong Kong in round one while Ahmed al Riyami will meet Pau Yik Man from Hong Kong. Loqman al Farsi will play against Bence Majoros Hungary. The playing system of all singles matches will be on knockout stages format as the winner from round will move to round two and then three. Later on, the winner from all the three rounds will secure slot in the main draw.

Peter Bohumsky from Czech is the chief referee while four external umpires from Egypt, Iran and Bahrain will officiate in the tournament beside many of the international umpires from Oman will be part of the officiating team.

This is the third appearance of WTT Contender events in Muscat after two successful outings in March and September 2022.

Tottenham go top of table after 1-0 win at Luton

LUTON: Tottenham Hotspur went top of the Premier League table with a 1-0 win at Luton Town on Saturday, despite playing the whole of the second half with 10 men.

Dutch defender Micky van de Ven scored the only goal of the game in the 52nd minute when he poked home a first-time shot after a cut back from James Maddison following a Spurs short corner move.

"A lot of character and resilience, which the team has showed a lot in the previous games before today," Spurs boss Ange Postecoglou said.

Spurs remain unbeaten after eight league games, and are now two points clear of Manchester City and three ahead of Arsenal, before those two sides meet on Sunday. Luton remain on four points.

The visitors had Yves Bissouma sent off in added time at the end of the first half, receiving a second booking for a dive outside the Luton area, but went on to break the deadlock early in the second-half to eventually claim all three points.

Luton missed some clear chances to take something from the game having weathered an early Spurs storm, but fell to their sixth league defeat of the season.

It was all one-way traffic early on, and in the seventh minute Spurs' Pedro Porro got in behind the keeper after a one-two with Son Heung-Min but Porro pulled his shot wide.

Luton's keeper Thomas Kaminski was called in to action again in the 17th minute when a Dejan Kulusevski cross was cleared by Tom Lockyer but only as far as Son, but his shot was straight at the keeper.

"They started strongly, we rode



Micky van de Ven celebrates scoring their first goal with Destiny Udogie, Cristian Romero and Pape Matar Sarr. — Reuters

our luck for the first 10 minutes or so, then we found our way into the game," Luton manager Rob Edwards said.

Luton had their first shot on goal in the 21st minute, but Marvelous Nakamba blasted his effort high and wide. The home side did, however, take some courage after holding Spurs scoreless and began to make inroads on the visitors' goal.

Spurs kept pushing, and on the half-hour mark Kulusevski's first-time shot was pushed wide by Kaminski at full stretch.

Luton thought they had found the breakthrough after 40

minutes. A free-kick into the box was headed on by Carlton Morris and Elijah Adebayo got a foot to the ball and flicked it towards the far post.

The ball came back off the upright and Lockyer was quickest to react and head into an open goal. But after a lengthy VAR check, the goal was ruled out for a foul by Adebayo on Cristian Romero.

The free-kick proved costly for Spurs, however, as Bissouma received a booking for his foul on Chidozie Ogbene. With added time almost over, Bissouma received a second booking for a

blatant dive.

"We started really well, should have been three or four up, but then you get the red card and it is a different type of game," Postecoglou said.

Luton should have taken full advantage of the extra man at the start of the second half, but Adebayo missed the best chance of the game in the 47th minute when his effort went wide.

Five minutes later and Van de Ven's first goal for Spurs would prove enough to put Tottenham top of the table, while Luton still await their first home win of the season. — Reuters

Oman to host Afghanistan for bilateral series

MUSCAT: Oman national cricketers will have a "perfect" buildup to the ICC T20 World Cup Qualifier later this month in Nepal with a bilateral series against Afghanistan A (AfghanAbdalyan) scheduled to be played at the Oman Cricket Academy (OCA) grounds in Al Amerat from 12-23 October.

This will be the first time Oman will host any Afghanistan national side and the tour will include two 50-over-matches and five T20I games.

Speaking on the upcoming visit of Afghanistan A squad to Oman, Oman Cricket Chairman Pankaj Khmiji said: "Afghanistan's rise in the cricket world is an example. The tour of the A squad, which also comprises few players who have already played for the national side will be a good match practice for our boys ahead of the ICC T20 World Cup Qualifier in Nepal.

"Our boys have just started the domestic season and we wanted to provide them with quality matches and Afghanistan A will be a good test for them."

Khimji added: "The visit also



Afghanistan A tour- file photo for illustrative purpose

assumes significance as this is the first time the Afghanistan Cricket Board has sent its squad and the visit will help strengthen our bilateral relations with them."

In a statement to the media, Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) Chairman Mr. Mirwais Ashraf: "We are committed to providing more playing opportunities for the AfghanAbdalyan squad, which includes top domestic players, to gain international exposure and be prepared for national call-ups

when necessary. This series is an excellent opportunity for the players to demonstrate their skills and make the most of it. Oman is a strong team, and I am hopeful to witness an entertaining series of competitive cricket."

Oman head coach Duleep Mendis said: "This is a perfect buildup for our boys as we aspire to book our spot in the ICC T20 World Cup 2024. We have the Asian Qualifier in Nepal, starting on October 30 and we hope

to finish among the top two in the eight-nation tournament to qualify.

"Oman had a good run in the T20 World Cup as we have made it to the global event twice in 2016 and 2021. We hope to make it this time at the 2024 ICC Men's T20 World Cup in West Indies and USA. As part of our buildup plans, we want to give our boys good preparations ahead of the Qualifier in Nepal. Afghanistan A squad comprises few T20 internationals and it would be a good exercise for our players."

ACB CEO Naseeb Khan said: "It is a significant achievement for the Afghanistan Cricket Board to have maintained strong bilateral ties with other cricketing nations. We are committed to continuing efforts to expand and improve the game, and hope that all players will have the opportunity to showcase their skills and create good memories during this tour."

"Oman remains our close cricketing friend country where cricket has been making significant progress, the same as the game progressed in Afghanistan."



Archive photo from the last meeting of Olympic committees

OOC HOSTS MEETINGS OF GCC EXECUTIVE OFFICE, NOC CHIEFS

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 7

During the period from October 13 to 16, Oman, represented by Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), will host the 35th meeting of GCC NOCs Heads, preceded by the 97th meeting of the Executive Office (GCC NOCs Secretaries-General), in addition to the second meeting of the Advisory Committee for Women's Sports.

The meetings will include many topics that will be presented for discussion and the necessary decisions will be taken in the interest of Gulf sports. A number of important sports figures will be present in addition to the presence of a number of representatives of the sports sectors in the GCC countries.

The OOC is completing all its preparations to receive the guests of Oman, in addition to completing all preparations for holding the three meetings. The meeting of GCC NOCs heads and Secretaries-General will be held on October 15-16, while the meeting of the Advisory Committee for Sports of the Women's Committee will be held on October 14. A working team has been formed to follow up on the preparations and provide all means to

make this important Gulf event a success. A media centre will also be established at the delegations' residence to have a role in conveying the events of these meetings through the media professionals accompanying the participating delegations from the GCC countries and facilitating their media tasks.

PROMOTING GCC SPORTS

The last meeting (34th) of GCC NOCs heads, held in Saudi Arabia, came out with a number of decisions aimed at promoting and supporting GCC sports and activating joint work, as it was approved to change the name of GCC Sports Dispute Resolution Authority to the Sports Arbitration Authority for GCC Sports Disputes Resolution Authority with the approval of its proposed budget. It was also agreed at that meeting to end the work of the organisational committees, and to form four advisory committees for organising and following up on joint sports work, represented by the Sports Committee, the Women's Sports Committee, the Athletes Committee, and the Paralympic Sports Committee which are directly linked to the Executive Office, and the heads of these committees will be according to the presidency in the GCC countries.



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GCC countries’ GDP reaches more than \$2.4 trillion

MUSCAT: Jasem bin Mohammed al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, praised the sincere efforts and tireless work made by the Sultanate of Oman to strengthen the path of the Cooperation Council and the support and interest that the joint Gulf action receives from the high standing of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Omani government.

Al Budaiwi said in a statement to the Oman News Agency (ONA) that the Gulf economy witnessed, during the past year, a steady annual growth of 6 per cent, and the gross domestic product of the GCC countries exceeded \$2.4 trillion and is expected to reach \$6 trillion in the year 2050.

He added that the financial value of the Gulf markets combined amounted to more than \$4 trillion by the end of 2022, occupying fifth place among the 10 largest global markets, while the value of the financial assets of the sovereign funds of the GCC countries reached more than \$3.225 trillion, and the assets of banks operating in the region were recorded at \$2.9 trillion.

Al Budaiwi stressed that the GCC countries are taking serious steps towards diversifying their sources of income and not relying on oil as the main source of income, and are working to encourage investments, support



A view of the Salalah Port, in this illustration image.



Jasem bin Mohammed al Budaiwi
Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council

the role of the private sector and develop human capital.

THE FINANCIAL VALUE OF THE GULF MARKETS COMBINED AMOUNTED TO MORE THAN \$4 TRILLION BY THE END OF 2022, OCCUPYING FIFTH PLACE AMONG THE 10 LARGEST GLOBAL MARKETS, WHILE THE VALUE OF THE FINANCIAL ASSETS OF THE SOVEREIGN FUNDS OF THE GCC COUNTRIES REACHED MORE THAN \$3.225 TRILLION, AND THE ASSETS OF BANKS OPERATING IN THE REGION WERE RECORDED AT \$2.9 TRILLION.

He said, “The GCC countries are currently focusing on completing the remaining steps of the customs union and the Gulf common market to reach economic unity in 2025, based on the directives the leaders of the GCC countries which comes within the framework of their interest in advancing the path of the Cooperation Council to serve their people and achieve greater coordination, integration and interconnection between the GCC countries.” —ONA

GCC-EU ministerial meeting in Muscat to strengthen relations

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, OCT 7

The upcoming Gulf Cooperation Council and European Union joint ministerial meeting in the Sultanate of Oman will aim to enhance cooperation and strengthen GCC-EU relations, according to GCC Secretary-General Jasem al Budaiwi.

In an online statement, Al Budaiwi said the meeting will assess progress on the strategic relationship and the joint work programme spanning the 2022-2027 timeframe, as well as address regional and international developments.

The meeting is taking place tomorrow, October 9, in Muscat, with the participation of over 30 official delegations.

The 27th session of the EU-GCC Joint Ministerial Council will be chaired by Oman Foreign Minister, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joseph Borrell.

During the meeting’s 26th session in Brussels last year, both parties agreed on a Joint Cooperation programme to strengthen relations in a variety of areas, including trade and investment, energy, education, climate change, political dialogue, regional security, and cyber-security.

According to data from the European Commission, the volume of trade between the GCC and



the EU amounted to €97.1 billion in 2020, making the EU the GCC’s second biggest trade partner that year making up 12.3 per cent of the GCC’s total global trade.

Furthermore, the EU ranked as the GCC’s number one import partner, while the GCC ranked as the 4th biggest exporter to the EU in 2020.

In 2022, EU exports to the GCC amounted to around €67.5 billion, while GCC exports amounted to €29.6 billion.

Machine and transport equipment accounted for nearly 40 per cent of EU exports, valued at approximately €26.7 billion, followed by 15.4 per cent in chemicals, valued at approximately €10.4 billion, and 13 per cent in agriculture and raw materials, valued at approximately €8.9 billion.

More than half of GCC exports to the EU were petroleum and mining goods, totalling roughly €18.6 billion and accounting for 62 per cent of total exports, followed by chemicals, totalling approximately €3.4 billion and accounting for 11.5 per cent of total exports.

In 2018, the total outward stock of foreign direct investment from the EU to the GCC region was around €76.9 billion, according to the European Commission.

Housing ministry offers two investment opportunities within the ‘Sorouh’ project



6 sites were offered with a total area exceeding 1.9 million sqm within the ‘Sorouh’ project.

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning announced through its electronic platform ‘Tatweer’ the offering of two investment opportunities for the National Initiative for Integrated Residential Neighbourhoods (Sorouh project) in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The first investment opportunity is located in the Wilayat of Bahla, on an area of more than 452,000 sqm, to provide about 600 residential lands, while the second opportunity is in the Wilayat of Samayil, on an area exceeding 137,000 sqm, and it is expected to provide 400 residential units.

TURN TO PAGE 14

Oman’s tourism sector experiences steady growth

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, OCT 7

In the dynamic landscape of global tourism, the Middle East has emerged as a region of significant importance. Recent statistics from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reveal that Gulf countries, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Oman, have witnessed substantial growth in the number of tourists during the first seven months of 2023.

Among them, Oman stands out as among the top 20 destination in the world that has experienced steady growth, highlighting its commitment to providing exceptional experiences for international travellers.

According to the UNWTO report, Oman’s tourist arrivals recorded a commendable growth rate of 14 per cent during January to July 2023. This growth not only reflects the country’s allure as a captivating tourist destination but also underscores its ability to attract visitors from around the world.

Oman’s diverse landscape, rich history, and warm hospitality have undoubtedly contributed to its rising popularity among travellers seeking unique and authentic



A tourist waves to a camera during a camel ride trip in Oman, in this file photo.

experiences.

The significant growth rates observed in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Oman collectively reinforce the growing importance of the Middle East in the global tourism industry. These countries have made substantial investments in infrastructure development, hotel establishments, and tourism promotion campaigns, which have positively impacted their respective tourism sectors.

The region’s commitment to

providing exceptional experiences for international travellers is exemplified by the increasing number of visitors flocking to explore its unique offerings.

Furthermore, the UNWTO report highlights that the Middle East has outperformed other regions in terms of tourism recovery, with arrivals surpassing pre-pandemic levels by 20%.

The recovery rates in other regions were also noteworthy, with Africa achieving 92% of pre-

levels during January to July 2023, representing a 16% decline compared to the same period in 2019.

The first seven months of 2023 witnessed approximately 700 million tourists travelling internationally, marking a significant increase of 43% compared to 2022.

For Oman, the steady growth in tourism arrivals signifies the country’s success in attracting visitors and diversifying its economy. The tourism sector’s contribution to Oman’s gross domestic product (GDP) has been steadily increasing, creating job opportunities and driving economic growth.

According to National Centre for Statistics and Information, the tourism sector posted a direct added value of RO 1.1 billion in 2022, a 33% increase from 2021 with RO 804.9 million. The tourism sector in 2022 contributed 2.4 per cent to Oman’s GDP.

The government, through the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism’s continued focus on promoting sustainable tourism practices and enhancing infrastructure will likely further propel Oman’s tourism industry in the coming years.

MHT concludes promotional workshops in the Gulf market

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) concluded the mobile promotional workshops it organised to introduce and promote the heritage and tourism components of the Sultanate of Oman in the Gulf market in Dubai.

The workshop was launched in Kuwait, passing through Qatar and Bahrain. More than 100 tourism companies participated in the promotional campaign in Dubai, and it witnessed the presence of major tourism companies.

These workshops in the Gulf market come within the



More than 100 tourism companies participated in the promotional campaign in Dubai.

Ministry's tourism promotion strategy by organising multiple campaigns to market the Sultanate of Oman as a heritage, natural, beach, mountainous and cultural destination, and to promote adventure tourism, which is gaining growing momentum around the world.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism also continues with tourism stakeholders to establish new relationships and contacts with holiday service providers from emerging markets, in addition to introducing new tourism and heritage projects and important tourist destinations.

Participants in the promotional workshops praised the success of the event organised by the Ministry and the efforts made to advance the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

The tourism companies presented the various services and tourism programmes and facilities they provide to the visitor, in addition to reviewing the services and offers they provide. They also conduct meetings to discuss ways to enhance integration and partnership in various tourism fields in order to develop the competitiveness of the sector.

— ONA

Housing ministry offers two investment opportunities within the 'Sorouh' project

FROM PAGE 13

Engineer Masoud al Hashemi, Director General of Real Estate Development at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, confirmed that these efforts come to ensure the provision of diverse housing options to those eligible, among 5 other options, including the integrated residential neighbourhoods 'Sorouh', 'Choose your land, acquire your land', and 'plans for your land and future cities', in order to achieve the Ministry's vision towards sustainable urban development.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), he said the title deeds were delivered to the first batch of those eligible to own property in the integrated residential neighbourhoods project 'Sorouh' in Al Naseem neighbourhood in Halban, which represents 6 per cent

of the housing units ready for immediate delivery, amounting to 220 residential units within the first phase of the project.

He stated that 6 sites were offered in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman with a total area exceeding 1.9 million square meters within the 'Sorouh' plans programme, to enhance the options available to citizens who are eligible to be granted government residential lands and who desire residential lands with integrated residential plans.

The Ministry proposed several sites distributed in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, and two projects were assigned in Muscat Governorate (Al Ahed and Al Amerat) and AlBatinah South Governorate (Al Lubban and Halban) with an investment value of RO 150 million. — ONA

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 7

Fitch Ratings has upgraded Energy Development Oman's (EDO) Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) and senior unsecured rating to 'BB+' from 'BB'.

"The Recovery Rating on the senior unsecured rating is 'RR4'. The Outlook on the IDR is Stable.

Fitch has also upgraded the rating on the Sukuk programme issued by EDO Sukuk Limited to 'BB+' from 'BB' with a Recovery Rating of 'RR4'. The upgrades reflect the upgrade of Oman to 'BB+'/Stable on September 25, 2023," said ratings agency said in a statement.

Fitch further added: "EDO's Long-Term IDR is constrained by the rating of its sole shareholder, the government of Oman given their close links, in line with Fitch's Government-Related Entities (GRE) and Parent and Subsidiary



Linkage (PSL) Rating Criteria."

EDO's 'bbb+' Standalone Credit Profile (SCP) is based on its record of maintaining a prudent financial profile and successfully maintaining the size and scale of reserves and production within the current fiscal framework.

The SCP is supported by EDO's large-scale oil and gas operations, strong and resilient cash-flow generation due to contracted sales prices for gas and a flexible royalty framework, flexible dividend policy, and low leverage. Fitch forecasts EDO will

maintain a strong financial profile until 2026 under the agency's oil and gas price deck, despite growing capex and high royalties and tax payments to the government. Dividends are paid from excess cash flow after all debt service obligations and working capital requirements have been met, as well as considering minimum cash levels, which allows cash-flow flexibility.

"We expect EDO's EBITDA net leverage and funds from operations (FFO) net leverage to average below 1x and 1.5x,

respectively, in 2023-2026, which includes an assumption of regular debt issuances to fund capex as well as continuing dividend payments. EDO plans to maintain company-defined net debt to FFO below 2.2x.

This was set by the board and is covenanted in the company's USD2.5 billion loan facility," said Fitch.

In 2022, EDO's total production costs before royalties was around USD5/boe of direct production costs and around USD11/boe of capex, putting it at the lower end of the global cost curve.

Adding generous royalties, which we estimate at around USD15-20/boe, significantly increases total production costs. This is somewhat mitigated by EDO's still strong financial profile, EDO's and the government interests being largely aligned, and the progressive nature of taxation on oil prices, it added.

Kia Sonet now with exclusive benefits



The Kia Sonet offers some of the finest experiences while making daily driving fun.

MUSCAT: Own a Kia Sonet and get service up to 5 years / 50,000 kms (whichever is earlier), 1 year comprehensive insurance and attractive instalments. (Conditions apply. Please visit any Kia showroom for details.)

The Kia Sonet offers some of the finest experiences while making daily driving fun. The Sonet's powerful and fuel-efficient 1.5L engine is paired to a CVT transmission that dishes out exciting performance with an impressive fuel efficiency of 17.5 kmpl.

The Sonet's interior makes a perfect impression with its well laid-out expanse that includes intuitive infotainment and cluster

interface which enhances the end user's experience. Adding to this is the availability of android auto and Apple CarPlay feature, audio remote control, bluetooth and USB charger.

The Sonet SUV makes an impressive mark with its body colour outside mirror, 2-tone bumper, power outside mirror, body colour door handles, side repeater lamps in outside mirror, 16" alloy wheels, chrome radiator grille, rear fog lamps, LED front fog lamps, roof rack, LED headlamps, LED daytime running lamps and more.

Amplifying experiences for passengers so that they enjoy comfortable drives is an 8" Audio

Display along with other smart features such as remote engine start, auto cruise control and more.

Adding to increased levels of convenience are features like keyless entry system, smart key with button start, central door lock and more. Kia has ensured that every drive with the Sonet is as hassle free and safe as possible, thanks to a rigorous set of measures created in line with Kia's pillars of safety.

Among the Sonet's key safety features are driver and front passenger airbags, ABS (anti-lock braking system), ESC (Electronic Stability Control), Rear parking assist system, Rear view camera, tyre pressure monitoring system

(TPMS) and ISOFIX child-seat anchoring points.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers.

Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way.

No wonder then that Reliable International Automotive has been ranked amongst the top Kia distributors worldwide and has been honoured with prestigious accolades including the 'Good Partnership award', 'Family Like Care' Service award, and 'Kia Distributor of Distinction' award.

Bank Nizwa's finance plan to help fulfil higher education dreams

MUSCAT: As the leading and most-trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Nizwa has always ensured that its innovative banking solutions serve to guarantee the community's welfare and progress.

In line with this aim is Bank Nizwa's attractive education finance offering that helps customers achieve their education goals. The offering is based on the Islamic principles of Murabaha and Ijarah (service Ijara) and offers attractive profit rates, with flexible payment options and a comfortable repayment period to all enrollees.

This education finance plan is geared towards the youth in the Sultanate of Oman who wish to pursue higher education degrees. Bank Nizwa recognises the potential of the country's youth and the important role they play in Oman's future economic and social flourishing.

To this end, the bank has created this offering for students who have completed high school.

The offer can be applied for jointly with their parents or guardians. The parent or guardian is required to pay only the profit amount during



A Bank Nizwa building

the period of the course and will additionally have a grace period of one year after course completion to repay the full amount.

Encouraging young dreamers to avail the Education Finance offering, Ikhlas al Lawati, Senior Head of Services Quality, Phone Banking and In Charge of Product Development at Bank Nizwa, said, "At Bank Nizwa, we believe the youth are the future of Oman and we must empower them with knowledge, skills and expertise, so that they may be prepared for the challenges of the workforce.

We encourage students and dreamers to avail our attractive fully Shariah-compliant education finance offering to fulfil their education dreams. Through this plan we wish to make higher education accessible to all."



OIA invests in US electrolyser tech firm



MUSCAT: The Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has announced an investment in US-based Electric Hydrogen (EH2), which specialises in developing and manufacturing electrolysers using proton exchange membrane technology used in the production of green hydrogen.

It marks the latest in a series of sustainable investments by the Authority with the aim of diversifying investments in its Future Generations Fund to help advance its green hydrogen strategy, enhance its role in the clean energy sector, and strengthen the hydrogen value chain.

The electrolysers developed by Electric Hydrogen produce green hydrogen using renewable energy sources, as green hydrogen is a necessary element for reducing carbon emissions from some vital industrial processes. The transition from fossil fuel-based energy sources to energy based on renewable green hydrogen has been

expensive and difficult to implement on a large scale.

Electric Hydrogen's technology will allow the manufacture and operation of electrolysers with an operating capacity of up to 100 megawatts, each of which can produce up to 50 tonnes of green hydrogen per day at a low cost, thereby enabling customers to achieve their carbon emission reduction goals.

Alwaleed bin Said al Shukaili, Senior Director of Economic Diversification Investments at the Oman Investment Authority, said: "At a time when the Sultanate of Oman is taking its first steps in its journey to produce green hydrogen, we believe that it is necessary to establish strategic partnerships with partners who have experience and advanced technical capabilities in this field.

Our investment in this company is a reflection of our interest in supporting the development of the green hydrogen sector in the Sultanate of Oman." — **ONA**

Omani-Turkish JV wins RO 148m Oman Cultural Complex project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 7

A joint venture of well-known Omani construction firm Saif Salim Essa Al Harasi & Co LLC (SAH) and Turkish-based contracting powerhouse Sembol Construction, has won the prestigious contract to implement the Oman Cultural Complex project in Muscat at a cost of RO 147.8 million.

The JV led a field of around 20 local and international firms that had originally bid for the keenly coveted contract. SAH is a reputable player in Oman's construction sector, having delivered scores of high-profile building projects primarily for the Royal Oman Police, and lately for, Outward Bound Oman.

Sembol Construction, which has expanded its footprint across the Middle East and East Europe, specialises in the construction of complex architectural projects.

Announcing the award, SAH said: "We are thrilled to announce the successful collaboration between Saif Al Harasi and Sembol Construction, the SAH-SML JV Co, in securing the esteemed Oman Cultural Complex project. This landmark initiative seamlessly melds Oman's rich cultural heritage with state-of-the-art design.

Saif Al Harasi expresses profound joy in contributing to this visionary project, viewing it as a true testament to our shared commitment to excellence



An architectural rendition of the Oman Cultural Complex project featuring a musharabiya-style canopy beneath which the key components of this new cultural landmark will be constructed.

and innovation. The strategic partnership with Sembol Construction significantly enhances our capabilities, ensuring the delivery of a cultural masterpiece that authentically represents Oman's unique identity and promising future."

Construction work on this new architectural showcase is expected to commence by around mid-November this year. The client is the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. A sprawling site in Airport Heights, that begins from next to the Ministry of Labour and extends northwards, has been allocated for the iconic project.

Spanning a built-up area of around 75,000 sq metres, the Oman Cultural Complex is billed

as the new cultural district of the capital region. At its heart is a trio of sumptuous structures planned around an expansive central square.

These building will house a 1,000-seat auditorium of the Oman National Theatre (incorporating a 250-seat flexible auditorium as well), a 20,000 sq metre National Library laid out across five floors, and a National Archives featuring kilometres of archival shelf space. Integrated with this complex are multiple other structures, such as an exhibition centre, cultural centre and cinema hall.

All of these buildings will sit beneath an expansive Musharabiya canopy designed with architectural elements

characteristic of traditional Omani and Islamic architecture. As a cultural destination in its own right, the complex will also house facilities for art and culture in the form of art galleries, lecture halls for literary events, display areas, and so on.

Thousands of date palms and indigenous trees, grown all around the complex, will add a verdant element to the setting. When completed by early 2027, the new Oman Cultural Complex will complement the capital city's growing list of modern architectural marvels, such as the Royal Opera House Muscat, Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, National Museum and the Majlis building.

'Oman needs more promotion of its investment and tourism potentials'

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman provides many incentives and facilities to attract foreign investments and pave the way for their success. Elie Rizk, President of the Lebanese International Company for Food Industries, stressed the importance of the role played by the competent authorities in the Sultanate of Oman to encourage foreign investment.

He said in an interview with the Oman News Agency (ONA) that he visited the Sultanate of Oman before the Covid-19 pandemic in response to an invitation by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) to learn about the investment sectors and incentives that Oman offers to investors.

The Lebanese businessmen delegation learned about the promising investment opportunities in various fields.

He also reviewed the efforts made by officials and those in charge of government institutions concerned with stimulating and attracting investment and facilitating the necessary procedures for investors, including the investor residency programme and the facilities and incentives encouraged by the industrial, free and economic zones.

Elie Rizq, who holds an investor residency in the Sultanate of Oman, noted the potential of the Omani market for various



The Lebanese business delegation visits the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry headquarters.

economic activities, and said that he saw this through his experience in the 5-star restaurant sector and factories specialised in food industries, whether for production in the Omani market or re-export to markets close to Oman.

There are more than 55 Lebanese companies in Oman investing in a number of economic sectors, noting that the volume of investment in the food industry and contracting sector has so far reached more than RO 600 million, and there is a trend to attract global investments.

He pointed out that the investor is looking for a safe and stable environment, and that the

Sultanate of Oman is currently classified according to the credit rating issued by international institutions at "BB+" with a stable future outlook, thanks to the measures taken by the government towards improving financial and economic indicators.

According to the latest International Monetary Fund report, the economy in 2024, Oman will record the highest growth rate among the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, at 5.5 per cent.

He stressed that the government has taken good steps to reduce the state's public debt by rationalising spending and focusing on training

and qualifying Omani youth. The Sultanate of Oman needed to further promote and market its terrain, attracting and encouraging investment in various sectors.

The Sultanate of Oman is the best country in the region with many incentives and attractions to invest, including the cost of operating, entering the market, taxes, fees and others.

He also praised the facilities and incentives offered to industrial cities and human cadres that manage cities professionally and promote and market all tourism and investment components.

— **ONA**



Total electricity production in Muscat Governorate decreased by 12.7pc

Oman's total electricity and water production increases until July-end

MUSCAT: The total electricity production in the Sultanate of Oman until end of July 2023 increased by 3.9 per cent to reach 25,133.6 gigawatts per hour, compared to 24,181.9 gigawatts per hour during the same period in 2022.

Preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the governorates of Al Dhahirah, South and North Al Batinah recorded an increase in total electricity production by 1.8 per cent, reaching 16,007.2 gigawatts per hour.

Production also increased in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate by 137 per cent to reach 127.8 gigawatts per hour, as well as in the North and South Al Sharqiyah Governorates by 7 per cent, reaching 5,628.7 gigawatts per hour, and in the Musandam Governorate by 2.1 per cent, recording 260.7 gigawatts per hour.

Total electricity production in Muscat Governorate decreased

by 12.7 per cent, recording 267.4 gigawatts per hour, and total production in Al Wusta Governorate decreased by 36.3 per cent, reaching 114.2 gigawatts per hour.

The Sultanate of Oman's net electricity production until the end of July 2023, which includes the purchases of the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company and the purchases of the Rural Areas Electricity Company by region, amounted to 24,357.2 gigawatts per hour, with the largest amount of net electricity production came from governorates of Al Dhahirah and South and North Al Batinah, which amounted to 15,488.9 gigawatts per hour.

The total amount of water produced in the Sultanate of Oman witnessed an increase of 1.8 per cent to reach 301,986,800 cubic metres by end of July 2023, compared to 296,770,000 cubic metres by the end of the same period in 2022. The production water in the Dhofar Governorate increased by 3.1 per cent, and in Muscat Governorate by 1.8 per cent.

— **ONA**

I am back to the GCC to experience the tech revolution

As I sit down to write this week's column, I am filled with a sense of joy and excitement about being back in the Middle East.

After spending some time in Southeast Asia, I have recently been stationed in Dubai, the hub for many industries in the United Arab Emirates. This move has brought me closer to both cherished friends in Oman and the thriving business pulse of the region.

One of the most significant advantages of my return to the region is the opportunity to revisit Oman, a place that holds a special place in my heart. It's not just about the stunning landscapes or the warm hospitality; it's the people and the



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connections I've forged over the years.

Being a stone's throw away from Oman now means that I can easily hop on a flight — or take the stunning drive — and reconnect with dear friends, creating memories that transcend borders and time zones.

However, my relocation to Dubai isn't solely driven by personal connections. The Middle East is rapidly evolving, becoming a hub for innovation and technological advancements. I recently attended my first event since my move, a presentation that delved into the latest developments in blockchain and web3 technology.

The event was a testament to the region's commitment to staying at the forefront of the tech revolution.

In the coming month, the GCC is set to host a plethora of blockchain and web3-related events, and I'm excited to keep you updated on the latest news and trends in this industry.

Blockchain technology, in particular, has the potential to reshape various sectors, including finance, healthcare, and supply chain management, offering opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive.

Speaking of technology trends, it's worth noting that the landscape of the tech industry is shifting. In the past year, we witnessed a wave of layoffs in the tech sector, particularly among junior developers.

While some might attribute this to underperforming big tech companies, there's a more nuanced story to tell. The rise of

AI is subtly creeping into the job market, slowly taking over certain roles traditionally held by junior developers.

Today, to develop an app, someone with a brilliant idea and a clear understanding of software architecture can leverage AI to handle the fundamental tasks. While this might raise concerns about job displacement, it also democratizes app development.

Anyone with a vision can now build and deploy applications, ushering in a new era of innovation and entrepreneurship.

This technological shift is further amplified by improvements on the infrastructure side.

Technologies like bun.js have not only accelerated the internet experience but also empowered aspiring developers.

Additionally, the widespread penetration of 5G technology has significantly enhanced internet performance, opening up a world of opportunities.

As we look to the future, it's clear that technology will continue to be a driving force in our lives, but it's evolving under a different lens. This region is poised to play a pivotal role in this transformation, thanks to its innovative spirit and commitment to embracing change.

My return to the Middle East represents not just a personal journey but a professional one as well. I am thrilled to be part of this dynamic and ever-evolving region, and I'm eager to share with you the remarkable opportunities and innovations that lie ahead.

The anatomy of the global inflation spike

Persistent surges in core price inflation (which excludes food and energy), and the resulting overshoot of central-bank inflation targets, have been a distinctive and distressing feature of the post-pandemic global economic landscape.

When confronted with such an economically significant phenomenon, those of us who pay attention to the relevant international evidence will look for common factors to account for the observed correlation between countries. I can think of at least three.

First, there is ample evidence to suggest that the initial surge of inflation across countries in 2021 and 2022 was triggered in part by an adverse shock to aggregate supply.

Second, there was substantial (and, in the case of the United States, unprecedented) fiscal and monetary policy support, delivered first in 2020-21, to cushion the blow to economic activity and employment, and again in 2022 (especially in Europe), to offset the higher energy and food prices caused by Russia's attack of Ukraine.



RICHARD CLARIDA

The writer, a former vice chair of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors, is Global Economic Adviser at PIMCO, Professor of Economics and International Affairs at Columbia University, and a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research.



THE POST-PANDEMIC SURGE OF INFLATION MUST BE ANALYSED IN ITS GLOBAL CONTEXT, WITH INSIGHTS DRAWN FROM THE NOTABLE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN COUNTRIES – AND ESPECIALLY BETWEEN ADVANCED ECONOMIES. ONLY THEN CAN ONE PROPERLY JUDGE MAJOR CENTRAL BANKS' PERFORMANCE IN MANAGING THE SITUATION AND PURSUING THEIR MANDATES.

Making this argument does not require one to take a stand on how much the initial increase in the relative price of goods versus services reflected demand versus supply.

If the equilibrium price of goods goes up for whatever reason, the overall price level will go up unless the central bank wants to engineer a decline in the price of services. If there is some nominal price rigidity in the service sector, the central bank has a choice.

It can allow the relative price increase to pass through and accept a one-time increase in the price level (which in isolation would produce "transitory" inflation).

Or, it can hike rates and throw people out of work to reduce the price of services sufficiently to keep the increase in the price index equal to the inflation target.

In the event, central banks opted, at least initially, to accommodate the price pressures by not trying to offset the increase in the relative price of

goods versus services.

When considering the monetary-policy response to the 2021-22 global surge of inflation, it is noteworthy that no advanced-economy central bank began to hike rates until headline inflation had already exceeded its target rate.

Equally, nearly all advanced-economy central banks (save Switzerland and Norway) delayed rate hikes until core inflation, too, had already exceeded their respective targets.

The question that many have asked is why monetary policies across most advanced economies "fell behind the curve" in this way. Critics of the US Federal Reserve (where I served as vice chair from September 2018 to January 2022) suggest that a persistent inflation overshoot, and a delay in lifting rates until inflation was already above target, must stem from a failure of the underlying monetary-policy framework.

According to this reasoning, the post-pandemic record (summarised in Chart 1)

indicates a breakdown of both inflation targeting and its "first cousin," flexible average inflation targeting, which the Fed adopted in August 2020.

I beg to differ. As I argue in a recent paper, the post-pandemic record is better understood as resulting from ex-post errors of tactics and execution, not from the monetary-policy frameworks.

Remember, the Fed committed in September 2020 to delay liftoff (rate hikes) until "labour market conditions ... reached levels consistent with ... maximum employment and inflation ha[d] risen to 2 per cent."

It then followed up in December 2020 with guidance that it would begin to taper the pace of QE asset purchases only after "substantial further progress" had been made toward its maximum-employment and price-stability goals.

But while these commitments were certainly consistent with the Fed's new framework, they were not

required by it.

Moreover, the employment and inflation conditions for liftoff that the Fed had committed to in September 2020 were met by September 2021, close to the liftoff date that the standard Taylor Rule framework would have set. And now, underlying inflation across advanced economies appears to have peaked.

With the unwinding of the adverse supply disruptions that contributed to the initial inflation surge, it seems to be on a downward trajectory – heading back toward official inflation targets.

Having hiked rates aggressively, central bankers appear to be close to the end of the global post-pandemic tightening cycle.

Their judgment is that they have moved rates into sufficiently restrictive territory and that if current policies are sustained for some time, inflation will eventually return to target.

I suspect that the mantra of "lower for longer," which prevailed among central banks for most of the previous decade, will soon be replaced by "higher for as long as it takes."

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MUSIC
French conductor Swann Van Rechem poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP



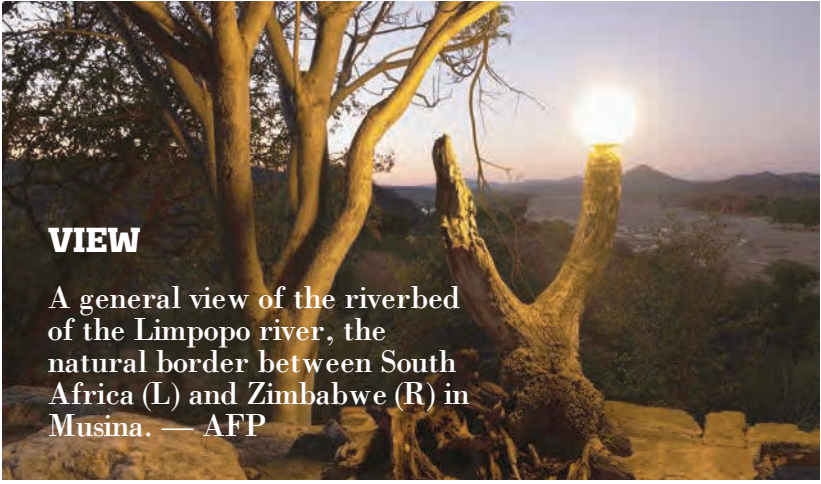
FASHION
South Korean actress Park Eun-bin arrives on the red carpet for the 28th Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) before the screening of their opening film Because I hate Korea, at the Busan Cinema Center in Busan. — AFP



BOLLYWOOD
Bollywood actor Rajveer Deol attends the premiere of his Indian Hindi-language comedy drama film 'Dono' in Mumbai. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
Hungary's Krisztofer Meszaros competes on the Rings in the Men's Individual All-Around Final during the 52nd FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Championships, in Antwerp, northern Belgium. — AFP



VIEW
A general view of the riverbed of the Limpopo river, the natural border between South Africa (L) and Zimbabwe (R) in Musina. — AFP

art & life

SUNDAY | OCTOBER 8, 2023 | RABEE AL AWWAL 22, 1445 AH

OMAN OBSERVER f x i g t y www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om



'Alzeej' shines at the Kurdada African Film Festival

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

Directed by Salah al Hadhrami, the captivating documentary 'Alzeej' proudly represented Oman in the fourth edition of the Kurdada African Film Festival held in Algeria from September 19 to October 2. This remarkable Omani film was handpicked among 35 outstanding entries from 12 different nations, including Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Iraq, Morocco, Syria, Yemen, and Algeria.

Filmed over five years from 2017 to 2021 in various wilayats namely Nizwa, Bahla, Manah, and Al Hamra, 'Alzeej' has not only participated in numerous international and local film festivals but has also earned accolades at multiple levels, including local, Arab, and international recognition.

Most recently, it garnered three prestigious awards at the Diamond Festival in India, including Best Show, Best

Acting, and Best Directing. Other noteworthy accolades include first place at the International Digital Portal Festival in Algeria, the Best Cinematography Award at the Muscat Film Festival, third place at the Arab Heritage Film Festival in the Emirate of Sharjah in the UAE, and second place at the Kuwait New Cinema Festival in Kuwait.

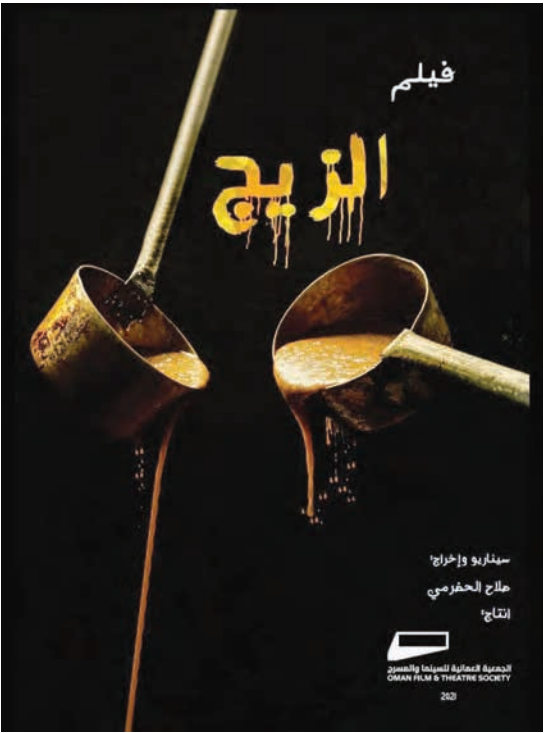
Produced by the Omani Cinema Society, 'Alzeej' beautifully illuminates the enduring journey of Omanis in harnessing their environment despite formidable challenges. Spanning from towering Rocky Mountains to arid and scorching deserts, the documentary delves into the Omani people's deep-rooted relationship with agriculture and their innovative endeavours in cultivating and producing Omani red sugar.

The film offers profound insights into the humanitarian, economic, and social dimensions of this profession,

emphasising the significance of those who have dedicated years to its practice.

The film artfully portrays the cultivation and production of sugar in Oman, exploring its far-reaching impacts.

It chronicles a journey filled with both joy and adversity while elucidating the nutritional, economic, and social advantages of this industry. 'Alzeej' underscores the importance of embracing change and modernisation in this sector, adapting to evolving times while preserving tradition.



What makes 'Alzeej' truly astonishing is its documentation of a vital profession that not only upholds the Omani identity but also ensures its



transmission to future generations. Omani red sugar, renowned for its economic significance, serves as an excellent alternative to white sugar. It is a key ingredient in Oman's most famous dessert, the Omani Halwa, and is also utilised for medicinal purposes.

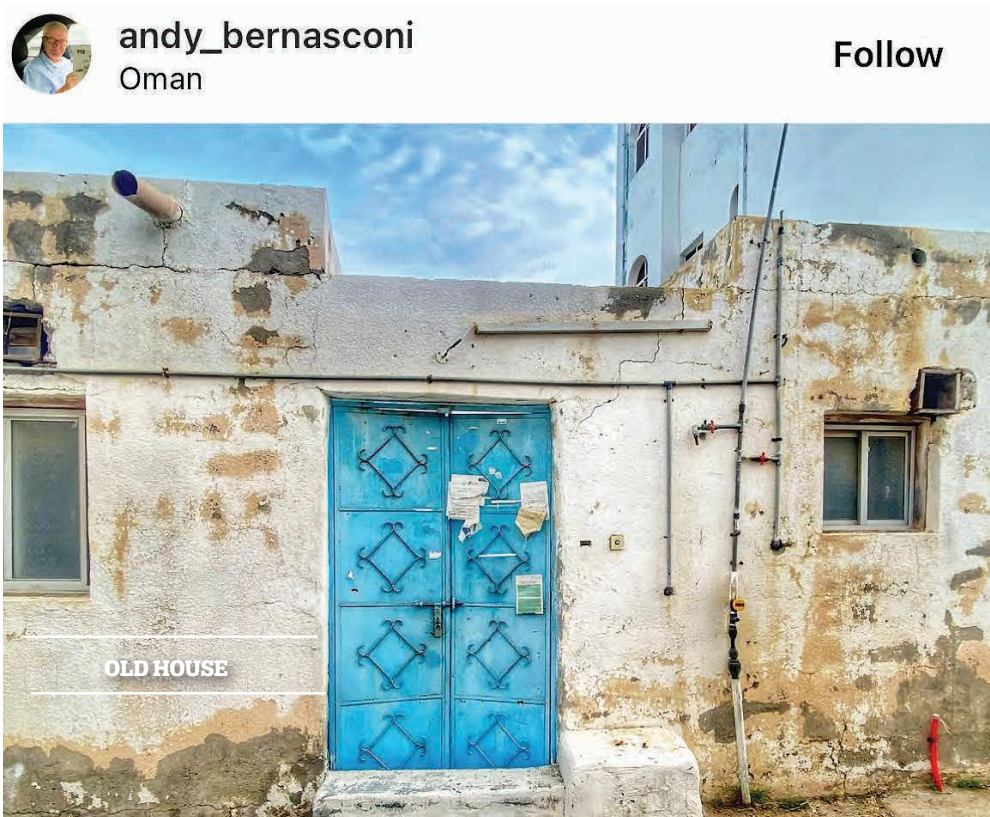
Moreover, the production of Omani red sugar serves as a

vital source of income for numerous Omani families, who distribute it both locally and internationally. This reflects their commitment to a healthy lifestyle and their astute utilisation of the environment as a means of livelihood. 'Alzeej' encapsulates the essence of a tradition that sustains Omani culture and enriches the lives of its people.



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THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE Muscat is delighted to present a brilliant jazz concert from two extraordinary artists. Igor Butman, Russia's leading jazz musician, and Randy Brecker, 7-time GRAMMY winner and one of the USA's most celebrated artists will lift the roof at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts. Performing as a sextet with 4 further outstanding musicians, expect a concert channeling the influences of a broad spectrum of popular artists such as Bruce Springsteen, Frank Sinatra, and Chick Corea. The concert will be performed in the 500-person auditorium of ROHMA, creating an intimate and relaxed vibe perfect for jazz. Alongside the long

held theory that jazz music encouraged higher levels of creativity, according to a study conducted by Johns Hopkins University, listening to jazz can improve your memory, mood and verbal abilities. The opera house is dedicated to creating bridges between countries and cultures and to providing a platform for incredible international artist to perform in Oman. The dynamic jazz concerts performed over two nights with the Igor Butman and Randy Brecker Sextet are testimony to the power of music to create unity. — **MUSCAT**

UN FORGETTABLE EVENING OF JAZZ

Daily drinking dark tea may lower diabetes risk

A RECENT STUDY SUGGESTS that daily consumption of dark tea may help mitigate the risk and progression of type 2 diabetes in adults by improving blood sugar control. Researchers from the University of Adelaide in Australia and Southeast University in China found that daily dark tea drinkers had a 53 per cent lower risk for prediabetes and a 47 per cent reduced risk for type 2 diabetes compared to those who never drank tea. This effect remained

significant after accounting for various risk factors. The study suggests that the unique fermentation process involved in making dark tea may produce bioactive compounds that enhance insulin sensitivity, improve pancreatic beta cell performance, and impact gut bacteria composition. The research involved 1,923 participants and found that dark tea had the most pronounced positive effects on metabolic control. — **ONA**





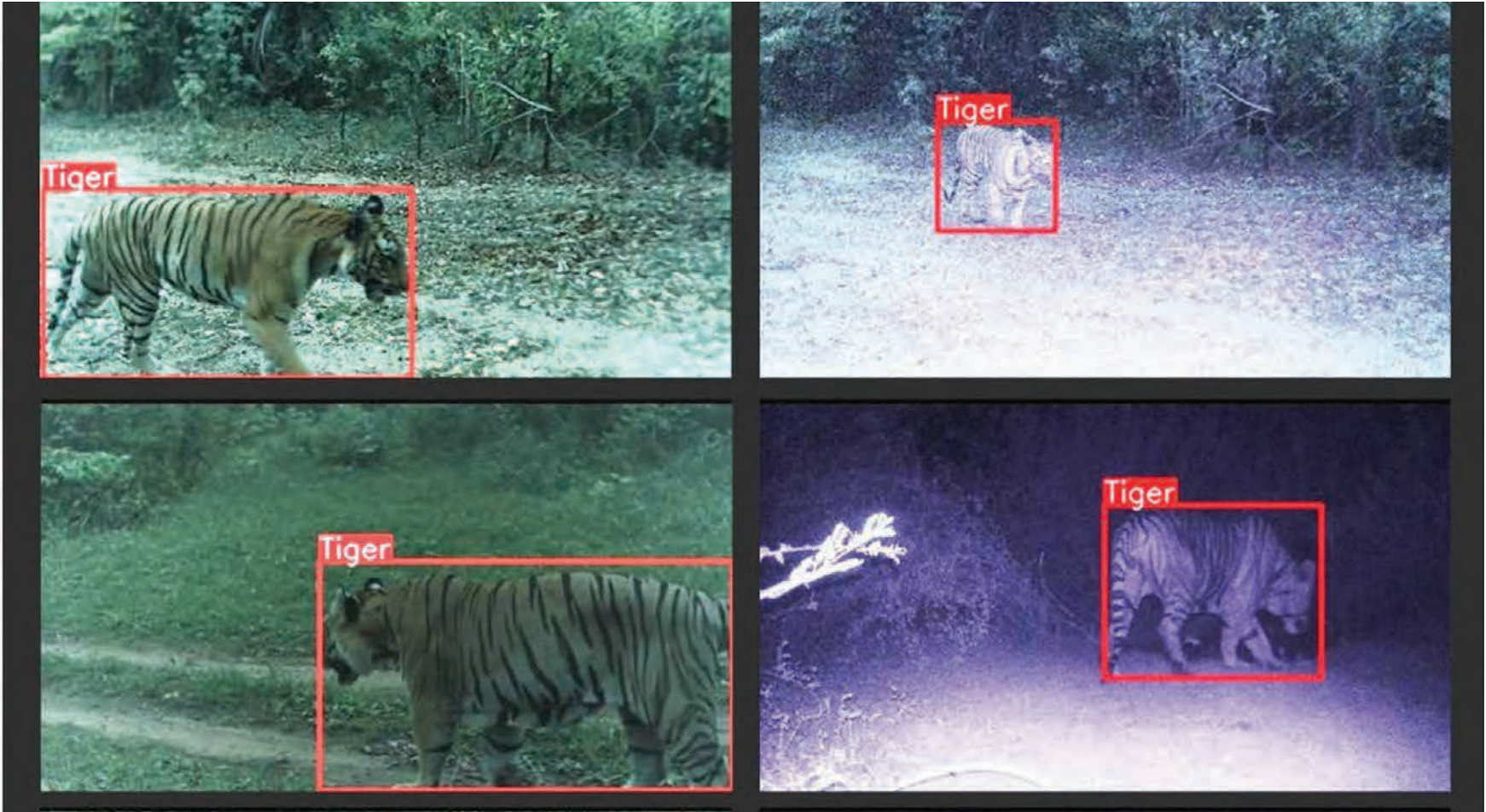
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SUNDAY | OCTOBER 8 | 2023

LIFESTYLE

AI of the tiger: Tiny camera ‘protects’ predator — and people



TIGER POPULATIONS ARE on the rise in the jungles of India and Nepal and the predators are roaming ever closer to villages, sparking a race among conservationists to find ways of avoiding conflict.

They are increasingly finding solutions with artificial intelligence, a bunch of technologies designed to reason and make decisions like humans.

Experts from Clemson University in South Carolina and several NGOs published research last month on their work using AI-enabled cameras that they say could help revolutionise tiger conservation.

They placed tiny devices around enclosures in the two South Asian nations, both to protect villagers from the predators — and the predators from poachers.

According to their research, published in the *BioScience* journal, the camera system called TrailGuard can distinguish between tigers and other species and relay images to park rangers or villagers within seconds.

“We have to find ways for people and tigers and other wildlife to coexist,” Eric Dinerstein, one of the authors of the report, told

AFP.

“Technology can offer us a tremendous opportunity to achieve that goal very cheaply.”

ELEPHANTS AND AMAZON LOGGERS

The research claims the cameras were immediately effective, picking up a tiger just 300 metres from a village, and on another occasion identifying a team of poachers.

They say their system was the first AI camera to identify and transmit a picture of a tiger, and it has almost wiped out false alarms — when traps are tripped by passing boars or falling leaves.

The scheme is one of several putting an AI spin on the established ideas of wildlife surveillance.

Researchers in Gabon are using AI to sift their camera trap images and are now trying a warning system for elephants.

Teams in the Amazon are piloting equipment that can detect the sounds of chainsaws, tractors and other machinery associated with deforestation.

And US tech titan Google teamed up with researchers and NGOs four years ago to collect millions of images from camera traps.

The project, called

Wildlife Insights, automates the process of identifying species and labelling images, saving many hours of laborious work for researchers.

Conservationists like Dinerstein, who also leads the tech team at the Resolve NGO, are sure that technology is helping their cause.

‘EARLY WARNING SYSTEM’

Their goal is to ensure that 30 per cent of the Earth’s land and oceans are designated protected zones by 2030, as agreed by dozens of governments last year, with that number eventually going up to 50 per cent.

Those zones will need to be monitored, and animals will need to move safely between protected areas.

“That’s what we’re shooting for, and the critical element of that is an early warning system,” he said.

The plight of tigers underscores the size of the challenge.

Their habitats have been devastated across Asia and their numbers in India fell to an all-time low of 1,411 in 2006, before steadily rising to current levels of around 3,500.

In the mid-20th century, India was home to an estimated 40,000.

‘JURY STILL OUT’

Jonathan Palmer, head of conservation technology at the US-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), who was not involved in the study, said TrailGuard had exciting potential.

But Palmer, who helped found Wildlife Insights with Google, said the broader uses of AI in conservation were not yet settled.

“In most cases, AI species identification is still in its infancy,” he said.

His NGO recommends outside verification of any species identification done by AI.

And Palmer said the “jury was out” on whether AI was better deployed in cameras at the scene or afterwards on servers or laptops.

Those uncertainties aside, Dinerstein is widening the rollout of TrailGuard — this time with even bigger animals in his sights.

“Elephants wander outside parks all the time and it leads to a massive amount of conflict,” he said.

They destroy crops, cause chaos in villages and can even cause train crashes, with dozens of deaths every year, he added.

“There’s an immense opportunity here to prevent that.” — AFP

Google's new phone to run AI on-device



Google on Wednesday said its latest premium-priced Pixel phone would have powerful generative AI models running independently on the device, as the search engine giant seeks to lure buyers away from the latest iPhone.

The announcement by Google caps the autumn release season for big tech hardware that saw Apple unveil the iPhone 15 series and Meta officially launch its latest VR headset.

Running on a powerful chip, Google’s Pixel 8 Pro would carry out certain AI functions on the device itself instead of relying on transfers from cloud data centres that require heavy bandwidth.



At a launch event in New York, Rick Osterloh, SVP of devices and services at Google, said that the company’s AI teams had figured out how to “distill” AI models “into a version efficient enough to run on our flagship Pixel.”

This would greatly enhance existing AI tools on Pixel phones, such as removing blemishes or unwanted intrusions in photographs.

Later this on-device ability would expand to other AI features, Osterloh said.

Pixel phones would also begin testing an AI-amped assistant that would bring many of the abilities of Google’s ChatGPT-style Bard onto the phone.



In time, the company said the AI assistant would provide real-time help such as choosing the best path for a hike, sifting through emails or planning a birthday party.

This would be handled through either spoken word, on-screen prompts or by using images, in a similar way that the more powerful chatbots work already.



“Assistant with Bard combines personalised help with reasoning and genitive capabilities,” said Monika Gupta, vice president of product management at Google.

Big tech’s hardware release season has featured many promises of AI enhancements, including Amazon teasing an upgrade of its Alexa voice assistant to function in a more human-like and “smart” fashion.

As with the other announcements, Google said that many of these AI powers were at an early phase and would be enhanced gradually.



Google caught some by surprise with news that the Pixel 8 Pro would also come equipped with a temperature reader, with approval pending from US regulators to use it for measuring body temperature. — AFP