

Majlis office elects members

Majlis Ash'shura held its first ordinary meeting of the tenth annual session under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman, on Wednesday. The members were briefed about the state's draft budget for the fiscal year 2024 referred by the Council of Ministers. The budget will be referred to the State Council after discussion. The members of the Majlis Ash'shura Office were elected by secret e-voting during the meeting. **DETAILS ON P6**



MUSCAT

'MALIYAH' APP TO CHECK TRANSACTIONS

The Ministry of Finance launched a financial services electronic application for smart devices code-named 'Maliyah'. The app seeks to facilitate the implementation of transactions among contractors dealing with government departments, individuals and institutions. In its current version, the application provides a number of services, including applying for new beneficiary numbers, updating, amending or renewing previous beneficiary numbers and adding or modifying bank accounts, among other services. The application also allows users to follow up the status of exchange bonds. — ONA

STATE COUNCIL HOLDS FIRST SESSION OF TERM



The State Council on Wednesday held its first session of the eighth term's first sitting to elect the two deputy chairmen and members of the council's office. The session was held under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdulmalek Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council. During the session, Salim Musallam Qutn and Shaikh Dr Hilal Ali al Hinai were elected as Deputy Chairmen. The two positions were contested by 17 members (6 of whom were women). **SEE ALSO P5**

OPINION

P12



BHASKER TRIPATHI
Farmers step in as climate finance lags

P13



SONIA AMBROSIO
Insured age discrimination

Omanis now have option to modify information on passports

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, NOV 15

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has confirmed the possibility for Omani citizens to get passport information and personal photos in passports modified. The ROP said that individuals can get the information updated based on the data recorded in the civil registry when obtaining or renewing a passport. Requests can be made to relevant authorities regarding how data should be presented, including options like first name/

father's name/grandfather's name/surname. The ROP has clarified that the civil registry database will remain unchanged, and modified only according to the previously established system. This means that the name in the civil registry will not change if there is a change in the name on the passport, unlike the previous practice where issuing a passport requires using the full name and the tribe. Regarding personal photos, the ROP has mentioned that it was previously mandatory to include

personal photos from the age of 15 and above, with the requirement of wearing Omani musar (turban). However, citizens now have the option to choose between wearing the official Omani outfit or a shirt. The ROP has added that currently, this service is available at some service centres in the Governorate of Muscat, with plans to extend the service to other areas after completing the technical aspects. The fee for this service is OR 5 for those under the age of 18 and RO 10 for those aged 18 and above.

Projects worth RO 4 bn ready

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced the completion of six national projects, delivered by its national companies. The projects are geographically distributed in a number of governorates, in diverse sectors, with an investment value exceeding RO 4 billion. Commenting on the completion of these projects, Hisham bin Ahmed al Shidi, Director General of Economic Diversification Investments at the OIA, said that these

projects come within the National Development portfolio of the Authority, aiming to contribute to economic diversification efforts, the development of governorates, attracting investments, empowering the private sector, as well as creating job opportunities. He stressed that these projects reflect the strategy and objectives of the OIA, and come aligned with Oman Vision 2040. **DETAILS ON P8**



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, will preside on Saturday (November 18) over the military parade, to be staged at the military parade ground of Adam Air Base in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah on the occasion of the 53rd Glorious National Day. Symbolic units representing the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), the Sultan's Special Force (SSF), the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the Royal Court Affairs (RCA), and the joint military musical band will take part in the military parade. The parade will be attended alongside His Majesty the Sultan by members of the Royal Family, ministers, advisers, chairmen of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), commanders of military and security units, heads of the diplomatic missions of the Arab and foreign countries accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, members of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura,

Symbolic units representing the Royal Army of Oman, the Royal Air Force of Oman, the Royal Navy of Oman, the Royal Guard of Oman, the Sultan's Special Force, the Royal Oman Police, the Royal Court Affairs, and the joint military musical band will take part in the military parade

under-secretaries, governors, ambassadors at the Foreign Ministry, retired military commanders, judges, members of the Public Prosecution Department, walis, shaikhs and dignitaries of the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah. It will be also attended by the military attaches of the Arab and foreign embassies in the Sultanate of Oman, senior military officers, senior state officials, senior retired officers, commissioned and non-commissioned officers at SAF and other military and security units. — ONA

International 'concern' as Israel raids Gaza hospital

GAZA STRIP: Israeli soldiers on Wednesday raided and then combed through Gaza's main hospital, which has raised fears for thousands of patients and other civilians trapped inside. Israeli soldiers, some wearing face masks, shot in the air and ordered young men to surrender, a journalist in contact reported, at the start of the army operation at the facility. About 1,000 male Palestinians, hands above their heads, were in the vast hospital courtyard, some of them stripped naked by Israeli soldiers checking them for weapons or explosives, the journalist said. The Red Cross and World Health Organization has urged utmost caution with civilian lives. Israel said the raid was being executed based on "an operational necessity" while the based Palestinian Authority branded it a "flagrant" violation of international law. The United Nations has said it estimates that at least 2,300 people — patients, staff and displaced civilians — are inside and may be unable to escape because of fierce fighting. Witnesses have described conditions inside the hospital as horrific, with medical procedures taking place without anaesthetic, families with scant food or



A Palestinian woman covered in dust rushes with her child in her arms into the hospital following the Israeli bombardment of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday. — AFP water living in corridors and the stench of decomposing corpses filling the air. The health ministry in Gaza says Israel's ensuing aerial bombardment and ground offensive have killed 11,320 people, mostly civilians, including thousands of children. International concern over the fate of the people inside the hospital has been steadily increasing, especially as the civilian toll in Gaza has climbed during the war. **SEE ALSO P10 and 11**



شركة تنمية نفط عُمان
Petroleum Development Oman

العيد الوطني المجيد

OMAN'S NATIONAL DAY

WARM FELICITATIONS TO
HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK
AND THE PEOPLE OF OMAN
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE **53rd** NATIONAL DAY





Our sincere congratulations and heartfelt greetings to

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

- May Allah protect and bless him -

on the glorious occasion of the

53rd National Day

May the Almighty Allah bestow his blessings upon His Majesty
and the people of Oman with growth and prosperity



53

Heralding the nation's dream of transformation

Congratulations and warm wishes to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
and the citizens of Oman on the occasion of the
53rd National Day.

Oman steps into the next level of progress, driven by
the revitalization of resources and technology,
however remaining firmly rooted to its traditional
values of peace and tolerance.

Mohsin Haider Darwish Group
joins the people of Oman in this transformative
journey, celebrating the momentous occasion of the
53rd National Day, expressing solidarity,
commitment and saluting the visionary leadership of
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.



محسن حيدر درويش ش.م.م.
MOHSIN HAIDER DARWISH L.L.C.





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State Council holds first session



Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.



Salim bin Musallam Qutn and Shaikh Dr Hilal bin Ali al Hinai were elected as Deputy Chairmen



MUSCAT: The State Council on Wednesday held its first session of the eighth term's 1st sitting to elect the two deputy chairmen and members of the council's office.

The session was held under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin

Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

During the session, Salim bin Musallam Qutn and Shaikh Dr Hilal bin Ali al Hinai were elected as Deputy Chairmen. The two positions were contested by 17 members (6 of whom were female).

As for members of the State Council's Office, the following were elected as members: Mohammed bin AbuBakr al Ghassani, Eng Ahmed bin Saleh al Jahdhami, Sayyidah Rawan bint Ahmed al Busaidyah and Dr Aisha bint Hamad al Darmakiyah. — ONA

ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER RECEIVES AMBASSADOR OF IRAN



Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in Ali Najafi Khoshroudi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman, in Muscat on Wednesday. The ambassador expressed his thanks and appreciation for Oman's stance regarding several regional and international issues. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest. They also reviewed the march of bilateral relations. — ONA

Oman Competitiveness Report launched

MUSCAT: The National Competitiveness Office issued the first version of Oman Competitiveness Annual Report 2022.

The report reviews the performance of Oman in international indicators monitored by the office, with the aim of raising the local community's awareness towards the international indicators. The report also aims to be a reference for government and private institutions and researchers interested in the current status of Oman's ranking in various areas.

The report includes four main themes. The first one presents 15 international indicators, which are among the most important international indicators issued by various international organisations and institutions that address the economic, social, political and environmental aspects.

The second theme gives the reader a deeper picture of Oman's performance in the seven main indicators monitored by the office.

Meanwhile, the third theme reviews the most important government efforts



during 2022, which could contribute directly or indirectly to improving the competitiveness of the Sultanate of Oman.

The final theme reviews different viewpoints of specialists and those interested in international indicators on the importance of improving the competitiveness of Oman by enhancing its performance in various international indicators. — ONA



CMA launches consumers' protection statistics online



MUSCAT: The Capital Market Authority (CMA) launched an online service for the public code-named "Customer Protection Statistics" on its website.

The service covers the capital market and insurance sectors.

Further, the service is an online page that is automatically updated according to the movement and activity of online systems and services concerned with communicating with individuals and institutions in the two sectors. The page includes indices and data related to the details of inquiries and complaints submitted to the CMA, besides monitoring the execution status of such transactions.

The page also allows the public to view the total number of comments received through the whistleblower system. The page reviews the level of customer satisfaction with the services provided by the CMA. — ONA

TENDER NOTICE

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

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources (Directorate General of Agriculture and Livestock Research) announces the following Tenders:-

Tender No.	Description	Tender documents price (R.O)	Class	Last date for collection of documents	Last date for Submission of documents
1067/2023/ MAFWR/ DGALR-142	Supply and Installation of Lab Furniture for Pesticide Residue and Quality Control Research Department	25/-	Specialized	Monday 11/12/2023	Monday 1/1/2024
838/2022/ MAFWR/ HQ-85	Supply of Olive Seedlings	25/-	Specialized	Monday 11/12/2023	Monday 1/1/2024
1068/2023/ MAFWR/ DGALR-143	Supply of Field Requirements for Livestock Research Programs	25/-	Specialized	Monday 11/12/2023	Monday 1/1/2024
1070/2023/ MAFWR/ DGALR-145	Supply of Irrigation System & Tools	25/-	Specialized	Monday 11/12/2023	Monday 1/1/2024
1069/2023/ MAFWR/ DGALR-144	Supply of Printers and Desktop Computers for Directorate General of Agriculture & Livestock Research	25/-	Specialized	Monday 11/12/2023	Monday 1/1/2024
1066/2023/ MAFWR/ DGALR-141	Supply of Lab. Materials & Tools for Soil, Water & Plant Laboratories	25/-	Specialized	Monday 11/12/2023	Monday 1/1/2024
1065/2023/ MAFWR/ DGALR-140	Supply of Lab Instruments for Soil, Water & Plant Laboratories	25/-	Specialized	Monday 11/12/2023	Monday 1/1/2024
1081/2023/ MAFWR/ DGALR-146	Rehabilitation and Maintenance of the Animal Health Research Center in Al-Rumais	25/-	Fourth	Saturday 16/12/2023	Saturday 6/1/2024

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

SUB-TENDERS COMMITTEE
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK RESEARCH
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services invites the specialize companies to participate and submit their offers for the below said tender in Dhofar Governorate.

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/ 2023/168	UNE - LOT 10I-2023	29/11/2023	14/12/2023	OMR. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/169	UNE - LOT 10D-2023	29/11/2023	14/12/2023	OMR. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/170	UNE - LOT 10E-2023	29/11/2023	14/12/2023	OMR. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/171	UNE - LOT 10H-2023	29/11/2023	14/12/2023	OMR. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/172	CONSTRUCTION EMERGENCY LAGOON PHASE III AT WRP	29/11/2023	14/12/2023	OMR. 1575.000
DISC/ 2023/173	FENCING WITH REHABILITATION WORKS AT WRP	29/11/2023	14/12/2023	OMR. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/174	11 KV & LV NETWORK IMPROVEMENT WORKS OF 2023 IN ZONE-1 AND ZONE-3 (LOT-6)	29/11/2023	14/12/2023	OMR. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/175	11 KV & LV NETWORK IMPROVEMENT WORKS - 2023 (LOT-07)	29/11/2023	14/12/2023	OMR. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/176	11KV & LV NETWORK IMPROVEMENT WORKS -2023 -(LOT-09)	29/11/2023	14/12/2023	OMR. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/177	11 KV OUTGOING FEEDERS FROM TAWIATAIR PSS	29/11/2023	14/12/2023	OMR. 105.000

- To view the tender details, you can visit www.dhofarservices.nama.om / scan the QR code
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 3.00pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through using "isupplier portal". No hard copies are accepted.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.
- For any clarifications contact us on:
Tel No. 2332554
email: purchase@dhofarservices.nama.om



Dhofar Integrated Services Company s.a.s.c.
CR Number 2585229, P.O Box 2609
PC 211, Salalah - Sultanate of Oman
Phone Number 2332529, Fax 23321183
www.dhofarservices.nama.om





MAJLIS ASH'SHURA ELECTS OFFICE MEMBERS



SUHAIL AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, NOV 15

Majlis Ash'shura held its first ordinary meeting of the tenth annual session under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman, on Wednesday.

The members were briefed about the state's draft budget for the fiscal year 2024 referred by the Council of Ministers. The budget will be referred to the State Council after discussion.

The members of the Majlis Ash'shura Office were elected by secret e-voting during the meeting.

As per the results of the voting process, the Office will comprise the following members: Ahmed bin Nasser al Abri (representative of the Wilayat of Nizwa), Mohammed bin Hasan al Ansi (representative



Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman, Majlis Ash'shura

of the Wilayat of Salalah), Salim bin Hamad al Mahrouqi (representative of the Wilayat of Adam), Said bin Mohammed al Saedi (representative of the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali), Ali bin Mansour al Amri (representative of the Wilayat of Al Seeb) and Omar bin Ali al Jaunaibi (representative of the Wilayat of Bahla).

The Majlis will hold a meeting next week to elect the members of the standing committees.

The chairman of Majlis

Ash'shura opened the meeting with a speech in which he hailed the Royal address delivered by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq at the opening of the eighth term of the Council of Oman.

Al Maawali said: "His Majesty affirmed that the Council of Oman is an essential partner in the state system and this shoulders us great responsibilities which we hope to be able to undertake, guided by the principles of the Basic Law of the State and the law of the Council of Oman. That national duty requires permanent cooperation between the council and the government bodies as we all seek to realise the same noble goal, which is to serve this dear country. We will be cooperating with the Council of Ministers in a way that serves the highest interest of the nation."

Morocco King grants Order of Throne to former Oman envoy



Dr Said bin Mohammed al Baramée with Tarek Lahssisne, Ambassador of Morocco to Oman.

MUSCAT: King Mohammed VI of the Kingdom of Morocco granted the Order of the Throne (Grand Cordon) to Dr Said bin Mohammed al Baramée, former ambassador of Oman to Morocco.

The order was handed over to Al Baramée by Tarek Lahssisne, Ambassador of Morocco to Oman.

Moreover, the ceremony, held at the Moroccan Embassy in Muscat, was attended by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, Najeeb bin Yahya al Balushi, Acting Head of the Protocols Department, Shaikh Faisal bin Omar al Marhoon, Head of the Arab Department, and several diplomats from the Moroccan Embassy. — ONA



Tender

Oman chamber of commerce and industry branch in Batinah South Governorate would like to announce the following public tender:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Tender Fees (irrevocable)	Specialized companies	Deadline for Obtaining Documents	Deadline for Tender submission
1/2023	Consulting and developing in franchising program	25 /- R.O	Companies specialized in consulting and developing franchising program	30 November 2023	Before 12 pm 14 December 2023

Companies may obtain the tender documents from the OCCI Branch in Batinah South Governorate, during the official working hours against the payment of tender fees.

Tender Terms:

- Provide valued CR, OCCI membership, Tender Board membership and taxation certificate.
- Interested companies should enclose their bids a 1% Bank guarantee/ certified cheque of proposal value issued by one of the banks operating in Oman valid for 90 days from the deadline of submitting the bids addressed in the name of **Oman chamber of commerce and industry branch in Batinah South Governorate**. The bids without this temporary guarantee will not be considered.
- The bids should be submitted in red waxed envelopes addressed to - Head of main tendering Committee in OCCI Branch in Batinah South Governorate- Rustaq, written outside the Number and title of the Tender. No indication about the bidder is allowed on the envelope.
- Offers should be deposited in the tender box kept in Oman chamber of commerce and industry branch in Batinah South Governorate.
- OCCI is not bound to accept the lowest or any other bids. It has the right to accept or reject any bids without showing reasons.
- Interested companies should submit the Tenders before 12 pm 14 December 2023

For any inquiries please call: **26875118-91360382**
Email: **rustaq@omanchamber.om**

www.omanchamber.om
الغرفة .. صوت القطاع الخاص

53-km walk to mark Oman's 53rd National Day

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

To create awareness on healthy eating habits and to spread a word about healthy living on Oman National Day, two vloggers are all set to walk 53 km thanking the country that has been their second home for many years

Noorudheen Muscat and Naufal Tirur, from the Indian state of Kerala, who have a strong social media following, will embark on their mission of such a long walk on Thursday from the Muttrah Sea Road to Barka on the National Day, November 18, after two breaks in between.

"This idea of walking for 53 km was actually inspired by the thought of expressing our gratitude to this country that gave many residents a life and future. Secondly, we want to remind our fellow beings about the importance of a healthy lifestyle to live longer and healthier," said the duo.

Permission from the local authorities were secured as the officials too were of the opinion that there was a need for awareness on healthy lifestyle. The duo thanked the Royal Oman Police



Noorudheen Muscat



Naufal Tirur

'This idea of walking for 53 km was actually inspired by the thought of expressing our gratitude to this country that gave many residents a life and future'

(ROP) and the other departments for their support.

According to them, a daily walk for at least 30 minutes should be made part of our lives and a big 'NO' should be said to oily food, sugar, salt and fat while keeping

stress at bay.

"Mind your mental health and the rest will follow as our body and mind are indispensably intertwined and any support to one would reflect on the other and vice versa," said these vloggers.

Nutritional experts suggest taking more dark green vegetables at least three to four times a week, eating whole grains at least two or three times daily, including lentils and fish and berries more often.

"We want to educate people that one should have enough physical activity and avoid sitting or lying down for long periods. One should avoid eating too much fat or sugar or salt. One should sleep well. The most important thing is avoid smoking," they said.



Promotional mobile workshops in Italy, Germany begin today



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism will start holding mobile workshops in Italy and Germany on Thursday to promote the prominent components of the tourism sector in Oman.

The workshops will see the

participation of several under-secretaries, ambassadors, and a delegation from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, as well as 22 private sector establishments operating in the tourism sector.

Further, the workshops will be held in the following cities: Milan,

Rome, Berlin and Munich.

Moreover, the number of visitors to Oman from Germany reached 95,623 during the period from January to September 2023 compared to 28,144 visitors during the same period in 2022, constituting a surge by 240 per

cent. Meanwhile, the number of visitors from Italy reached 46,056 during the period from January to September 2023 compared to 12,155 visitors during the corresponding period in 2022, comprising an increase by 279 per cent. — ONA



NCSI poll on promotion of integrity in society

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) is conducting a public opinion poll on the promotion of integrity in society during the period from November 13 to 27.

The survey aims to measure the level of community awareness regarding the concept of integrity, the risks of the absence of integrity in society, and awareness

on the institutional role of promoting integrity.

The opinion poll targets citizens aged 18 and over and the sample size includes 1,500 citizens residing in different governorates of Oman. The survey takes into account the representation of males and females, age groups, and different educational levels.

The data for the opinion poll is being collected via phone calls. — ONA

SALALAH PORT RECEIVES CRUISE SHIPS



SALALAH: Salalah Port on Wednesday received two cruise ships with 5,934 passengers on their board, including 4,359 tourists. The cruise ships have a tourist programme to visit many ports around the world.

The tourist programmes of the two cruise ships which arrived from Cyprus and Egypt included tours to tourist attractions and archaeological sites renowned in the Governorate of Dhofar, besides visiting beaches and traditional bazaars in the Wilayat of Salalah. Oman annually witnesses visits of many cruise ships, due to its sea location overlooking the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Sea of Oman. — ONA



Unicef training to identify disability beneficiaries

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development and the Social Protection Fund, with the technical support of Unicef Oman, launched a comprehensive training programme on the identification of eligible beneficiaries for the new disability cash benefits.

The training programme will enable them to apply the Functional Disability Determination Tool, which is a standard tool to classify disability based on abilities and functions.

It will equip the 80 participants from the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Health with the knowledge and skills to use the Functional Disability Determination Tool effectively for screening

and determining the level of disability to define the eligibility criteria for people with disability to benefit from the new disability cash benefits stipulated in the Social Protection Law (52/2023).

This training highlights the commitment of the Ministry of Social Development and the Istidama Programme to improve and expand services for people with disabilities. These efforts are aligned with Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises social development, inclusivity, and the well-being of all citizens. The programme, which will span several weeks, involves a series of workshops, interactive sessions, and practical exercises delivered by global experts on disability.

A Muttrah Souq shop that is more than 140 years old

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Muttrah Souq is in the mood of celebration as the National Day nears and the weather has brought the tourists into town.

The cruise ships season has begun and there is an international flavour to the ancient Souq. There are newer shops too such as the one that specialises in spices and herbs that serves Omani coffee and indigo as well in addition to dry flowers.

Then there is this shop that draws everyone that has a collection of antiques, Omani Khanjars, jewellery, pearls, coral and semi precious stones. Ali Baba Gift Shop has been here for more than 140 years and it

is the grandson who has been running the business now and he is Akhtar Rasool al Balushi who had begun to accompany his father to the shop when he was just seven year old back in 1981 — that is 11 years into Oman's modern renaissance.

His grandfather specialised in selling guns, Omani Khanjars and everything that was traditional.

Everyday Akhtar arrives at the shop dressed in the complete traditional attire that is the Musar and Khanjar, which on its own has become a major attraction to tourists. Today there are many more grand pieces of antiquity from around the world in the shop compared to the days of his grandfather and father.

“Since the last seven years



Akhtar Rasool al Balushi

people have come and sell me the pieces from around the world so I don't have to go anywhere,” said Akhtar while urging to look at the biggest piece of amber which holds a fossilised snake.

The unique Amber piece costs about RO 150,000, “But it is not for sale like Roman glass and other pieces in the showcase.”

Looking back at his journey Akhtar said, “I am happy even if I get one Rial, I am content to wear my Khanjar and maintain my nation's traditions.”

One of the walls of the shop has photographs with royalty and celebrities from around the globe who have visited his shop from world leaders, business tycoons to Hollywood stars. The most special photograph is of his grandfather at

the age of 103 actively participating in an event.

The beginning was not so smooth he recollected, “When I started to work at the shop others joked and said, ‘Look at what he is selling’. And then I made my first sale to a French customer. He said to listen to them with one ear and take it out from the other. It gave me immense strength.”

Akhtar never looked back since then and today he deals with antiquities from around the world.

He would like to see more Omani tour guides and hope one day Muttrah Souq would have an underground water canal so that the rainwater from the mountains can go straight to the sea instead of rushing through the Souq and causing damage to the shops.



His Highness Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd al Said launches MoCIIP's digital platforms in Muscat on Wednesday. – Photo by Khalfan al Ruzaiki

MOCIIP LAUNCHES THREE E-PLATFORMS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion on Wednesday launched three e-platforms: Oman Business, Marouf Oman and Hazam as part of the Sultanate of Oman's digital transformation strategy and the improvement of the investment atmosphere.

The platforms were launched by His Highness Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd al Said, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, in

the presence of Qais bin Muhammed al Yusef, Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment Promotion, and officials in Muscat.

The MoCIIP aims to provide all the services it provides online to complement the efforts undertaken by the government to enhance the investment environment in Oman, facilitate procedures for starting businesses, bring in international best practices, and enhancing the Sultanate of Oman's ease of starting business, competitiveness and innovation.



Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries

OIA wraps up six projects worth over RO 4 billion

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced the completion of six national projects, delivered by its national companies. The projects are geographically distributed in a number of governorates, in diverse sectors, with an investment value exceeding RO 4 billion.

Commenting on the completion of these projects, Hisham Ahmed al Shidi, Director General of Economic Diversification Investments at the OIA, said that these projects come within the National Development portfolio of the Authority, aiming to contribute to economic diversification efforts, the development of governorates, attracting investments, empowering the private sector, as well as creating job opportunities, while offering business opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

He stressed that these projects reflect the strategy and objectives of the OIA, and come aligned with Oman Vision 2040, in terms of their competitiveness and attractiveness for investment, as well as, their economic and social dimensions.

Largest in Duqm

Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries (OQ8) Project is known to be the largest project executed in the Duqm economic zone. The project is considered as the starting line for the plan to transform Duqm into one of the largest industrial and economic centers in the region. The project includes three key areas: main processing units at the refinery, facilities and services, storage and export facilities for liquid petroleum materials at Duqm Port, the crude oil



The Ras Markaz Crude Oil Storage project

storage facility in Ras Markaz, and the 81-km long crude oil transmission pipeline from Ras Markaz to Duqm Refinery. The refinery includes 10 main processing units capable of producing diesel, jet fuel, liquefied petroleum gas, sulfur and petroleum coal, with a capacity of 230,000 barrels per day.

The Ras Markaz Crude Oil Storage project, in Al Wusta Governorate, promotes the government's efforts in the field of economic diversification. It achieves several economic and commercial values, such as storing crude oil in the Sultanate of Oman with high capacity that goes up to 200 million barrels, with a storage capacity up to 26.7 million barrels in the first phase, allocating of 5.2 million barrels to the Duqm Refinery (OQ8). In addition, the facility is set to export oil by connecting it to the Nihayda Station, which serves as another port to export crude, along



JW Marriott Muscat Hotel

with Mina Al Fahal, in Muscat. Due to its strategic location near the emerging markets in Asia and Africa, the project is capable to address the demands of local and global markets, and will contribute to increasing the number of offshore oil transportation vessels coming to Oman.

The Duqm Integrated Power and Water Project (DIPWP) in Duqm will meet the electricity and water needs of OQ 8 (Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries), and attract investments to the Duqm Special Economic Zone by providing industrial electricity and water needs to heavy industry companies which are looking to invest in the region, meet the future expansions in Duqm Economic Zone, and provide electric power to the Crude Oil Storage project. The design capacity of the station is 326 MW of electricity and 36,000 cubic meters of water/day. Moreover, the station includes facilities for taking sea water with a supply

capacity of up to 1.5 million cubic meters/day, in addition to a water return line with a capacity of up to one million cubic meters/day.

Rabt project is one of the strategic projects in Duqm. The first phase consists of 660 km length, with 400 Megawatt of transmission lines, and five main stations in Nihayda, Park, Suwayhat, Duqm, and Mahout.

The project will boost the efficiency and integration of the National Electricity Transmission Network, and will play a pivotal role in enhancing the reliability and safety of electric energy. It will also contribute to build great prospects for renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind energy, in Al Wusta Governorate. It connects remote areas from the main electricity transmission network, including Haima, Duqm and Mahout. It also reduces the cost of energy produced in Duqm and Mahout, which

currently depends on diesel fuel and has effects on the environment.

Food security

Khuwayma Shrimp Farm Project in Jalan Bani Bu Ali, Governorate of South A'Sharqiyah, contributes to achieving food security and establishing other industries to enhance the value added of the raw materials available in the Sultanate of Oman. The project is built on an area of 200 hectares, containing 126 aquariums, a shrimp nursery unit of 48 aquariums, a care unit for shrimps after the larvae stage, a primary processing unit, and a production and packaging unit. The operational capacity of the project is 4000 tons/year.

Tourism

Supporting the tourism sector in the country, JW Marriott Muscat Hotel has 304 rooms and suites, and sets an outstanding example for tourism development by exploiting the natural resources to achieve long-term goals, supporting economic diversification efforts, raising the direct and indirect contribution of the tourism sector to the GDP, and generating direct employment opportunities for the national workforce.

The hotel is one of the main aspects complementing the first phase of Madinat Al Irfan East. With the completion of the hotel, the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre complex will be completed with its integrated facilities to become a growing destination for welcoming and hosting major conferences, events, and local, regional, and international events. — ONA



Russia concedes Ukrainian troops have crossed Dnipro River

KYIV: Russia conceded for the first time on Wednesday that Ukrainian forces had crossed the vast River Dnipro into areas of Kherson region, but said it had sent in more troops to stop them as Kyiv tries to open a new line of attack to annexed Crimea.

Ukraine said it had secured a foothold on the eastern bank of the Dnipro “against all odds”, a potentially major setback for Russian forces in the south.

A Ukrainian military spokesperson added on Wednesday that Ukrainian troops were trying to push Russian forces back from the eastern bank of the river, which serves as a formidable natural barrier on the battlefield.

Vladimir Saldo, the governor of the part of Kherson region which Moscow controls, acknowledged in a statement that Ukrainian forces had managed to cross the river, but said they were taking heavy losses. “Our additional forces have now been brought in. The enemy is trapped in the settlement of Krynky and a fiery attack has been arranged for him: bombs, rockets, heavy flamethrower systems, artillery shells and drones,” said Saldo.

Citing what he said was first-hand information from Russia’s “Dnepr” military grouping, he said Ukrainian forces were pinned down in basements in the day and predicted the Ukrainian assault would be thwarted.

The village of Krynky lies close to the Dnipro around 30 km northeast of the city of Kherson, which Ukraine recaptured almost exactly a year ago.

Natalia Humeniuk, spokesperson for Ukraine’s



A view shows residential houses heavily damaged by a Russian missile strike, in the town of Selydove, Donetsk region, Ukraine. – Reuters

southern military command, described the frontline as “fairly fluid” and said Kyiv’s forces had been putting Russian troops under pressure along the river.

“The pushback from our side is taking place on a line from 3 to 8 km along the entire bank from the water’s edge,” she said.

“For now, we will ask for informational silence... which would allow us to report later on great successes,” she said in televised comments.

Russia has largely held Kyiv’s counteroffensive at bay in the

A Ukrainian military spokesperson added on Wednesday that Ukrainian troops were trying to push Russian forces back from the eastern bank of the river.

southeast, but an advance in occupied Kherson region could spread their defences thinner and ratchet up pressure. “Against all the odds, Ukraine’s

defence forces have gained a foothold on the left eastern bank of the Dnipro,” President Volodymyr Zelenskii’s chief of staff said on Tuesday.

The official, Andriy Yermak, said that Ukraine’s counteroffensive, which it launched in June, was “developing” and that Kyiv knew “how to achieve victory”.

Russia’s military said last week its forces had thwarted a Ukrainian attempt to forge a bridgehead on the eastern bank and nearby islands, inflicting heavy losses.

— Reuters

UK govt doubles down on Rwanda migrant policy

LONDON: The UK government vowed on Wednesday to persevere with a controversial plan to send migrants to Rwanda, despite the Supreme Court upholding a lower court ruling that it was unlawful and should not go ahead.

In a major setback for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, a five-judge panel at the UK’s highest court unanimously sided with an earlier Court of Appeal decision that the policy was incompatible with Britain’s international obligations.

In a 56-page ruling, the judges agreed there were “substantial grounds” to believe Rwanda could forcibly return asylum-seekers and refugees to a country where they could face persecution.

But within hours of the long-awaited judgment, Sunak and his ministers said the government would press ahead with finalising a “new treaty” with Rwanda to address those concerns.

“We anticipated this judgment... and for the last few months have been working on a plan to provide the certainty that the courts demand,” newly appointed interior minister James Cleverly told MPs.

The new treaty will “make it absolutely clear” to British and European courts that the Rwanda policy “will be consistent with international law”, he added.

In a call shortly after the ruling, Sunak and Rwandan President Paul Kagame “reiterated their firm commitment to making our migration partnership work”, Downing Street said.

“Both leaders... agreed to take the necessary steps to ensure this is a robust and lawful policy and to stop the boats as soon as possible,” Sunak’s office added.

The Supreme Court decision could widen rifts in the ruling Conservative party and prompt renewed demands from right-wingers that Britain withdraw from the ECHR.

In parliament on Wednesday, Sunak told MPs he was “prepared to change our laws and revisit those international relationships” if “domestic legal frameworks or international conventions” frustrated the plans.

Outspoken Tory party deputy chairman Lee Anderson said ministers should “ignore the laws” and deport migrants the day they arrive.

He branded the court judgment a “dark day for the British people” and said the government should “just put the planes in the air now and send them to Rwanda”.

The main Labour opposition, riding high in the polls, accused Sunak of failing to “have any serious plan to tackle dangerous boat crossings”. — AFP



Toufique Hossain representing asylum-seekers speaks to the media outside the Supreme Court in London, Britain. – Reuters

India contacts cave experts to free trapped tunnel workers

DEHRADUN: India has sought advice from the Thai company that rescued children from a flooded cave in 2018 as it races to save 40 men trapped in a road tunnel, officials said on Wednesday.

Excavators have been removing debris since Sunday morning from the site in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand to create an escape tunnel for the workers, all of whom are still alive.

Officials have “contacted the Thai company which rescued the children trapped in the cave”, the state government’s department of public relations said in a statement.

The statement was referring to the dramatic operation to rescue 12 boys from a junior football team and their coach who were trapped for more than two weeks in the Tham Luang cave complex.

Authorities have also asked for help from engineering experts in soil and rock mechanics at the Norwegian Geotechnical Institute as frantic



A supply truck loaded with augers prepares to enter a tunnel where 40 road workers are trapped after a portion collapsed in Uttarkashi in the northern state of Uttarakhand, India. – Reuters

efforts to free the men stretched into a fourth day. Rescuers said on Wednesday they had sent medicine to the 40 men, trapped since the road

tunnel they were building collapsed on Sunday. “After consultation with doctors, medicine has been sent to the workers through pipes,” police officer Prashant Kumar said from the site. “Contact is being maintained with the workers.”

No details were given about the condition of the men or how many of them were sick.

But as rescue teams removed the vast piles of rubble, more fell from the broken roof of the tunnel and two labourers working to remove the debris were injured overnight on Tuesday, Kumar said.

The pace of drilling was “slow because of natural causes”, but efforts were being made on a “war footing”, Uttarakhand state police chief Ashok Kumar said in a statement on Wednesday.

The air force on Wednesday flew in a second drilling machine on a C-130 Hercules military plane on Wednesday to “speed up rescue work” after the first one broke down, he said. — AFP

China-US climate pledge ‘significant moment’ pre-COP28

PARIS: The joint China-US climate declaration is “a significant moment” in the build-up to COP28, the climate summit’s president said on Wednesday, but some experts criticised the lack of concrete commitments.

“The consensus reached between the US and China is a significant moment ahead of COP28” said Sultan Al Jaber, president of the 28th UN climate conference set to take place in Dubai at the end of the month.

“It clearly signals that despite global challenges, COP28’s call for climate action is uniting parties and raising ambition,” he added in a statement.

China and the United States pledged on Wednesday to work

more closely together to fight global warming, declaring the climate crisis “one of the greatest challenges of our time”.

The announcement came hours ahead of the first meeting between Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping in a year, on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco.

Petteri Taalas, head of the United Nations’ climate and weather agency, welcomed the announcement. “It’s important that those biggest emitters — China and the USA — are supporting further ambition level of climate mitigation,” the World Meteorological Organization chief said.



Chinese and US flags flutter outside the building of an American company in Beijing, China. – Reuters file photo

“The forthcoming COP, we will see what happens there, but this fact that the USA and China have started interacting is a positive sign because those big players, they can change the big scene,” he told a Geneva press conference.

“Let’s hope that this enhanced potential of US-China cooperation will lead to concrete results.”

Li Shuo, a former Greenpeace staffer now at the Asia Society Policy Institute, said the declaration was “good news” and “it sets a floor for the meeting in the UAE”.

“That said, this statement did not see any major breakthrough in terms of what the two countries committed to do.

“There will still be a lot of contentious issues” to discuss at COP28, he added.

David Waskow, of US think-tank the World Resources Institute, called it “disappointing that the two nations said nothing about the need to rapidly transition away from fossil fuels this decade, which will be a central issue at the COP28 summit”.

“The most striking part of the statement is the two countries’ commitment to include all greenhouse gas emissions, including methane, in their next national climate plans”, he added.

Waskow called the inclusion of methane “a major step” as China is the world’s largest methane emitter. — AFP



Israeli raid at Gaza hospital sparks international concern



Smoke rises during an Israeli military bombardment of the northern Gaza Strip. – AFP

PARIS: The Israeli army operation in Al-Shifa hospital, targeting what it says is a command centre under Gaza’s biggest medical facility, on Wednesday set off a wave of international condemnation.

The army had announced overnight it was carrying out “a precise and targeted operation in a specified area” of the hospital where the UN estimates there are at least 2,300 patients, staff and displaced Palestinians.

An official from the health ministry who was in the hospital said that he could see tanks inside the compound.

The territory’s health ministry says Israel’s ensuing aerial

bombardment and ground offensive have killed 11,320 people, mostly civilians and including thousands of children.

Palestinians said US President Joe Biden was “wholly responsible for the assault on the Al-Shifa medical complex”.

“The adoption by the White House and the Pentagon of the occupation’s false claim that the resistance is using the Al-Shifa medical complex for military ends has given the green light to the occupation to commit more massacres against civilians.”

The Palestinian Authority that runs the occupied West Bank denounced the raid as a “flagrant violation” of international law,

“
As the carnage in Gaza reaches new levels of horror everyday, the world continues to watch in shock as hospitals come under fire, premature babies die

MARTIN GRIFFITHS
UN humanitarian chief

demanding world action to protect patients and civilians inside the facility.

The White House renewed its concerns for the safety of civilians shortly after the raid began.

The White House “won’t speak to the specifics of an ongoing Israeli military operation,” a National Security Council spokesperson said.

“We do not support striking a hospital from the air and we don’t want to see a firefight in a hospital where innocent people, helpless people, sick people trying to get medical care they deserve are caught in the crossfire,” said the spokesperson said.

“Hospitals and patients must be protected.”

The United Nations humanitarian chief demanded immediate action to “rein in the carnage”.

“As the carnage in Gaza reaches new levels of horror everyday, the world continues to watch in shock as hospitals come under fire, premature babies die...”

“An entire population is deprived of the basic means of survival. This cannot be allowed to continue,” said Martin Griffiths.

Griffiths stressed in a separate video statement he understood Israel wanted to find fighting leaders, but insisted that was no excuse for turning hospitals into a battlefield. — AFP



Spain's acting Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez

Spain PM urges Israel to end ‘indiscriminate killing’

MADRID: Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on Wednesday urged Israel to end the “indiscriminate killing of Palestinians” in Gaza, in his sharpest criticism of Israel since war broke out over a month ago.

“We demand an immediate ceasefire on the part of Israel in Gaza and strict compliance with international humanitarian law, which today is clearly not respected,” he said during a debate in parliament ahead of a vote in confidence on Thursday in which he is poised to be re-appointed for another term.

“Let there be no doubt, we stand with Israel in rejecting and its response to the attack that this country suffered in October,” the Socialist premier added.

“With the same clarity we reject the indiscriminate killing of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank,” he said.

Spain has maintained that Israel has the right to defend itself after the Palestinians attacked southern Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 people and taking over 200 hostages.

But like the United States and other allies, it has expressed increasing concern over the mounting death toll in the battered enclave, where local health officials say over 11,300 people, mostly civilians, have been killed since the conflict started.

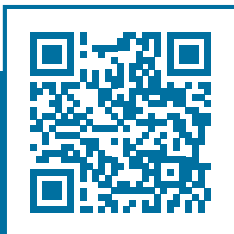
Shortly after he spoke the leader of far-left party Podemos, acting social rights minister Ione Belarra, reiterated on social media her call for Spain to break diplomatic ties with Israel and impose economic sanctions on the country. — AFP



A displaced Palestinian man, who fled from the Israeli bombardment, is now living in a make shift shelter, stocks up an oven outside a tent in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP



Palestinian patient Kamel Al-Najjar, 90, lies on a bed as he shelters in a makeshift tent outside Nasser hospital due to overcrowding, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. – Reuters



Comments about Israeli advance on Al Shifa and other hospitals

GAZA: Israeli soldiers entered Gaza's biggest hospital, Al Shifa, on Wednesday and were searching the premises, after Israel said fighters had their headquarters in tunnels beneath the facility, a charge the Palestinian group denies. Here are reactions to the fighting at Al Shifa and other Gaza hospitals:

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)
"Reports of military incursion into Al Shifa hospital are deeply concerning," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on social media platform X.
"We've lost touch again with health personnel at the hospital. We're extremely worried for their and their patients' safety."

UNITED NATIONS AID CHIEF
"The protection of newborns, patients, medical staff and all civilians must override all other concerns," UN aid chief Martin Griffiths wrote on X, adding he was "appalled" by reports of the raids.
"Hospitals are not battlegrounds."

DOCTOR AT AL SHIFA HOSPITAL
"Bombardment. Shooting around the hospital and within the hospital. It's really horrible you can feel that it's very near to the hospital. And then we realised that the tanks are moving around the hospital," Doctor Ahmed El Mokhallalati said.
"They just parked in front of the hospital emergency department. All kinds of weapons were used around the hospital," and staff avoided being near the windows.

UNITED STATES
"We do not support striking a hospital from the air and we don't want to see a firefight in a hospital where innocent people, helpless people, sick people trying to get medical care they deserve are caught in the crossfire," a White House National Security Council spokesperson said.
"Hospitals and patients must be protected."

FRANCE
The French foreign ministry said that France was deeply concerned about Israel's military operations at Al Shifa and "reiterates the absolute need for Israel to comply with international humanitarian law".

IRELAND
Foreign Minister Micheal Martin said in Cairo: "We urgently need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and we are working to ensure that aid is able to reach those who need it most."
"It is also vital that law, international humanitarian law, is upheld, it's obligatory on all actors, state and non-state actors."
"Without question we need a dramatic increase in aid at scale to meet the dire humanitarian situation on the ground in Gaza, where a human catastrophe is unfolding in front of our eyes."

CANADA
"I urge the government of Israel to exercise maximum restraint," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Tuesday, before the raid. "The world is witnessing this killing of women, of children, of babies. This has to stop." — **Reuters**

'Stop this horror', Unicef chief says on visit to the strip

GENEVA: The head of the UN children's agency said on Wednesday she had witnessed "devastating" scenes on a visit to war-ravaged Gaza and urged both fighting sides to "stop this horror".
"What I saw and heard was devastating. They have endured repeated bombardment, loss and displacement," Unicef's executive director Catherine Russell said, describing a rare visit to the Palestinian territory by a top UN official.
"Inside the Strip, there is nowhere safe for Gaza's one million children to turn," Russell said in a statement.
"The parties to the conflict are committing grave violations against children," she said.
"These include killing, maiming, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access — all of which Unicef condemns."
The health ministry in Gaza says Israel's ensuing aerial bombardment and ground offensive have killed 11,320 people, mostly civilians.
Russell pointed out that more than 4,600 of those killed were children, while nearly 9,000 have reportedly been injured.
"Many children are missing and believed buried under the rubble of collapsed buildings and homes, the tragic result of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas," she said.
"Meanwhile, newborn babies who require specialised care have died in one of Gaza's hospitals as power and



Unicef's executive director Catherine Russell meets children in Gaza. Photo taken from UNICEF official website.

medical supplies run out, and violence continues with indiscriminate effect."
Russell reiterated her call "on all parties to ensure that children are protected and assisted, as per international humanitarian law."
"Only the parties to the conflict can truly stop this horror."
Russell called for "an immediate humanitarian ceasefire" and for the rivals "to safely release all abducted and detained children". She also demanded that the two sides "ensure that humanitarian actors have safe, sustained and unimpeded access to reach those in need with the full range of lifesaving services and supplies."
Russell said she had visited the Al-Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis where she met with patients and displaced families seeking shelter and safety.
"A 16-year-old girl told me from her hospital bed that her neighbourhood had been bombed. She survived but doctors say she will never be able to walk again," she said.
Russell said she had also met with Unicef staff who were "continuing to deliver for children amidst the danger and devastation". — **AFP**

Iran calls for 'urgent' UN efforts to get needed aid

GENEVA: Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian called on the United Nations on Wednesday to do more to get desperately needed aid into war-battered Gaza.
"The amount of humanitarian aid sent to Gaza is very small and almost zero, and it is necessary for the United Nations to take immediate and serious action in this regard," Amir-Abdollahian said in a meeting in Geneva with UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths.
Trucks carrying the first delivery of fuel to Gaza since the war began on October 7 crossed from Egypt on Wednesday but the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said it was "not at all enough".
Amir-Abdollahian has been in Geneva since Tuesday for talks with UN and other officials on aid deliveries into Gaza.
In his talks with Griffiths, he called for "strong and urgent management by the UN to remove the blockage at the Rafah border crossing and get humanitarian aid into Gaza".
The Palestinian enclave has endured more than five weeks of Israeli air and ground attack that have killed 11,320 people, mostly civilians,



A displaced Palestinian girl, cuddles up to an older woman as they sit outside a makeshift shelter after overnight rainstorms in Khan Yunis. — AFP

according to its health ministry.
Israel has laid siege to Gaza and halted all aid deliveries from its territory, leaving the Rafah border crossing from Egypt as the only access point for humanitarian relief for the hundreds of thousands of civilians displaced inside the enclave. — **AFP**

First fuel delivery since start of war delivered to UN

ISMAILIA: The first truck carrying fuel into Gaza since the start of the war crossed from Egypt on Wednesday to deliver diesel to the United Nations, though it will do little to alleviate shortages that have hampered relief efforts.
The delivery was made possible by Israel giving its approval for 24,000 litres of diesel fuel to be allowed into Gaza for UN aid distribution trucks, though not for use at hospitals, according to a humanitarian source.
"This is only 9 per cent of what we need daily to sustain lifesaving activities," Tom White, director

of UN relief agency UNRWA in Gaza, posted on social media platform X. He confirmed that just over 23,000 litres, or half a tanker, had been received.
"Our entire operation is now on the verge of collapse," said UNRWA director Philippe Lazzarini. "It is appalling that fuel continues to be used as a weapon of war."
Aid workers say a lack of fuel, which is needed for hospital generators, provision of water, sewage treatment and communications as well as for the distribution of relief, has contributed to a sharp



A truck carrying fuel crosses into Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

deterioration of conditions for Gaza's 2.3 million residents.
Limited deliveries of humanitarian aid have been crossing from Egypt into Gaza since Oct. 21, but Israel had refused to allow in fuel.
The United Nations had warned in recent days that it would soon have to halt humanitarian operations as its fuel stocks became fully depleted.
It said fuel shortages had already caused or contributed to the closure of hospitals, bakeries, sewage pumping stations, water desalination plants and water wells, and were threatening to shut down telecoms data centres and connection points within 48 hours.
The initial delivery of fuel was intended to be split over two days, with 12,000 litres allocated for each day, an international source with knowledge of the operation said.
"This is not enough for anything - not for hospitals, not even for aid deliveries," said the source, speaking on condition of anonymity. "It's meant to be enough only to bring some of the aid that has been outside - and got rained on for example - indoors to the warehouses." — **Reuters**

Gaza is part of you and it deserves freedom



Mohammed Anwar Al Balushi

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Has anyone ever pondered the significance of a country’s flag? What does it truly represent to each of us? Is it merely a piece of cloth adorned with various colours like red, blue, black, white and green, or does it bear a more profound symbolism?

Let’s shift our focus to the enduring situation in Palestine, which has remained a prominent issue since its occupation in 1947. Unravelling the pages of its tragic history could consume copious amounts of time and discussion.

Nonetheless, if today, the world’s writers, intellectuals, storytellers, business leaders and political figures fail to extend their support to Gaza in some way, it seems that they might lose a vital aspect of their humanity and one of the world’s wings, called Gaza. Will that be easy?

This is not the moment for idle analysis while Gaza gradually fades away. Instead, it is the time to promptly assess and safeguard it.

Gaza, at its core, embodies our shared humanity. It epitomises the countless innocent men and women who have perished, those who still linger on the waiting list for aid.

It signifies the children who have lost their lives, as well as those who are barely clinging to survival, witnessing their parents’ half-lived existence.

The concept of leadership and its true role in such crises remains elusive to me. After all, how can one define themselves as a man or a woman unless they recognise “Gaza” within themselves today?

This composition is not about politics or business; it is about “humanism.” In Gaza today, human lives are being extinguished, families displaced, individuals subjected to torture, and people forcibly uprooted from their homeland.

How can the world afford to ignore and let Palestine vanish? Consider the verses of Mahmoud Darwish, the renowned Palestinian poet:

Your eyes are a thorn in my heart

Inflicting pain, yet I cherish that thorn
And shield it from the wind.
I sheathe it in my flesh, I sheathe it, protecting it
from night and agony,
And its wound lights the lanterns,
Its tomorrow makes my present
Dearer to me than my soul.
And soon I forget, as eye meets eye,
You are water; you are fire.

Gaza is an integral part of our collective identity, and it rightfully deserves freedom. The message emanating from Gaza may not be perceived the same way by everyone in the world, but I believe it serves as a resounding call for the restoration of Palestine’s freedom.

A second message to the global community is to refrain from annexing land through force and usurping the freedom and individuality of nations.

The third message underscores the imperative need for new laws and regulations to safeguard the freedom of all nations.

Jordan aims to score big in global gaming industry

KAMAL TAHA

For many, gaming is a waste of time. Hours lost staring at glowing screens. But Jordan is betting on its youth to capture a slice of a lucrative global market.

At the Jordan Gaming Lab, Nasser Kasabreh, 21, sits behind his computer, working on a game he has been developing over the past months.

He and two friends have already designed three video games including “Drift Arabs”, downloaded on Google Play more than 100,000 times.

With the support of the King Abdullah II Fund For Development, it provides modern equipment and free educational courses to young people aged nine and above on all aspects of the gaming industry from manufacturing, to production, and even marketing.

The Fund would not disclose how much money has been spent over the years, but it represents a significant investment by the Hashemite kingdom in its young people.

More than 10,000 youngsters have benefited from the training, as Jordan seeks to tap into a global video game industry worth around \$300 billion, according to industry specialists Accenture.

Expectations are the market will only grow with the development of cloud gaming, still in its early stages, and even virtual reality.

Half of the population of Jordan is estimated to be under the age of 25 and according to the World Bank unemployment runs at about 23 per cent.

“This lab has completely changed society’s idea about electronic games. Twenty years ago, I found it difficult to convince young people or their parents of the importance of making these games, today it is totally different,” said entrepreneur and the lab’s technical partner, Nour Khrais.

But Arab game-makers face a huge challenge.

Mobile gaming is the fastest-growing gaming sector in the world — and of all the digital games produced in the region, Jordan produces more than half, Khrais said.

In a sign of the growing importance of the Middle East gaming market, the latest edition of the hugely-popular “Assassin’s Creed” franchise released last month was set in 9th-century Baghdad and for the first time had Arabic subtitles.

“Jordan has today become the most experienced country in electronic games in the Middle East,” said Hussein Bino, the Fund’s gaming lab coordinator.

— AFP

Farmers step in as climate finance lags



Bhasker Tripathi has been reporting about climate change, environment, agriculture and energy for over 10 years and is currently working with Thomson Reuters Foundation

440 MILLION SMALL-FARMER HOUSEHOLDS ARE COLLECTIVELY SPENDING APPROXIMATELY \$368 BILLION ANNUALLY ON ADAPTATION

As droughts and floods wreak havoc on harvests, small-scale farmers are spending billions of dollars of their own money each year to adapt to a changing climate, despite it being a problem they did not create, according to research released on Tuesday.

A survey of about 1,800 farmers by the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF), a funding platform supporting farmers, and the London-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) found that, on average, farming households each invest \$838 per year to adapt to shifting weather patterns.

Extrapolating the average spending, the survey across 13 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America estimated that nearly 440 million small-farmer households are collectively spending approximately \$368 billion annually on adaptation. This “dwarfs” the \$230 million pledged by countries for the UN’s Adaptation Fund at last year’s COP27 climate talks, according to the research.

“Farmers working small plots of land around the globe are the unsung heroes of the battle to adapt to the climate and nature crises,” said Xiaoting Hou Jones, a senior researcher at IIED, who co-led the survey.

As climate change disrupts their lives, these farmers are investing significant amounts of their own time and money to cope, often in ways that help people and nature thrive together, “dwarfing the contributions from rich governments”, she added. Some farmers invest in climate-resilient crops, others shift to soil-friendly cultivation methods that require less water and chemical fertilisers, while some farmers plant trees.

The survey, which covered smallholder forest and farm producers managing 24.7 acres or less, said many of the approaches taken can help conserve biodiversity and store carbon, improving climate resilience.

A separate analysis, also released on Tuesday, found that very little of the climate finance available globally reaches small farmers to help them adapt to a warming planet.

In 2021, they received only about \$2 billion, or 0.3 per cent of international climate finance from public and private sources, according to the analysis by Amsterdam-based think-tank Climate



Small family farms sustain the livelihoods of more than 2.5 billion people globally.

Focus and released by a new alliance of farmer networks in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific.

Small family farms sustain the livelihoods of more than 2.5 billion people globally but lack infrastructure, technology and resources to adapt to climate impacts, with serious implications for global food security and rural economies, said the Climate Focus analysis.

Family farms of less than two hectares produce a third of the world’s food, while farms of five hectares or less account for over half of global production of nine staple crops: rice, peanut, cassava, millet, wheat, potato, maize, barley and rye. Strengthening “sustainable food systems” will be a key consideration at December’s COP28 United Nations climate summit in Dubai.

The host nation, the United Arab Emirates, is urging governments to include food and agriculture in their national climate plans and boost finance for more sustainable practices. COP28 is also set to define how to implement a global goal for adaptation enshrined in the 2015 Paris Agreement.

In the absence of sustained financial support, farmers in some of the world’s most vulnerable regions are having to find their own solutions to new climate challenges.

Shashikant Shukla, a farmer in northern India’s Uttar Pradesh state, recently borrowed fertilisers worth Rs 4,000 (\$48) from his dealer to prepare for the winter wheat crop.

In 2022, when his wheat harvest plummeted because of unprecedented

March heatwaves, it took him several months to pay back loans.

“Small farmers like me have a credit cycle — we never have enough cash to sow the next crop,” said Shukla, who cultivates wheat, pulses and oil seeds on about half an acre.

Erratic rainfall in the monsoon months from June-September has almost put an end to that season’s crop cycle in his region, he said, with most farmers now vesting their hope in winter wheat. But over the years, it too has become vulnerable to early heatwaves and unseasonal rains.

“Whenever the wheat crop is struck by a disaster, farmers start selling their cattle to repay and sow the next crop,” he said. In the past decade, he had to sell a pair of oxen and a buffalo to cover his debt.

To help the most vulnerable communities, including small farmers like Shukla, spending on adaptation must increase by 10 to 18 times from current levels, the UN Adaptation Gap report said this month.

Every respondent to the IIED-FFF survey noted some kind of climate change impact, including floods, droughts, increases in pests or diseases, and changes in seasons or rainfall.

Farmers said they are adjusting planting and harvesting schedules, controlling pests, soil erosion and surface water run-off, and improving soils with eco-friendly approaches.

They are also protecting natural areas and increasing the number of crop species, trees and animals on their land, along with attending training courses on adaptation.

Insured age discrimination

It was heartbreaking. I would have been entitled to compensation for emotional distress and age discrimination if it had occurred in some other countries.

People can be dispensable through war, homelessness, disease, hunger, and government policies. We see it all over the world. Auto insurance firms may also view senior people as expendable. It makes no difference if someone has a spotless accident claim history and has been faithful for a long time.

While trying to sort things out, the main question in my mind was: how can retired people stay in Oman when insurance providers do not renew their car insurance? “Our policy limits the driver’s age to 65.” Well, a few things are not coherent. Many retired people are choosing to stay in the country!

With new housing projects attracting buyers, how is it likely for investors to stay in the country if they cannot drive and there isn’t suitable public transportation? Without car insurance, there is no renewal of car registration, and therefore one is trapped! It seems poles apart between tempting property buyers and insurance providers applying age discrimination. Apparently, some sectors are not talking to each other.

Another immediate worry popped into my mind: how terrible if I can’t drive to the desert or the mountains? It may sound vain, but not to me. These are the things that drew me to stay in Oman. Sure enough, there will be a time when physical mobility will hinder my driving abilities, but not just yet.

Considering that no insurance regulations had been broken, the lack of renewal came as a shock. Firstly, to be told that the car, manufactured in 2015, was too old for comprehensive coverage. It seems that the rule for third parties applies when the car is 10 years from the manufacturing date, not 8 years. Then, an even harsher and more discriminatory restriction was presented: the driver’s age. Currently, there isn’t a government-set senior age



SONIA AMBROSIO @ambrosionelson

The writer is journalist, academic, researcher in media studies

AUTO INSURANCE FIRMS MAY ALSO VIEW SENIOR PEOPLE AS EXPENDABLE

limit for drivers.

Has the service provider based their risk assessment on reliable information? Does the policyholder have any sort of disability? Are insurance companies permitted to refuse to insure senior drivers under broad or blanket policies? What is the agreement between the government and the insurance industry? Though these are all just arguments, a formal insurer notice should have been issued when the changes occurred.

“Weird”. “Never heard of this”. “What is the name of the insurance company?” and “I have a friend who can help you”, were some of the reactions. Friends suggested that I hire a private driver. Fair enough, but one should not be skirting such a problem. After all, foreign property buyers, in general, are not young people. Besides, it is already a big risk to drive through the country’s roads, as traffic rules are usually overlooked. Speeding and driver misconduct are at the top of traffic accidents. Drivers should be judged on their abilities and not on their date of birth.

So, the big picture is that these issues require attention, especially when someone invests thousands of rials in a residential property. Age discrimination is a blow to individuals and makes a bad impression when looking for a new vehicle insurance company. Age discrimination is, nevertheless, widely accepted.

As with most issues, any situation can be examined from different angles. Insurance providers have their free reign, and people are obliged by their rules. Don’t comply with the insurer’s policy; pay the price! Since I am not getting any younger, I question if it makes sense to stay in the country and worry every year when my car insurance is about to expire. Then, I was asked, “Leaving the country because of a small problem?” “There is always a solution.”

Absolutely, let me stay behind the wheel and in control of my destinations.

UNDER THE SUN!



A camel herder looks out from a field as the sun sets during the annual Camel Fair at Pushkar in India’s desert state of Rajasthan on Wednesday. – AFP

The case for energy realism at COP28

At this year’s upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, world leaders will, for the first time, officially take stock of global progress towards the goals set out in the Paris climate agreement in 2015. The growing frequency of extreme-weather events makes this a decisive moment for climate action, and it is no secret that countries are falling short of their Paris commitments. The question is whether the assembled leaders — whose ranks will include Pope Francis — will be able to navigate the myriad complex challenges impeding progress.

One particularly thorny challenge is the “energy trilemma”: the need to balance the reliability, affordability, and sustainability of supplies. While sustainability is obviously critical — which means rapidly reducing emissions in order to limit global warming to 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels, as set out in the Paris agreement — it cannot come at the expense of access. On the contrary, the world must increase access to energy: 775 million people worldwide currently lack electricity.

The energy trilemma lies at the root of key controversies surrounding climate negotiations. The United Arab Emirates has been using its position as one of the world’s biggest oil exporters to persuade its fellow oil-rich countries to accelerate their emissions-reduction efforts. The Global Decarbonisation Alliance, an



Ana Palacio, a former minister of foreign affairs of Spain and former senior vice president and general counsel of the World Bank Group, is a visiting lecturer at Georgetown University

WHEN THE INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY SUGGESTED LAST MONTH THAT 2030 WOULD MARK THE “BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE FOSSIL-FUEL ERA,” OPEC REJECTED THE IEA’S FORECASTS, ARGUING THAT THEY WERE BASED ON IDEOLOGY, RATHER THAN FACTS

effort by Sultan al Jaber, COP28 president, to prod major state oil companies to reduce their greenhouse-gas emissions, is expected to be unveiled at COP28.

We know that effective climate action will require the engagement of a wide array of stakeholders. For example, in order to cover the massive costs of climate action — it is estimated that Africa’s Nationally Determined Contributions alone will cost nearly \$3 trillion — private finance is essential. That is why it bodes well that Wall Street heavyweights, led by BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, are flocking to COP28, after staying away from last year’s conference.

When it comes to climate action, engaging with Big Finance might seem less problematic than including Big Oil. But the energy trilemma implies otherwise. Though the International Energy Agency suggested last month that 2030 would mark the “beginning of the end of the fossil-fuel era,” Opec rejected the IEA’s forecasts, arguing that they were based on ideology, rather than facts.

The hydrocarbons exporters may well have a point. The IEA report paints an optimistic picture, predicting that global demand for coal, oil, and natural gas will peak by 2030, as electric-vehicle adoption accelerates and renewables gain a larger role in

the global electricity mix. But as energy experts were quick to point out, these projections depend on several factors.

For starters, the IEA is betting that economic growth in China — the world’s largest polluter — will slow enough to bring about a significant reduction in energy demand. Moreover, it assumes that governments will fulfil their climate-policy pledges, despite strong evidence to the contrary. In the United Kingdom and Germany, green measures have been rolled back, and in the United States, Republicans are working hard to dilute the clean-energy provisions contained in the Inflation Reduction Act.



The Global Decarbonisation Alliance, an effort by Sultan al Jaber, to prod major state oil companies to reduce their greenhouse-gas emissions, is expected to be unveiled at COP28.

There is another problem. The IEA focuses on when fossil-fuel demand will peak, but fails to consider adequately the shape of the consumption curve before and after. Energy demand may well plateau at its highest-ever level for some time, rather than quickly beginning to fall. That demand will have to be met, and the extent to which renewables will be able to cover it is not yet clear. Opec’s warning against underinvesting in energy security thus should not be dismissed out of hand.

Allowing idealism and ideology to dominate discussion of the energy transition will lead only to incomplete or

unrealistic solutions. Though use of renewables is growing, fossil fuels continue to account for a large share of the global energy mix. Moreover, there is no guarantee that energy demand will fall in the short or even medium term, not least because the developed world’s burgeoning middle class has shown a strong and growing appetite for affordable energy.

Big Oil is well aware of this. Last month, US oil-and-gas giant Chevron announced its purchase of rival Hess for some \$53 billion, and ExxonMobil acquired Pioneer Natural Resources for nearly \$60 billion. While these acquisitions may have been partly motivated by the desire to evade buyback pressure from shareholders, they also represent a bet that firms will benefit from the ability to produce more oil and gas in the coming decades.

Phasing out fossil fuels is, as Al Jaber himself has put it, inevitable. But, as enticing as the IEA’s projections might be, the precise trajectory and timeline are far from certain. If COP28 is to be a success, participants must recognise this and work together to find pragmatic and realistic solutions to the energy trilemma that enable real progress towards a global economy that is dynamic, sustainable, and inclusive.



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extends its sincere congratulations and heartfelt greetings to

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

- May the Almighty protect and bless him - and the people of Oman on the glorious occasion of the **53rd National Day**.

We are deeply honoured to contribute to His Majesty's vision for a sustainable future and reaffirm our commitment to upholding the highest standards of social, environmental and economic sustainability as outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

The Sustainable City - Yiti
A Sustainable Lifestyle
For A Better Tomorrow



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On the occasion of the 53rd National Day,
JW Marriott Muscat Hotel extends its sincerest
congratulations and best wishes to

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik,
May God protect him, and to all the people of Oman.

May Oman continue to prosper and progress

For more information: jwmarriottmuscat.com



Congratulations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik

And the people of Oman on the Joyous Occasion of
The 53rd National Day of the Renaissance



Steering Ahead with Remarkable Progress Fuelled by the Nation's Strength

Oman, guided by the wise and visionary leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, is making remarkable progress in line with Oman Vision 2040. While fostering progress and shaping excellence, Oman is increasingly making a prominent place as a destination for investments, diversification and an unwavering focus on development of the national talent.

Today, Saud Bahwan Group reiterates its commitment to recognising promising Omani talents, nurturing their true potential and offering numerous opportunities to make significant contributions in every functional area.

On the 53rd Oman National Day, Saud Bahwan Group extends its felicitations to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik and the people of Oman.



SAUD BAHWAN Group



We salute the visionary leadership of
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
-May Allah protect, preserve, and bless him-
and extend our greetings to the people of
Oman on the occasion of the
53rd National Day.

An industrial powerhouse with a global presence in steel, Jindal Group is a leading player in the global steel sector. It is bolstering its commitment to the Sultanate of Oman by undertaking several strategic investments aimed at fostering socio-economic growth and supporting the nation's transition to a green, circular economy. Working in tandem with Oman's Vision 2040 plan to reduce the country's dependency on the oil and gas sector while diversifying into non-oil-based manufacturing, the group is flying the flag high. These investments under the Vulcan International Holding Company include Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel, Sohar Steel, and Vulcan Pelletizing Plant in Sohar, in Duqm Vulcan Green Steel, and in Muscat Vulcan Green Energy.





We extend our warmest greetings to

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

-May the Almighty protect and guide him-

On the blessed occasion of Oman's 53rd National Day, may the Divine Grace shower Oman, its people and its esteemed leader with ever-increasing prosperity and progress. Oman is boldly advancing towards the creation of a sustainable, economically resilient and socially progressive nation. In doing so, we wholeheartedly reiterate our dedication to providing everything required to realise the goals set forth in Oman's visionary roadmap for 2040.



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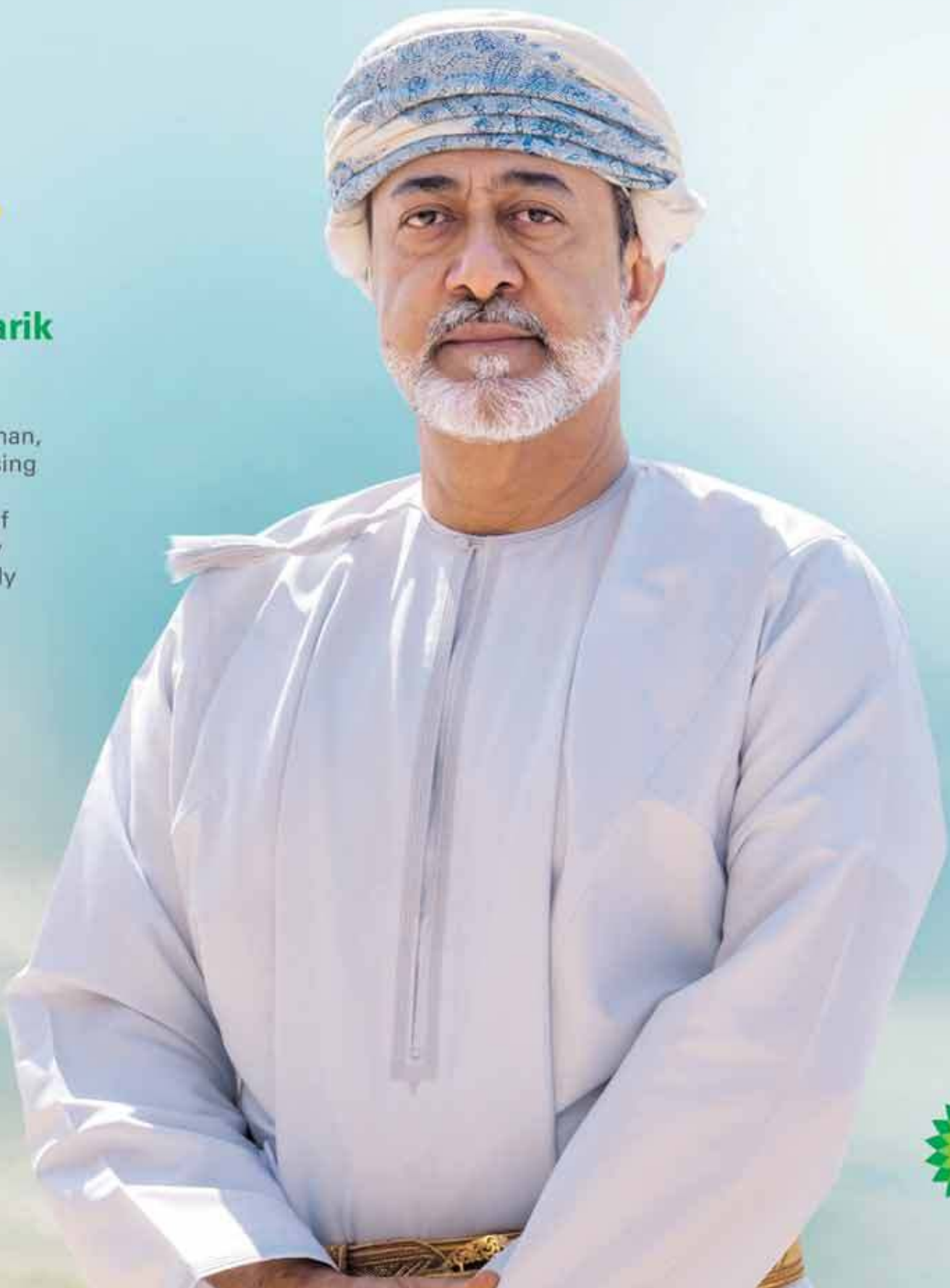
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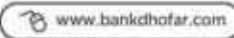
Honouring 53 years of progress, resilience & unity

On this 53rd National Day, we commemorate the progress and unity of our great nation and take pride in our contribution to the nation's development process during our 50 year journey. We will continue to deliver and unlock opportunities to support Oman's renewed renaissance under the prosperous reign of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.





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Sohar Power

Sohar Power’s bankruptcy application rejected by court

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, NOV 15

A Seeb court has issued a judgment rejecting the Sohar Power Company SAOG’s application for bankruptcy.

In a disclosure to Muscat Stock Exchange the company Sohar Power Company SAOG said: “Update on the Application for Bankruptcy, Sohar Power Company SAOG (the company) wishes to inform the Muscat Stock Exchange and the investor community that following the application for bankruptcy of Sohar Power Company SAOG (company) filed in the court, the company attended before the Primary court in a Seeb on November 13 to hear the court judgment.”

The company awaits the details on the judgment, after receipt of which the company will seek advice from its legal advisor and its partners.

The company had filed for bankruptcy protection in June 2023, stating that it was unable to pay its debts and was likely to become insolvent. The company has been unable to secure a contract since the term of Power and Water Purchase Agreement (PWPA) expired on May 15, 2022.

Sohar Power Company had a total installed capacity of 585 MW, generated from its combined cycle gas turbine (CCGT) power plant in Suhar.

The company’s current capital stands at RO 22.1 million, while its outstanding debts amount to RO 39 million.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 15

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), the leading integrated tourism and urban development company in Oman, marked the successful conclusion of the inaugural “Rummana” experience. Supervised by Janaen, the agritourism development company, and organised by Teepee & IPS, this initiative marks a significant milestone in agritourism projects within the region.

Over a span of 12 weeks, the Rummana initiative, held in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, highlighted unique agricultural and touristic experiences centred around the pomegranate harvesting season, attracting over 22,000 visitors. The event culminated with the sale of more than 1,800 kilogrammes of local pomegranates, highlighting its popularity and success.

Eng Mazin bin Issa al Raisi, General Manager of Janaen, expressed his pride in the initiative’s achievements. “Rummana has played a vital role in promoting the concept of eco-friendly agritourism. We are dedicated to fostering this emerging sector as an increasingly attractive tourism activity that significantly contributes to the local economy and sustainable agriculture.”

Omaima Mahmood al Hinai – Teepee’s Co-Founder reflected on the initiative’s impact: “Our goal was to highlight Al Jabal



The lush pomegranate orchards of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar provided a stunning backdrop for the first agritourism project organised by Omran Group

Al Akhdhar’s distinctive terrain and abundant seasonal fruits, creating an ideal destination for agritourism enthusiasts. The overwhelming response we have received inspires us to continue developing similar initiatives in the future.”

“Rummana” is part of Omran Group’s strategic efforts to diversify Oman’s tourism offerings, emphasising agricultural tourism, environmental tourism, and adventure tourism as some of the fastest-growing sectors globally. The Group is committed to collaborating with stakeholders to enhance sustainable agritourism, supporting job creation, and unlocking new investment opportunities.

Rummana, Oman’s first

RUMMANA OFFERED AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE INTO THE WORLD OF POMEGRANATES. VISITORS ENGAGED IN INTERACTIVE WORKSHOPS, ART INSTALLATIONS, AND GUIDED HIKES, ENHANCING THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF THE REGION’S AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE

agritourism project, was officially inaugurated on October 3, 2023. The project was a collaborative effort between Teepee, a cultural immersion glamping company, ABS Group, an Omani food investment giant, and Janaen, a joint venture between Oman Food Investment Holding Co. (NITAI) and Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group).

Located in Saiq village atop the mountains of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Rummana offered an immersive experience into the world of pomegranates. Visitors engaged in interactive workshops, art installations, and guided hikes, enhancing their understanding and appreciation of the region’s agricultural heritage.

The initiative also featured a menu curated by ABS Group, with local flavours harmonising with the scenic pomegranate orchards, and has been praised for its creative integration of nature and hospitality.

The success of Rummana, was also supported by contributions from various partners, including Omani artists, branding agencies, and local businesses.

Oman Air elevates cargo capabilities with new Boeing freighter

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, NOV 15

In a strategic move to bolster its cargo capabilities, Oman Air has welcomed its first dedicated cargo aircraft, the 737-800 Boeing Converted Freighter (BCF), in partnership with Boeing.

This marks a significant milestone for the Muscat-based carrier, signalling its commitment to expanding in the air cargo logistics sector.

The decision comes on the heels of Oman Air Cargo witnessing a remarkable 42 per cent increase in cargo volume during the first half of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022.

This surge is attributed to the carrier’s passenger airplane fleet’s capacity expansion.

The 737-800BCF, with a freight



Boeing and Oman Air announced an order and delivery of the operator’s first 737-800 Boeing Converted Freighter (BCF)

capacity of up to 23.9 tonnes and a range of 3,750 km, is poised to contribute significantly to Oman Air’s sustained capacity growth.

“The freighter will contribute to the growth of the air cargo logistics sector in Oman and beyond, will be based at our strategically located Muscat hub, and will enhance our ability to connect East and West,” emphasised Oman Air.

This move aligns with the airline’s vision to strengthen

connections and facilitate trade between regions.

Kate Schaefer, Vice President of Boeing Commercial Modifications, highlighted the importance of the 737-800BCF in complementing Oman Air’s passenger fleet with dedicated cargo capacity.

She expressed Boeing’s honoUr in partnering with Oman Air Cargo to provide a proven and reliable freighter that meets the

demands of an evolving air cargo landscape. The 737-800BCF, built on an efficient and reliable platform, is designed for airlines responding to increased cargo demand, optimising fleets, or replacing older freighters.

Notably, it boasts up to 20 per cent lower fuel use and CO2 emissions per tonne compared to the previous generation of standard-body freighters, aligning with sustainability goals.

The freighter conversion process was completed at Taikoo (Shandong) Aircraft Engineering Co Ltd (STAECO), underscoring the collaboration and global efforts involved in bringing this advanced cargo aircraft to fruition.

As Oman Air enhances its cargo capabilities, this development is poised to contribute significantly to the nation’s economic status.

UK INFLATION RATE COOLS BY MORE THAN EXPECTED

LONDON: British inflation cooled by more than expected in October as household energy prices dropped from a year ago while stubbornly high services sector price growth also eased, offering some relief to the Bank of England and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Annual consumer price inflation plunged to a lower-than-expected 4.6 per cent in October from 6.7 per cent in September, official data showed on Wednesday. The increase in consumer prices was the smallest in two years.

The Bank of England’s forecasts and the consensus from a Reuters poll of economists had pointed to a reading of 4.8 per cent .

Sterling fell slightly against the dollar after publication of the data which showed key inflation measures watched closely by the BoE also falling by more than expected.

Core inflation, which strips



Shoppers push trolleys along an aisle inside an ALDI supermarket near Altrincham. – Reuters

out energy and food prices, fell to 5.7 per cent from 6.1 per cent , while service sector inflation also fell by more than the central bank had expected to 6.6 per cent from 6.9 per cent .

The data represented some rare welcome news for Sunak who promised to halve price growth this year before an expected 2024 election that opinion polls show his Conservative Party is likely to lose. — Reuters



Omantel reports 28.7 pc rise in Q3 net profit

MUSCAT: Oman

Telecommunications Company Group has reported significant growth for the nine months ending in September 2023, with net profit increasing by 28.7 per cent from RO 195 million to RO 251 million at the end of September 2023.

The group's revenue also showed a robust increase of 10.6 per cent, rising from RO 1981.5 million to RO 2192.5 million at the end of September 2023.

At the domestic level, Omantel's revenues grew by 8.2 per cent, reaching RO 458.1 million compared to the



Omantel HQ

corresponding period.

This growth is primarily attributed to an increase in wholesale transit voice revenue by RO 17 million and device revenue by RO 10.9 million.

Retail revenue growth is driven by an 11.4-per cent increase in Mobile Postpaid revenue and a 4.4-per cent increase in Fixed Broadband revenues.

The net profit for the nine months ending in September 2023 stands at RO 54.7 million, a slight decrease from RO 54.9 million in the previous period.

Despite aggressive competition in both Mobile and Fixed

segments, the net profit is maintained at similar levels compared to last year, thanks to sustainable revenue growth in Postpaid Mobile revenue, fixed broadband revenue, and a reduction in finance costs and tax expenses. Zain Group, a subsidiary of Omantel Group, released its financial results yesterday, indicating an 11-per cent growth in revenues to reach \$ 4.6 billion.

The net profit also experienced a notable increase of 13 per cent, reaching \$ 561 million compared to the corresponding period in 2022.

Ahlibank joins forces with Sawa Nabni



Ahlibank has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the "Sawa Nabni" charitable team

MUSCAT: In a demonstration of its ongoing commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), ahlibank has signed (MoU) with the "Sawa Nabni" charitable team. The collaboration is focused on renovating deteriorated homes in selected areas.

The "ahli cares" initiative stands as a testament to the bank's commitment to supporting the local community and assisting families in need. It underscores the significant contributions of social responsibility efforts made by employees to support families in need.

The aid provided by the ahli cares team, comprised of several volunteering employees, has contributed to enhancing the living standards and quality of life for underprivileged families, aligning the bank's strategic goals with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Jumana al Hashmi, Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications at ahlibank, emphasised the significance of this collaborative effort, stating, "The ahli cares campaign represents our exceptional efforts to support the community and provide essential needs."

Moosa Abdul Rahman Hassan & Company unveils Suzuki's latest trio

MUSCAT: Moosa Abdul Rahman Hassan & Co, a renowned name in the automotive industry, has announced the much-anticipated unveiling of the latest Suzuki models — the all new Suzuki Fronx, all-new Grand Vitara, and Baleno. The cutting-edge technology of Suzuki vehicles is set to redefine the driving experience and elevate automotive innovation to new heights.

"We are excited to introduce the Suzuki Fronx, Grand Vitara, and Baleno, representing a new era of automotive excellence. These models reflect our commitment to pushing the boundaries of technology, design and performance.

"The line-up will undoubtedly provide our customers with an unmatched driving experience," said Said bin Darwish al Balushi, CEO of Moosa Abdul Rahman Hassan & Co.

SUZUKI FRONX: VIBE DIFFERENT

The all-new Suzuki Fronx is the future of SUV, with a blend of contemporary coupe design, advanced technology and exceptional fuel efficiency, it is a perfect choice for those seeking a sporty up-class Hatchback with sophisticated style and strength, offering an unparalleled driving experience like never before.

The all-new Fronx comes in seven monotone shades, namely – Arctic White, Splendid Silver, Grandeur Grey, Bluish Black, Celestial Blue and Opulent Red.

It also comes in dual-tone colour combinations of Splendid Silver with Bluish Black Roof, Opulent Red with Bluish Black Roof. Key features include:

- Innovative mild hybrid



Suzuki's latest trio: Fronx, Grand Vitara and Baleno

powertrain for exceptional fuel efficiency

- Appealing aesthetics
- Spacious, sturdy and sleek interiors with advanced technological features
- Head-up display, 360 view camera, 9" touchscreen display, Qi certified wireless charger
- Capable K15C dual jet engine (Mild Hybrid)

SUZUKI GRAND VITARA: LEAVE A GRAND TRAIL

The Suzuki Grand Vitara combines performance with refined elegance.

Its bold styling, advanced safety features and impressive performance ensure a comfortable and secure journey, whether you're on city streets or conquering challenging terrains.

With powerful SUV exterior styling, flushed hood and crafted chrome grill, long shoulders emphasise the overall length while the shoulder line and the front/rear fenders give it a muscular and assertive SUV exterior.

The front face with distinctive 3-point signature lamps, chrome grille bar which connects right and left lamps, and polygonal grille give the all-new Grand Vitara a premium look.

Sophisticated layered instrument panel expresses luxury and the thick console enhances the appearance as a confident SUV.

The all-new Grand Vitara is equipped with a panoramic sunroof, head-up display, 9" display audio system, 360 view camera. Moreover, wireless

charging and rear AC vents contribute to great comfort and accessibility.

Key features include:

- Strong aggressive exterior design
- 4WD all grip select – Drive system with 6 speed automatic transmission
- Cruise control
- LED headlamps
- Qi certified wireless charger
- Sunroof

SUZUKI BALENO: RAISE YOUR EDGE

The Suzuki Baleno is a versatile hatchback that seamlessly blends modern design with practicality, featuring a spacious interior, advanced infotainment systems and a capable engine.



Ali al Lawati receives the appreciation certificate

Meethaq takes part at Oman's Banking conference

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking, a division of Bank Muscat, recently participated in the 2nd Oman Islamic Banking Conference titled "Islamic Banking and Finance: Augmenting Competitiveness and Generating Investment Opportunities" at Crowne Plaza Muscat Hotel.

The event, under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Mamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, aimed to discuss challenges and solutions for expanding Islamic services and products in Oman.

In collaboration with the Central Bank of Oman, the conference highlighted the potential of Islamic banking and financing in generating sustainable investment opportunities. Ali bin Ahmed al Lawati, Assistant General Manager of Meethaq Corporate Banking, presented a paper on "Islamic Capital Markets and Investment Opportunities," addressing Islamic financial markets, the role of Meethaq Islamic Banking, and challenges in the sector.

Malabar Gold unveils exclusive Omani-themed collection

MUSCAT: A special collection of pendants and rings priced at RO 53 has been launched on the occasion of the 53rd Oman National Day.

To pay tribute to the glorious spirit of the nation on Oman's 53rd National Day, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 335 showrooms across 11 countries, has launched a special collection of diamond pendants and rings.

Priced at RO 53, the collection

has been crafted in an Omani theme, making it an ideal option for self-gifting or gifting to loved ones during the National Day celebration.

Available across all of the brand's outlets in Oman, the exclusive collection is available in 10 designs and is part of the brand's Mine Diamond jewellery array.

"We are very excited to join in the 53rd Oman National Day celebrations by launching a limited-



A special collection of pendants and rings priced at RO 53 has been launched on the occasion of the 53rd Oman National Day.

edition collection of pendants and rings.

"As the country and its residents celebrate this momentous occasion, Malabar Gold & Diamonds is proud and honoured to be a part of Oman's rich legacy of culture and heritage.

"With 13 world-class showrooms across the Sultanate and more showroom openings in the pipeline, Malabar Gold & Diamonds' stature as the go-to

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Japan’s economic concerns over Gaza War

There are several countries that are still monitoring the tragic situation in resolute Gaza, despite the successive barbaric attacks carried out by Israel against Palestinian civilians. The genocide of the people of Palestine continues despite the mounting death toll. Among those countries that are monitoring the unfolding tragedy with great concern is Japan. Although part of the Western bloc, it is seeking to bring about a halt to the hostilities. It has demanded compliance with international law and legitimacy.



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

In the midst of this crisis, Foreign Minister of Japan, Yoko Kamikawa, had a call with Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, a few days ago where they urged an immediate end to the attacks on innocent people, a cessation of the bombing of civilian infrastructure, and for immediate efforts to bring about an urgent truce to enable the people to access humanitarian relief. Japan is keen to give priority to the language of dialogue in finding a final and permanent solution to the Palestinian issue on the basis of a two-state solution. Japan was among four

countries that voted against a draft resolution submitted by Russia to the UN Security Council at the beginning of the war alongside the United States, Britain and France in rejecting the draft. Japanese officials also rushed to Israel and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, similar to what was done by the heads of the United States and some European countries. Japan’s foreign minister has asked Israel to stop its attacks against the Palestinians, according to what the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said. At the same time, she

stressed the necessity of starting a humanitarian truce in this bloody conflict. In the recent meetings of the seven countries hosted by Japan, the Japanese minister announced that she is monitoring the situation with great concern regarding the violations taking place in Gaza, and intends to provide aid worth \$10 million to civilians in Gaza. Japan, on its part, is concerned about this conflict in the Arab region, and warns of its possible effects on its country’s economy, especially with regard to the energy sector, as it is the third largest economy in the world that

depends on most of the oil imports coming from the Gulf region. There are many negative impacts on other peoples and institutions in the world, including the Japanese individuals, families, and institutions with regard to their consumption and the status of their companies. In general, the ongoing war on Gaza will have negative effects on some foreign economies, but it will leave major adverse impacts on the Israeli economy, which is collapsing daily as a result of its war machine continuing to kill innocent people of Gaza.

The AI future is still a long way off

In a recent discussion with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, tech billionaire Elon Musk prophesied that there “will come a point where no job is needed,” owing to advances in artificial intelligence. “You can have a job if you want a job,” continued the CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, “but AI will be able to do everything.” The future is long, and Musk did not specify when exactly this point will come. But, at least for the next several decades, the odds of AI causing a jobs apocalypse are vanishingly small. Fear of technological unemployment is nothing new. In the early nineteenth century, a group of English textile workers known as the Luddites smashed labor-saving machinery to prevent its use. Yet even though technology has leapt forward in the two centuries since then, businesses continue to employ workers. Much of the concern about technological advances eliminating the need for human workers is rooted in a zero-sum mentality that fundamentally misunderstands how economies evolve. Yes, new technologies will be able to perform some tasks relatively better and at lower cost than humans. Yes, this will lead businesses to use technology, not workers, for those tasks. But the process of creative destruction creates as well as destroys. New technology will make many workers more productive and thus of greater value to firms, which will compete more aggressively for them in the labour market, driving up their wages and incomes. Higher incomes will increase overall demand for goods and services in the economy, which in turn will increase the need for workers. This dynamic process allows an economy to avoid higher structural unemployment. Moreover, new technology creates novel goods and services, which also increases demand for workers. This is not just a theory. Consider the remarkable advances in information and communications technology and robotics over the past five decades. These breakthroughs have had profound effects on the labour market – for example, by substantially



MICHAEL R. STRAIN
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tech billionaire Elon Musk prophesied that there “will come a point where no job is needed,”

reducing the employment share of manufacturing and clerical occupations – and the broader economy. But it has not become more difficult for workers to find jobs. There has not been an upward trend in the unemployment rate. Looking ahead to the next several decades, my main concern is not too many workers, but too few. Falling fertility rates and rapid population aging will reduce the rate of workforce growth in the United States and across much of the developed world. These countries could rely on larger inflows of immigrants to make up for the shortfall, but the political winds are currently blowing in the opposite direction. In the US, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office forecasts population growth of

0.3 per cent per year over the next three decades, or roughly one-third the pace from 1983-2022. In this environment, workers who want jobs should be able to find them. Of course, advances in AI will certainly be disruptive, but not by eliminating – or even substantially reducing – the need for workers. Instead, AI will change what many workers do. Again, this is not new. While technological unemployment may have failed to materialise over previous decades, the structure and nature of employment were utterly transformed. The MIT economist David Autor and coauthors found that the majority of current employment is in job specialities introduced after 1940. The further into the future

we look, the harder it is to rule out the possibility that Musk’s prediction could come true. But a world in which AI eventually replaces all human workers would look a lot different from ours. While one of today’s fundamental economic problems is how to make the best use of scarce resources, Musk’s future is one of abundance, in which technology meets all our needs and inequality as we currently understand it no longer exists. Why accumulate wealth in a world of abundance? On the other hand, such a world could also exacerbate inequality, particularly if a relatively small number of people own the machines that are generating all the income. How would humans engage with this world? I receive a great deal of fulfilment and satisfaction

from my professional activities, but the primary reason I get up and go to work each day is to provide for my family. Without the need to put food on the table and money in the retirement accounts, would we get up each day with the goal of bettering ourselves and our communities? Or would we fall to the darker angels of our nature, with unoccupied time leading to boredom and dystopia? There are no easy answers to such questions. Fortunately, it’s more likely than not that we won’t have to answer them. Technological change has not eliminated the need for human workers in the past, and it likely won’t in the future – at least not within any timeframe that is relevant to workers and policymakers today. © Project Syndicate, 2023

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- May the Almighty protect and bless him -

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A Seeb player attempts a basket against Al Bashayer during the Oman Basketball League match.

Seeb clinch thrilling victory over Al Bashayer

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, NOV 15

In a nail-biting game held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, Seeb Club secured a hard-fought win against Al Bashayer with a final score of 62-58. The intense match was part of the Oman Basketball League general season for 2023-24. The overall game was dramatic and exciting between the two sides when Seeb managed to turn their deficit into an exciting win over Al Bashayer. Several players from Seeb played a significant role in the victory and scoring, including Bryce Jonathan, Hassan al Faraji, Rashid al Zahibi, and Abdulraza al Batashi. Meanwhile, most of Al Bashayer's points were scored by Damon Rosser, Saeed al Saadi and Hadeed Beit Bakhit. The match began on an even footing, but Al Bashayer took the lead with Ahmed al Halhali netted two points. Seeb responded promptly, levelling the score with two points from Hassan al Faraji. The game unfolded with captivating back-and-forth actions, as Damon Rosser from Al Bashayer contributed four points. Seeb's Marwan al Hadidi responded with two points, and Bryce Jonathan added one from a foul. Despite Seeb's efforts, Al Bashayer maintained a slim

lead of 6-5 by the end of the first quarter. The excitement continued with both teams exchanging attacks, resulting in Seeb adding 9 points and Al Bashayer scoring 13 points, concluding the first quarter with Al Bashayer leading 19-14. The second quarter witnessed an equilibrium in both defensive and offensive strategies, with each team adding 15 points. As the first half concluded, Al Bashayer maintained a lead of 34-29. Seeb staged a comeback in the third quarter, taking the lead in scoring operations and managing to equalise the score. Seeb players hit 16 points, while Al Bashayer managed 11 points. The third quarter ended in a tie at 45-45. The fourth quarter continued the intense battle, with both teams adding 10 points each, resulting in a tie at 55-55. The match then proceeded to a fifth quarter, where Seeb Club outscored Al Bashayer by 7 points, to secure the final victory with a score of 62-58. International referee Issam al Siyabi officiated the match as the first referee, and international referee Rashid al Mushaifri served as the second referee. Mazen al Hilali was the third referee, while on the table were Yaqub al Nadabi, Majid al Akhzami and Ghaleb al Hasani.

Red Warriors look for strong start in joint WC qualifiers

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 15

Oman will target a strong start in their opening match against Chinese Taipei for Group D of the Preliminary Joint Qualification - Round 2 for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027. The match will take place at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Thursday and will begin at 7 pm (Oman time). In the same Group, Malaysia host Kyrgyz Republic at National Stadium Bukit Jalil. The Branko Ivankovic-coached side wants to capture the three winning points that will give a boost the Red Warriors in their journey at the joint qualifiers which will last for eight months approximately. The national senior team players are in good shape and fitness to commence their campaign in the Round 2 qualification. Coach Branko voiced confidence in the press meet on Wednesday saying Oman are ready for a strong performance against

Chinese Taipei. "It is an awaiting moment for us to begin the historic qualifiers. We will enter the qualifiers with high potential and move further until reaching the desired target especially this time as Asia will have 8 direct slots and a play-off berth in the forthcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup," the Croatian said. "It is always that the opening match will be difficult. Although Oman are the best technically but we have to respect the opponent. I am fully satisfied with players discipline and performance in the training camp. I am confident on my players to give a strong display against Chinese Taipei," he added. **AL YAHYAI TO MISS MATCH** Commenting on the injured players, the 69 years old responded that Salah al Yahyai will not take part in the match due to his injury. "Khalid al Hajri also is suffering from an injury in his knee while Ahmed al Hudaifi and Mahmood will not be ready for the opening match. Arshad will be one our



Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic addresses a press conference in Muscat.



choices for the next camps," he said. Chinese Taipei's game will be followed with another challenging fixture against Kyrgyzstan on Tuesday in Bishkek city. "We had worked hard to analyse the opponent and in this kind of matches you may get any surprises. However, I am confident on my squad to deliver top game," he concluded. Oman team captain Harib al Saadi affirmed that the joint qualifiers is very essential event. "We have completed ten days of training camp ahead of this crucial game and the readiness of the team is in good level to show a top game," he said. "Oman fans are used to be in the top events and we are looking forward for their usual support in the qualifiers matches," he added. The head coach of Chinese Taipei, Gary John White, said he is happy to be in Muscat for a second time. "The players are in good condition after many days in the training sessions. They are fit for the match. The main focus

is to rebuild the team as currently the team is comprised of a great mixture of young and experienced players." "The Chinese Taipei players are developing and some of them currently play in Chinese Professional League besides that Chinese Taipei League is growing. Furthermore, Chinese Taipei players are hungry to earn more accomplishments and to attend in top assignments including FIFA World Cup," the former coach of Guam added. "I had observed Oman team in their last friendlies against Palestine and USA. They have quality players with desired speed. It is challenging match to play against the top-seeded team," he said. Chinese Taipei player Wu Chun Ching said he is excited for the match. "It is a vital match for us as it is representing the qualifiers for FIFA World Cup. We will work very hard to come out with the desired result. The weather is good in Oman and we are looking for a top match," he said.

OFA LAUNCHES FOOTBALL TALENT DEVELOPMENT CENTRE



MUSCAT: The inauguration of the Football Talent Development Centre was held under the auspices of Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, at Al Seeb Stadium on Tuesday. As part of the event, Basil al Rawas oversaw a training session and performance by players under the programme, managed by the centre's technical crews.

In line with Oman Vision 2040, the Oman Football Association (OFA) has entered into a partnership agreement with Jindal Shaded Iron and Steel (JSIS) for the project.

This national project is part of the Talent Support Programme initiated by the world football body Fifa in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth and in partnership with JSIS.

JSIS envisions cultivating a generation of talented athletes, aiming to amplify their potential and empower them to proudly represent the nation, showcasing its colours in diverse international competitions and events by the project's completion. This project is poised to inspire emerging young football talent, propelling them towards loftier goals and dreams by providing top-notch coaching, state-of-the-art facilities, and opportunities to realise their full potential.

Al Rawas conveyed his delight at the project's inauguration, emphasising its inherent value and the feasibility of its objectives. He stated, "Sports possesses the transformative power to inspire, unite, and build character. This initiative stands as a testament to our unwavering commitment to nurturing the potential of our youth and elevating Oman's football to unprecedented heights. It underscores our ambitions for the future of Omani football, forging a robust pathway for youth to actively participate and excel."

He also remarked, "Football is poised for a positive and ambitious future, given the nation's abundant talents, capabilities, and growing interest. I am delighted by the Ministry's active participation in this project, and I am confident in its success through the close cooperation and sustainable partnership between the public and private sectors."

"The strategic partnership between OFA and JSIS serves as a commendable



example of collaboration between the public and private sectors. I hope the programme will play a pivotal role in talent selection and yield outcomes that align with the progress observed across various sectors of the country. This partnership also underscores the private sector's eagerness to contribute to achieving sports goals at elevated levels befitting our dear country."

In conclusion, Al Rawas affirmed, "The Ministry is committed to offering assistance and support for all targeted strategic projects and programmes. We anticipate that the project will yield promising qualitative outcomes by the end of 2026, benefiting Omani football and aligning with its goals, as well as fulfilling the aspirations of the fans."

Shaikh Salim bin Said al Wahaibi, Chairman of the Oman Football Association (OFA), expressed his joy at the commencement of the project's first edition, commending the Ministry's efforts. He also extended his gratitude to Basil al Rawas and Fifa for their

AS PART OF THE FIFA TALENT SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Basil al Rawas: The Ministry promotes partnerships between the public and private sectors in line with Oman Vision 2024

Al Wahaibi: Our strategic partnership with JSIS is an example of sustainable partnerships

Harsha Shetty: Sports hold a unique place in building nations

Al Masroori: Launching four training centres in Muscat

support. Additionally, he praised the significance of the sustainable strategic partnership with JSIS, expressing hope for the project's success in positively impacting the football landscape in the Sultanate of Oman.

The OFA chief said: "We take pride in our strategic partnership with JSIS to

inaugurate this national project aimed at supporting and developing talent in Oman. This partnership exemplifies our dedication to talent development and a sincere aspiration to attain sporting excellence. We firmly believe that the project will serve as a great source of inspiration for numerous ambitious young individuals, reflecting the nurturing environment fostered by the programme."

The unique Talent Centre is poised to take the lead in identifying promising young players and guiding them towards advancement in their football careers, potentially opening doors to top-class professional opportunities. Moreover, it will elevate young players' technical, tactical, and physical skills through meticulously structured training programmes while instilling essential values such as discipline, teamwork, sportsmanship, and a robust work ethic in young athletes.

Harsha Shetty, Chief Executive

Officer of JSIS, remarked, "Sports holds a unique position in nation-building. On the field, we imbibe the essence of teamwork, humility in defeat, camaraderie of sportsmanship, and the profound honour of representing our country and team. At JSIS, we wholeheartedly champion sports and youth, placing them at the core of our focus. Our ongoing support for the Oman Hockey Association and the successful partnership with the Oman Football Association last year underscores our commitment to nurturing athletic talent and contributing to the growth of Omani youth through various sporting initiatives."

He added, "We are thrilled to collaborate with OFA in launching the first-ever football academy in Oman. The inception of this Talent Center marks the beginning of many as we strive to inspire and consistently cultivate our youth's potential. This aligns seamlessly with our identity as an Omani company devoted to social investment and responsibility."

"Youth and sports stand as integral pillars of Oman Vision 2040. JSIS remains steadfast in ensuring that its endeavours harmonise with the vision of the Sultanate of Oman, considering these centres as a positive stride toward realising the overarching goal of supporting sports and bolstering the role of youth."

"The collaboration between JSIS and OFA will unlock numerous opportunities for ambitious Omani youth, providing a fully equipped centre to showcase their skills and compete at a global level."

He concluded, "The establishment of the Talent Development Centre aims to elevate players' skills, identify talent, foster skills and character development, and create a pathway for young talents to progress in professional football."

Mohsin al Masroori, First Vice-Chairman of OFA, said, "According to the five-year plan for the project, the training schedule is set to commence in its initial phase with the establishment of four training centres in Muscat, three for juniors, and a fourth centre dedicated to girls. The project's scope is projected to expand, with preliminary estimates indicating the launch of eight new centres across the various governorates of the Sultanate in 2024."

Sinner edges Djokovic to close in on ATP Finals' last four



TURIN, Italy: Jannik Sinner edged towards becoming the first ever Italian to reach the last four of the ATP Finals on Tuesday after a thrilling 7-5, 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/2) win over Novak Djokovic.

World number four Sinner needed a straight-set victory in front of enthusiastic home support in Turin over tennis icon Djokovic to guarantee passage from the Green Group with a match to spare.

And while the 22-year-old couldn't quite make that happen, a superb performance gave him his first win in four attempts over Djokovic, who is bidding to win for a record seventh time at the year-ending tournament.

"It means a lot to me," said Sinner on court.

"When you win against the world number one who has won 24 Grand Slams it's obviously in the top-top."

Fans made an almighty din for Sinner, chanting his name to the rafters once he claimed victory in an exciting, three-hour contest which ran way past midnight at the Pala Alpitour.

Sinner has had the best year of his career and looks be fulfilling the promise he has long shown,

winning four titles this season including the Masters 1000 event at Toronto, and looks on form in Italy.

He made the first breakthrough when he capitalised on Djokovic handing him advantage in game 11 with a double fault, moving 6-5 ahead with a big backhand before claiming the set with a service game to love.

Djokovic pulled level after a bruising second set in which neither player faced a single break point, but after fighting back from 4-2 down in the decider he wilted in the tie-break and ended his winning run at 20 matches.

"In these kinds of matches very few opportunities will be presented and if you don't use them then the other player will," said Djokovic.

"Some you win some you lose... I don't think I've done too many things wrong in terms of my game, he was just more decisive and courageous in the moments where he needed to be."

Both players' fate will be decided in the final round of group matches, with Djokovic facing Hubert Hurkacz who has stepped in for Stefanos Tsitsipas after the Greek pulled out of the



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas (R) embraces with Denmark's Holger Rune after withdrawing from their group stage match at the ATP Finals tournament in Turin. Stefanos Tsitsipas pulled out of the tournament with a back injury. — AFP

tournament with a back injury against Sinner's next opponent Holger Rune.

TSITSIPAS OUT

And Rune will have the benefit of having played just three games before being awarded a straight-set win.

in the afternoon session, fans angered by him playing despite persistent rumours of injury.

"I'm gutted that I wasn't able to finish the match," Tsitsipas, 25, told reporters.

"My doctors and the countless visits that I had in the last few days suggested that I play... Unfortunately I felt terrible on the court. I did what I could do in best possible way to be ready and fit for this match, But it didn't work out for me."

Tsitsipas said after pulling out that he had felt problems during his warm-up and that once on the court he felt too much pain to complete the match.

"I've gone through pain during matches in the past... But this was clearly too much to handle and I had to take the difficult decision to do what I did," he said.

Tsitsipas also hinted that a "lack of rest" in a packed schedule could have contributed to him having to drop out.

The ATP has come under fire from players and coaches for scheduling which often leads to late-night matches and short recovery times during tournaments.

On Wednesday, world number

two Carlos Alcaraz will try to get his Red Group campaign up and running against Andrey Rublev, while Daniil Medvedev eyes a spot in the last four in his clash with Alexander Zverev. — AFP

ATP Finals results on Tuesday Singles

Green Group
Holger Rune (DEN x8) bt Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x6) 2-1 retired; Jannik Sinner (ITA x4) bt Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) 7-5, 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/2)

Doubles
Green Group
Santiago Gonzalez (MEX)/Edouard Roger-Vasselin (FRA) bt Maximo Gonzalez (ARG)/Andres Molteni (ARG) 6-4, 6-4; Marcel Granollers (ESP)/Horacio Zeballos (ARG) bt Ivan Dodig (CRO)/Austin Krajicek (USA) 6-4, 6-4

ATP FINALS STANDINGS

Standings at the ATP Finals in Turin after Tuesday's matches (played, won, lost, sets won, sets lost, x denotes seeding):

Green Group
1. Jannik Sinner (ITA x4) 2 2 0 4 1
2. Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) 2 1 1 3 3
3. Holger Rune (DEN x8) 2 1 1 3 2
4. Hubert Hurkacz (HUN) 0 0 0 0 0
5. Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x6) 2 0 2 0 4
Singles
Red Group
1. Daniil Medvedev (RUS x3) 1 1 0 2 0
2. Alexander Zverev (GER x7) 1 1 0 2 1
3. Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x2) 1 0 1 1 2
4. Andrey Rublev (RUS x5) 1 0 1 0 2

Babar Azam resigns as Pakistan captain after World Cup flop

LAHORE: Babar Azam said on Wednesday he was resigning as Pakistan captain in all three formats following the team's Cricket World Cup flop but will continue playing for the national team.

"Today, I am stepping down as the captain of Pakistan in all formats," Azam announced on X, formerly Twitter, after meeting Pakistan Cricket Board chief Zakar Ashraf in Lahore.

"It's a difficult decision but I feel it is the right time for this call. I will continue to represent Pakistan as a player in all three formats."

Azam, 29, had been leading the side since November 2019 but after the failure to reach the World Cup semifinals in India his



Babar Azam, 29, had been leading the side since November 2019 but after Pakistan's failure to reach the World Cup semifinals in India his position was immediately under threat. — Reuters

position was immediately under threat. "I am here to support the new captain and the team with my experience and dedication," added Azam.

"I want to express my sincere thanks to the Pakistan Cricket Board for entrusting me with this significant responsibility."

Shan Masood is tipped to lead the Test side while Shaheen Shah Afridi is the likely candidate for the white ball captaincy, but no official announcement has been made.

Azam said his journey had been a rollercoaster ride which culminated in a record of four wins and five losses at the World Cup.

As well as suffering an eighth defeat in eight meetings at World

Cups against arch-rivals India, he also oversaw a first loss to neighbours Afghanistan.

"I vividly remember the moment when I received the call from the PCB to lead Pakistan in 2019. Over the past four years, I've experienced many highs and lows on and off the field," said Azam. "But I wholeheartedly and passionately aimed to maintain Pakistan's pride and respect in the cricket world."

Ranked as the number one batsman before the World Cup, Azam failed to score big runs in India, finishing with 320 without a century over nine games.

Azam led Pakistan in 20 Tests, winning ten, losing six and drawing the other four. In 43 ODIs, Pakistan won 26, losing 16

with one no result.

In the shortest format, Azam led Pakistan to the semifinal of the Twenty20 World Cup in 2021 and a runners-up finish a year later.

In 71 T20Is, he enjoyed 41 wins, 23 losses with seven no results.

Team director Mickey Arthur and head coach Grant Bradburn also held discussions with Ashraf but they are likely to remain in their positions.

Pakistan has a tough tour of Australia coming up where they play three Tests, starting in Perth from December 12.

They have lost all of their last 14 Tests in the country with their most recent victory coming back in 1995.—AFP

KOHLI RECORD TON, 7-STAR SHAMI POWER INDIA TO FINAL



LEADING BATSMEN AND BOWLERS

BATSMEN
Virat Kohli (IND) 711 runs, Quinton de Kock (RSA) 591, Rachin Ravindra (NZL) 578, Daryl Mitchell (NZL) 552, Rohit Sharma (IND) 550, Shreyas Iyer (IND) 526, David Warner (AUS) 499, Rassie van der Dussen (RSA) 442, Mitchell Marsh (AUS) 426, Dawid Malan (ENG) 404

BOWLERS
Mohammed Shami (IND) 23 wickets; Adam Zampa (AUS) 22; Dilshan Madushanka (SRI) 21; Shaheen Shah Afridi (PAK) 18, Gerald Coetzee (RSA) 18, Jasprit Bumrah (IND) 18; Marco Jansen (RSA) 17; Mitchell Santner (NZL) 16, Haris Rauf (PAK) 16, Bas de Leede (NED) 16, Ravindra Jadeja (IND) 16



MUMBAI: India's Virat Kohli struck a record 50th hundred and fast bowler Mohammed Shami's seven-wicket haul proved equally crucial as the unbeaten hosts overpowered New Zealand by 70 runs in a high-scoring match on Wednesday to march into the World Cup final.

Kohli's 117 and a blistering 105 from Shreyas Iyer helped India post 397 for four wickets after they won the toss at the Wankhede Stadium, where the hosts had lifted their second and last 50-over World Cup trophy in 2011.

In reply, New Zealand, who beat

India at the same stage in the 2019 tournament, were bundled out for 327 in the 49th over with Daryl Mitchell's excellent innings of 134 proving to be in vain.

Australia and South Africa meet in the second semifinal at Kolkata's Eden Gardens on Thursday, with the final on Sunday in Ahmedabad.

Mitchell added 181 for the third wicket with Kane Williamson to keep the Black Caps firmly in the chase but Shami, who sent back both openers, returned to dismiss the New Zealand captain and Tom Latham in one over to put India on top.

The right-handed Mitchell

suffered cramps after getting past his hundred but continued to plunder runs with Glenn Phillips during a 75-run stand before the latter fell for a 33-ball 41.

The target ultimately proved too steep, however, as the Indian juggernaut rolled on for their 10th win in as many matches in the 50-over showpiece.

Shami finished with figures of seven for 57, his third five-wicket haul in the tournament.

Kohli's knock, which came off 113 balls, gave him the record for the highest number of centuries in the 50-overs format of the game, taking him past Sachin Tendulkar, the Indian batting great who was in the stands to applaud the feat.

After scampering two runs off fast bowler Lockie Ferguson to get to his mark, Kohli took off his helmet and bowed to the stands where television cameras showed Tendulkar and former England soccer captain David Beckham standing and clapping in appreciation.

The 35-year-old hit nine fours and two sixes before holing out in the deep off fast bowler Tim Southee, who took three wickets for 100.

Iyer's blistering 105, which came off 70 balls and was studded with four fours and eight sixes, provided the late fireworks for India.

India captain Rohit Sharma, who made 47, gave the hosts a rollicking start in a 71-run opening stand with Shubman Gill. Gill retired hurt due to leg cramps but returned to resume his innings and finished unbeaten on 80. — **Reuters**

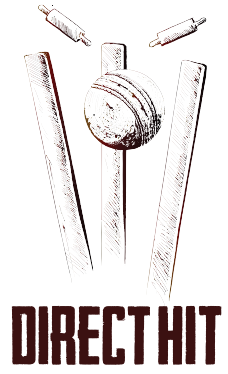
Shreyas' quick runs, Shami's 7 wickets extra special

The first semifinal was to be India's acid test as it was against their bogey team New Zealand who always found ways to beat and upset India. But this time India was ready for the test and how well they managed to get past a fighting New Zealand and reach the final.

There was superlative performance from Rohit Shama, who once again gave India the rousing start to set the template, Shubman Gill's half century who made sure India did not drop the tempo after Rohit's dismissal, Virat Kohli's 50th ODI hundred who kept one end going,



ANIS SAJJAN



DIRECT HIT

Mohammed Shami's seven on a flat wicket and of course the hurricane hundred by Shreyas Iyer who made sure India had enough in the bank.

All performances from India were special but I would pick two as very special, the reason I pick Shreyas Iyer and Mohammed Shami as both were crucial in the context of the game.

Firstly, the way Shreyas attacked all the New Zealand bowlers and made sure India posted a total which was good enough to sustain a New Zealand fight. Shreyas hit 105 runs of Just 70 balls with eight massive sixes and four boundaries at a strike rate of 150 which made sure



India almost reached 400, India's eventual score was 397.

I was there to see the game, and everyone knew the ball would swing in the night at Wankhede. And it did but Bumrah and Siraj did not get the

early wickets as expected. But Rohit banked on Shami who got two wickets in first two overs to keep New Zealand quiet.

That's when it looked India would cruise but as New Zealand always do, they fought back. Captain Kane Williamson and Daryll Mitchell stitched a partnership of 171 and till 30 overs they were in the game. Shami had dropped a sitter of Kane Williamson and he had to make amends and boy what he did was absolutely mind blowing.

He first got Kane Williamson and in the same over got Tom Latham. But New Zealand were not done. He went to knock of the last three wickets to skittle

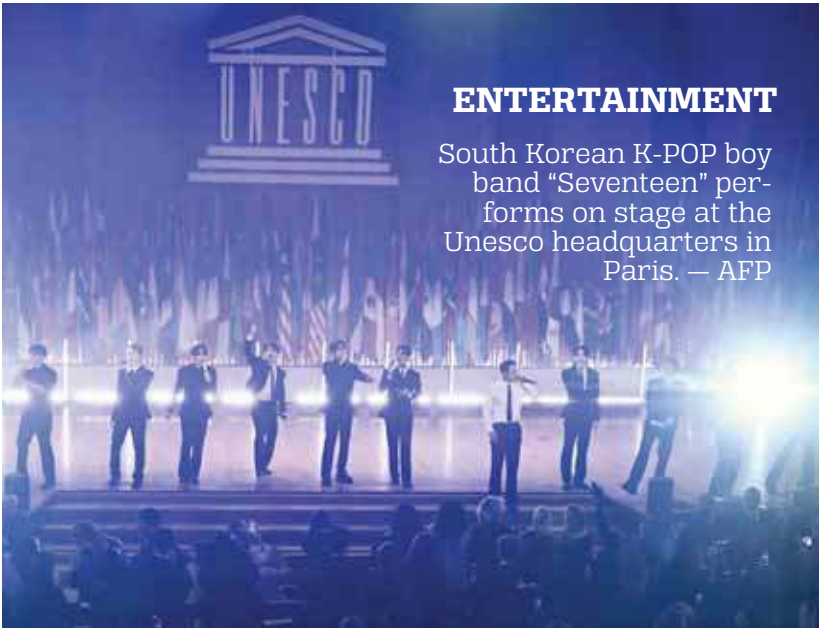
out News Zealand for 327 to give India that win against a team which was haunting them in ICC knockout events, eventually becoming the highest wicket taker in this World Cup with 23 wickets.

The margin of win might look big but trust me it was very close and all of us in the stadium were quiet when the partnership between Daryll Mitchell and Kane Williamson was going on. Wankhede is a good chasing ground and the extra runs scored by Shreyas at the strike rate gave India the cushion and the crucial wickets picked by Shami was the difference in India winning and New Zealand losing.



TRAVEL TALES

The Golden Gate Bridge, an iconic suspension bridge located in San Francisco, California, spanning the Golden Gate Strait, the entrance to San Francisco Bay from the Pacific Ocean. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

South Korean K-POP boy band “Seventeen” performs on stage at the Unesco headquarters in Paris. — AFP



ART

This picture shows the “Genie de la Patrie” mould which was damaged by protestors on the sidelines of the December 1, 2018, “Yellow Vests” demonstration, in a gallery of the Arc de Triomphe on the day of its reopening in Paris, France. — AFP



CULTURE

Jas Singh, an advisor to the Sikh Federation in the UK, poses for a portrait at the Guru Nanak Gurdwara, in Smethwick, near Birmingham, central England. — AFP



FASHION

Brazilian lawmaker Erika Hilton, of the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL), presents a creation by Apartamento 03 during the Sao Paulo Fashion Week in Sao Paulo, Brazil. —AFP

art & life

THURSDAY | NOVEMBER 16, 2023 | JUMADA AL ULA 2, 1445 AH

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Wild encounters in Oman

Oman’s diverse terrain boasts majestic mountains, vast deserts, and vibrant marine life, home to rare species like Arabian Oryx and Leopards, offering thrilling adventures for visitors... P32

Photo by Environment Society of Oman

FASHION

Giorgio Armani fashions his own legacy with succession plan

GIORGIO ARMANI HAS always kept a tight grip on the firm he founded, and the Italian fashion king’s attention to detail extends to clear rules on how it should be run after his death. Armani, 89, remains CEO and

effectively sole shareholder of the business he set up with his late partner in the 1970s, which had a 2.35 billion euros (\$2.5 billion) turnover last year. With no children to pass it on to, there has been speculation about the long-term future of Armani’s empire and whether, in an industry dominated by luxury conglomerates, it will be able to maintain the independence he treasures. But a hitherto obscure document from 2016, held by a notary in Milan and reviewed by Reuters, sets out the future governing principles for those who inherit the group, while another details issues including protecting jobs at the firm. The first document explains how his heirs should approach a potential stock market listing — though not until five years after his passing — and any potential M&A activity. For the Armani look itself, the document commits them to the “search for an essential, modern,



elegant and unostentatious style with attention to detail and wearability”. The document is the product of an extraordinary meeting that Armani called in 2016 to adopt new bylaws for the group which

would come into force upon his death.

SUCCESSION PLAN

Armani’s heirs are expected to include his sister, three other fam-

ily members working in the business, long-term collaborator Pantaleo Dell’Orco and a charitable foundation. The bylaws divide the company’s share capital into six categories with different voting rights and powers, and were amended in September to create some without voting rights. The Armani group, which as well as the CEO also represents the family members mentioned in the document, declined to comment on the document or its contents. It is not clear from the document how the different blocs of shares will be distributed, but corporate governance experts say the guidelines should ensure a relatively smooth transition by giving the board a central role. “It is an organisation that reduces the margins for disagreement between the heirs,” Guido Corbetta, professor of Corporate Strategy at Milan’s Bocconi University, said.

Armani has a younger sister, Rosanna, two nieces, Silvana and Roberta, as well as a nephew, Andrea Camerana. Dell’Orco is also considered part of the family. All are currently board members and, apart from Rosanna, all work for the Armani group. Silvana and Dell’Orco are heads of design, working closely for decades with Armani, who dubbed them his “lieutenants of style”. The 2016 bylaws set the process for how the board will appoint future women’s and men’s style directors in a company known for its classic tailoring. Roberta is Head of Entertainment & VIP Relations, while Camerana is sustainability managing director. Other fashion groups including LVMH, Europe’s most valuable luxury company, also have succession issues, with the five children of LVMH CEO and Chairman Bernard Arnault all having key management roles at brands in the empire. — Reuters



A Cook's Tour of the Tokyo Food Scene



IT'S A MONDAY AFTERNOON in the Tsukiji branch of the Tokyo Sushi Academy and we're about to be put to the test. Or I am anyway. Most of the other students enrolled in the Japanese Culinary Intensive course are professionals. They are local or from abroad, just brushing up on skills or adding to their repertoire. My bench mate works charter yachts out of Australia. Our sensei, chef Hiro Tsumoto, noticed a tattoo on his forearm with Japanese characters and called out: "Hey, that's my aunt's name!"

I'm among the civilians whom the academy also welcomes into the course. I'm here for the challenge, certainly. But in this moment, I'm feeling distinctly in over my head.

Hiro, who is also one of the academy's founders, has been walking us through the basics of kaiseki, a word used for both the traditional multicourse Japanese meal as well as the skills and techniques required to make it. This involves talking about a bewildering range of things, including knife cuts for notching the top of a shiitake mushroom, how to knot a sprig of the herb mitsuba for garnish, as well as the precise temperature to best extract flavour for dashi broth made from kombu seaweed and katsubushi, or dried bonito fish shavings. On the topic of kaiseki Hiro grows briefly philosophical, noting that it's a lifetime practice and thus approaching the ineffable.

"Like the kappa. What actually is the kappa?" he says, by way of a winking explanation. "OK, let's cook!"

I'll only learn later that the kappa is a mythic reptilian creature fond of cucumbers and sumo. At the moment, I have to dive into the fray of all these pros grabbing pots and grills and assembling ingredients for the fish stew we're preparing.

My first order has arrived at the imaginary pass: an individual kaiseki serving of clear fish soup, osumashi, for one. My heart is racing. My hands are trembling. This has to be the most pressure I've ever experienced on what is supposed to be a holiday. But I am loving it.

A NEW RESPECT FOR TEMPURA AND OTHER CLASSICS

There are more obvious ways to explore Tokyo's food scene. Following the Michelin stars makes a certain amount of sense given that the Michelin Guide lists 198 restaurants with 261 total stars this year, more than any other city on earth. But you could also arrive here without any food plan at all.

Cooking school, I've found, adds a layer to one's explorations. And you don't need a week at the Tokyo Sushi Academy either. I've done a three-hour soba intensive with Tokyo Cook and a one-hour fruit-cutting lesson at the Takano Fruit Parlor.

At the most obvious, things you have taken for granted will inspire new respect. Or at least, if you are me, you'll rethink your longstanding indifference to tempura. It's just too hard to make to be indifferent about. Before cooking school, I'd never thought about the perfect temperature gap between the battered item and the oil in which it's cooked, for example, which is 295 degrees.

Neither had I considered that if you were skilled enough, you could cook tempura largely by ear. At Tempura Kondo, where the two Michelin stars induce a reverential silence among diners (good for listening), you can watch

this all play out like a floor show for insiders. Tempura masters are busier than sushi chefs, Hiro said, and they never talk to the customers. Why? Well, because they're standing over the oil with their ear cocked to hear the "pulse" of sound, which surges and recedes as the bubbles grow smaller and the dish nears completion.

And that was only the beginning of the drama. Without sweating a couple of hours over my prep at the academy, would I have noticed the knife cuts that fanned out my miniature eggplant, or how the paper was folded kimono-style on my plate, or that the daikon ginger garnish was scooped into a bowl to look like a bozu temple master's bald head?

You'll find this same technical fixation behind most Japanese culinary preparations. You might hear the word datsusara when you talk to food people here. I heard it first from the ramen expert Brian MacDuckston, with whom I ate at Yakitori Yamamoto near Mitaka Station. The word datsusara captures the idea of escaping the rat race and is associated with chefs who come from the corporate world and turn their fastidious devotions to food instead. But it speaks to a detail-oriented drive for food perfection more generally.

Yakitori restaurants are mesmerising places to observe the phenomenon. The chef is often right in front of you, leaned in over the clay box grill filled with binchotan charcoal, minutely inspecting the skewers, pinching them to test doneness, dunking them in tare sauce at precisely the 80 per cent mark. After trying your hand at this, you'll know also that when the grill guy throws one of those skewers away, it was because the prep guy didn't balance it correctly to prevent it from rolling in place.

"That's why you're on skewer prep for three years before touching the grill," Hiro said.

At Yakitori Yoneda, just south of Nishi-Ogikubo Station, I found myself noticing how the tsukune, or chicken meatballs, arrives perfectly charred, a tiny bit sweet, with a perfect spring to the bite from that potato starch added to the mixture the night before grilling. I tucked under the red awning away from the rain with a skewer of medium-cooked chicken livers, another of crispy chicken skin. The tsukune here is plump, the size of a small zucchini. And when it arrives with its diced onion and jammy soft fried egg, I enjoy it even more for recognising the perfect execution. It's still one of the best plates I've had in Tokyo over many visits.

Yoneda also illustrates another point: You don't have to spend a ton of dough to have these "best bite" moments. Good, inexpensive yakitori in Tokyo is going to run you around 400 yen, or about \$2.65, for a couple of skewers. I think cooking classes actually lower the price of pleasure by allowing you to see how great the technique can be in many everyday Tokyo restaurants.

A SLURPABLE BOWL OF HEAVEN

In the Tokyo Cook kitchen at Sougo in Roppongi, I spent an afternoon learning soba with chef Shinichi Yoshida, a natty gent who wears a shirt and tie under his apron. Yoshida walked me through the history of buckwheat in Japan. He explained dashi down to the glutamine content of various kinds of kombu seaweed, a key ingredient. He shaved off katsubushi for the dashi from his own block of bonito, dry-aged five years, the cut surface darkly translucent like a black gemstone. We made the noodles by hand,

rolling out the tricky, low-gluten dough with a long dowel, then cutting it into 1/16th inch ribbons with an enormous menkiri knife, the handle wrapped in shark skin.

I only ate a couple of bowls of noodles in Tokyo that came close to the brilliant dish that Yoshida showed me that day, with its perfectly balanced dipping sauce of five parts dashi to one part kaeshi, a slow simmered marriage of soy, sugar and dark mirin. The first of these was at Teuchi Soba Fujiya in Shinjuku, recommended by Hiro from the Tokyo Sushi Academy, where a line of people forms 30 minutes before they open and your meal comes with a tiny jug of the soba cooking liquid to drink after your meal to help digestion.

I found the second perfect bowl at a chain called Tokyo Abura Soba with 60 Japanese locations, where you order from a vending machine and get your bowl of noodles with chashu pork in about three minutes. Abura soba isn't really soba at all. It's a broth-less bowl of ramen noodles napped in a sauce made with soy, bouillon powder, sugar, vinegar and white miso or Chinese doubanjiang. It's stupidly delicious. It's also addictive. But I wouldn't have known what string of rules had to be broken en route to this slurpable bowl of heaven if Yoshida hadn't shown me the fastidious perfection of "proper" soba in the first place.



THE CHANGING WORLD



Shaddad al Musalmy

THANK YOU, YOUR MAJESTY

AS THE SULTANATE OF OMAN celebrates 53 years of Renaissance under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik who inspires every Omani, we pray for his well-being and are grateful for the many good deeds he has done for the nation and its loyal people ever since his accession to the throne.

On January 11, 2020, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik pledged to continue to shape Oman in the new era. This is evident following the testimonies of citizens and expatriates in the country who have expressed confidence in his leadership that is taking the Sultanate of Oman forward.

Since the very first day of his rule, His Majesty the Sultan has exerted sincere efforts to set up a new phase of Oman's renewed Renaissance that meets the requirements of the upcoming period and fulfil the aspirations of the Omani people as well as preserve the achievements that took place in the last five decades.

During the past three years, His Majesty the Sultan issued several directives and has taken a number of steps for the implementation of Oman Vision 2040 which was launched at the beginning of January 2021 for execution in four consecutive plans beginning with 10th Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025).

Based on the national priorities of Oman Vision 2040, His Majesty the Sultan called for the channelling of all efforts and resources for the realisation of goals and programmes of fiscal balance, the development of legal instruments for investments, the streamlining and acceleration of government services, the development of economic zones and the implementation of major projects, besides upgrading national expertise. All these have been linked to the employment of citizens being a top national priority.

In this context, His Majesty the Sultan underlined the government's constant keenness to pursue five-year plans aimed at achieving the goals and priorities of Oman Vision 2040.

Within the framework of reviewing state-owned companies and improving their performance, His Majesty the Sultan issued Royal Decree No 61/2020, directing the establishment of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), as a unified investment body comprising investment, monitoring and executive entities. The establishment of OIA marks a significant step that will contribute to augmenting investment revenues and improving the Sultanate's international credit status.

On the foreign front, His Majesty the Sultan reaffirmed Oman's foreign policy, which is based on good neighbourliness, friendship and cooperation with all. His Majesty the Sultan has always reiterated the Sultanate of Oman's principle of neutrality and non-intervention in the internal affairs of others.

In his first public remarks as head of state, His Majesty the Sultan promised to uphold his predecessor's foreign policy. "We will follow the same line as the Late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, and the principles that he asserted for the foreign policy of our country, of peaceful coexistence among nations and people, and good neighbourly behaviour of non-interference in the affairs of others."

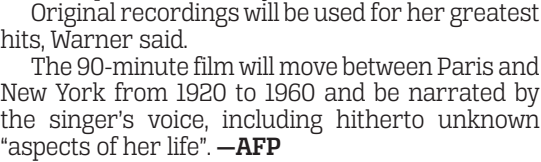
Thanks to the recognition and confidence that the Sultanate of Oman enjoys on the international level, it is keen on adopting the principle of dialogue for resolving regional issues out of belief in the importance of peaceful solutions and mutual cooperation to ensure stability in the region.

Within the context of the ongoing crises in the Middle East, the Sultanate of Oman has been able to maintain its position as one of the few countries that maintain good relations with all parties concerned when many other countries face challenges in keeping up with dialogue and it remains committed to carrying out its significant role in bridging viewpoints.

The achievements of His Majesty the Sultan are amply evident and manifest in every sphere of life. In these three years, he has sowed and cultivated true faith in the people and is now considered the new father figure of the nation after His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said who will forever be a torch to guide the nation.

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

FOR FEEDBACK, EMAIL THE AUTHOR AT
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WILD ENCOUNTERS IN OMAN



By Yeru Ebuen

Oman's allure lies in its varied terrain. Majestic mountains like Jabal Shams, the 'Grand Canyon of Arabia', captivate adventurers seeking breathtaking vistas. Vast deserts, including Rimal Al Sharqiya, offer thrilling experiences like dune bashing and stargazing under clear night skies. Lush oases and coastal wonders, such as the crystal-clear waters of the Arabian Sea, complete Oman's natural tapestry. The country's rich biodiversity is a testament to its commitment to preserving nature. Encounter iconic species like the Arabian oryx and the elusive Arabian leopard in protected areas and reserves. Oman's skies are

cliffs for breathtaking views, or explore ancient forts and archaeological sites that blend seamlessly with the natural surroundings. Oman's cultural heritage and traditions interweave harmoniously with its natural beauty. Oman offers excellent infrastructure, ensuring visitors can explore its natural treasures with ease. Whether you seek luxury resorts or prefer an off-the-beaten-path adventure, Oman caters to all preferences. Here are five of the amazing animal species you should check out when you're travelling to Oman.

ARABIAN ORYX

The Arabian Oryx is an iconic desert antelope known for its elegant, long horns and

Where to find: Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve and the Dhofar Mountains in southern Oman.

Best time to see: They are nocturnal, but chances increase during dawn or dusk.

Where to stay: Nearby resorts or accommodations in Salalah, Dhofar Governorate.

GREEN SEA TURTLES

Oman's coastline is a vital nesting ground for green sea turtles, known for their large size and distinctive green coloration.

Where to find: Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve in Ras Al Hadd, Masirah Island, and along the

September (summer).

Where to stay: Musandam Peninsula resorts or accommodations in Salalah, Dhofar Governorate.

NUBIAN IBEX

A mountain-dwelling species of wild goat with distinctive curved horns, well-adapted to rocky terrain.

Where to find: Jabal Shams, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, and the Hajar Mountains.

Best time to see: Morning or late afternoon when they come out to feed.

Where to stay: Nearby accommodations in



adorned with an array of birdlife, offering birdwatchers a paradise during migration seasons. Oman's dedication to conservation is evident through its numerous protected areas and nature reserves. Explore the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary, where efforts to protect this majestic animal are ongoing, or witness the nesting rituals of endangered sea turtles at Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve. The coastal regions of Oman beckon with their vibrant marine life. Dive into the cerulean waters to discover colourful coral reefs teeming with diverse aquatic creatures. Embark on dolphin-watching tours or enjoy snorkelling adventures along the stunning coastline. The country's diverse landscapes cater to adventure seekers. Hike through wadis, scale

white coat. It's a symbol of beauty and resilience in the arid desert.

Where to find: Al Wusta Governorate, and the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in the Jiddat Al Harasis desert.

Best time to see: Early mornings or late afternoons when they are active.

Where to stay: Camps in the desert or nearby accommodations in Haima, Al Wusta Governorate.

ARABIAN LEOPARD

The Arabian Leopard is a rare and elusive big cat, adapted to the rocky mountainous terrain. It's critically endangered with a small population.

coasts of Ras Al Hadd.

Best time to see: Nesting season from June to September, with higher chances at night.

Where to stay: Lodges near Ras Al Jinz or Masirah Island resorts.

ARABIAN SEA HUMPBACK WHALES

These whales are known for their acrobatic behaviour and unique songs. They migrate through Omani waters and can be spotted during specific seasons.

Where to find: Musandam Peninsula, Dhofar Governorate, and along the coast of Mirbat.

Best time to see: Migration seasons from November to April (winter) and June to

Nizwa, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, or Al Hamra.

Seeing these animals may require thorough planning and working with people who specialise in tracking them and finding their locations. Do prior research and make sure to check out the timing of when you can actually see them. It is important to note that some of these animals are wild; therefore, always make sure to keep your distance. In fact, in the case of the evasive Arabian Leopard, make sure to talk with the right people to get all the accurate information. If you're visiting Oman off-season, you can never go wrong with birdwatching. From birds that nestle in cities like Muscat to those that can be found in remote shore paradises like Barr al Hikman, there are better chances for you to enjoy your adventure even better.