

Putin to join G20 online summit

President Vladimir Putin is to take part in a G20 summit called for this week by the Indian presidency of the group representing the world's main economies, Russian state television reported on Sunday. Putin is to hold direct talks with Western leaders for the first time in months during the online summit convened by Indian President Narendra Modi on Wednesday, according to the report. Russia was represented at the G20 New Delhi summit at the start of September by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.



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DJOKOVIC BEATS ALCARAZ TO SET UP ATP FINALS TITLE CLASH WITH SINNER



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SOHAR PORT AND FREEZONE A KEY CONTRIBUTOR TO OMAN'S GROWTH



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MUTRAH SOUQ'S CHARM EXTENDS BEYOND A MERE MARKETPLACE



MUSCAT

REGISTRATION TO AVAIL BENEFITS

The Social Protection Fund has announced the opening of online registration on Saturday, to avail childhood and the elderly benefits. These two benefits are stated under the Social Protection Law issued by the Royal Decree 52/2023 in July. Over 10,000 people had registered for the benefits by Sunday morning on the website [spf.gov.om](#). Hashim bin Mohammed al Hashemi, Director General of Customer Services, Social Protection Fund, said that the applicants must register only from the official website and should avoid following any shared links. **DETAILS ON P2**

27 INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The outcomes of the second set of workshops aimed to attract investments in transport and logistics sector were reviewed by the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Information Technology (MoTCIT) and the Civil Aviation Authority. The programme of workshops generated 27 investment opportunities and 6 enabling initiatives for the improvement of the logistics sector. Organised by the MoTCIT and the CAA, with the support from the National Programme for Investment and Export Development (Nazdaher), the programme lasted for two weeks during which the team of organisers held meetings with relevant authorities. During the workshops, investors and private companies had a chance to identify related challenges, shape their ideas and study investment opportunities in cooperation with Nazdaher. **DETAILS ON P4**

OPINION

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Sergey Plekhanov
Rasputin: The myth that crushed the empire

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Kamla Said al Rahbia
Finding your niche

SULTAN QABOOS SAILING TROPHY WINNER



The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) handed over the winner of the Sultan Qaboos Sailing Trophy (11th edition) to the winner in the city of Dunkirk, the Republic of France. The event, which reflects the Sultanate of Oman's interest in sailing at the regional and international levels, coincides with the 53rd glorious National Day. The Sultan Qaboos Sailing Trophy for this year (2023) was won by the Polish sailing ship Dar Młodzieży. **DETAILS ON P2**

962,000 khareef visitors spent RO 103 million

MUSCAT: The number of visitors to the 2023 Dhofar Khareef (monsoon) season stood at about 962,000, compared to 813,000, an increase of 18.4 per cent over statistics of the corresponding period in 2022.

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that spending during Dhofar Khareef this year stood at RO 103 million, compared to RO 86 million in 2022 season.

The duration of visitors' stay (total occupancy) during Dhofar Khareef season in 2023 surged to 7 million nights, from 6 million nights in the 2022 season.

The data showed that 666,307 Omani visitors showed up at Dhofar Khareef season venues, comprising 69.2 per cent of the total number of visitors. As many as 190,853 inbound arrivals were GCC citizens (comprising 19.8 per cent), compared to 68,100 visitors from Asian countries and 31,214 visitors from Arab countries. This is in addition to 3,740 visitors from Europe and 1,982 visitors from other countries.

Spending on lodgings during Dhofar Khareef in the 2023 season went up by 19.4 per cent (to RO 33,068,567), as against statistics registered during the 2022 season. This constituted 32.2 per cent of the total volume of spending. **TURN TO P5**

CALLS ON WORLD TO IMPOSE SANCTIONS ON ISRAEL

Oman denounces attack on school

MUSCAT: The Foreign Ministry has voiced the Sultanate of Oman's denunciation and rejection of the persistent, unjustifiable military assaults launched by Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people, including the heinous massacre that took place at Al Fakhoura school, which is affiliated to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The assault killed many civilians who had been displaced from the Gaza Strip.

While expressing its condolences to the families of the martyrs and its wishes of speedy recovery for the injured, Oman values the staunch struggle of the valiant Palestinian people who keep withstanding Israel's injustice, relentless aggression and continuous occupation of the Palestinian territories in flagrant violation of the international law and the resolutions of the United Nations (UN) Security Council.

Oman also reiterates its call on the international community to take practical measures and impose deterrent sanctions on Israel to stop its aggression and the crimes it commits against civilians.

Oman affirms that such practices are exercised in stark contempt and disregard for human souls and human dignity in blatant violation of UN charters and international norms, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international humanitarian law. It expresses its rejection of Israel's continuous, inhumane



The picture taken from southern Israel shows Israeli flags flying over destroyed buildings inside the Gaza Strip on Sunday. – AFP

siege and blockade on the Gaza Strip, depriving the population there of basic living necessities including fuel, water, food and medicine.

Meanwhile, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk has sharply criticised attacks on schools in the Gaza Strip where people fleeing the conflict had sought refuge.

"The horrendous events of the past 48 hours in Gaza is beyond our belief," he said. Türk was responding to a video filmed in a school that showed numerous dead and injured people, along with devastation of the school buildings.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) has confirmed the attack on a school but was unable to say how many had died. Referring to leaflets from the Israeli military instructing people to take shelter, Türk said: "Nowhere is safe in Gaza. Irrespective of warnings, Israel is obliged to protect civilians wherever they are."

In another development, France said it is preparing to send its Dixmude helicopter carrier to the eastern Mediterranean to offer medical assistance in Gaza, the office of the French president said on Sunday.

The Dixmude will set sail "at the start of the week and arrive in Egypt in the coming days," President Emmanuel Macron's office said.

A charter flight carrying more than 10 tonnes of medical supplies is also planned for the start of the week. **SEE ALSO P6 & 7**

AUSTRALIA WIN SIXTH WORLD CUP TITLE



Australia players celebrate with the trophy after winning the ICC Cricket World Cup. Australia won a record-extending sixth 50-overs World Cup title by defeating hosts and title favourites India by six wickets in the final at a packed Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, India, on Sunday. **DETAILS ON P12**

UN plastic treaty talks grapple with re-use

NAIROBI: A third round of United Nations negotiations to try to deliver the world's first treaty to control plastic pollution has drawn more than 500 proposals from those involved, participants said on the last day of the talks on Sunday.

Negotiators, who have spent a week meeting in the Kenyan capital at talks known as INC3, have until the end of next year to strike a deal for the control of plastics, which produce an estimated 400 million tonnes of waste every year. The plastics industry, oil and petrochemical exporters, have said a global deal should promote recycling and re-use of plastic, but environmental campaigners and some governments say much less needs to be produced in the first place.

GREATER LEADERSHIP

Environmental group Greenpeace said a successful deal would require the United States and the European Union to show greater leadership than they have so far.

"The hard truth is that INC3 has failed to deliver on its core objective: delivering a mandate to prepare a first draft of a treaty text," Graham Forbes, head of delegation for Greenpeace, said.

"This is not progress. This is chaos," he said referring to the number of submissions.

Two more rounds of talks will take place next year to try to finalise the deal. — **Reuters**



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Royal Office Minister receives
Egypt, Brunei Ambassadors



Al Numani with Khalid Mohammed Abdul Halim Radi, Ambassador of Egypt



Al Numani with Noralizan Abdula Momin, Ambassador of Brunei Darussalam

Muscat: Gen. Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Sunday Khalid Mohammed Abdul Halim Radi, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Numani underlined the bilateral relations between Oman and Egypt and the advancement of

those relations in various fields of interest.

The ambassador expressed his appreciation for Oman's stances regarding several regional and international issues. He also underscored Oman's active roles in bridging points of views and calling for resolving issues by peaceful means.

Further, the two sides

exchanged views regarding a number of matters of common concern.

Al Numani also received Noralizan Abdula Momin, Ambassador of Brunei to Oman. During this meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of joint cooperation and means of enhancing them. They also discussed several issues of mutual interest. — ONA

Registration to avail elderly,
childhood benefits begins

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Social Protection Fund (SPF) announced the opening of online registration, to avail childhood and the elderly benefits which are two of the benefits stated under the Social Protection Law issued by the Royal Decree 52/2023 in July.

Over 10,000 people had registered for the benefits by Sunday morning on the website spf.gov.om.

Hashim bin Mohammed al Hashemi, Director General of Customer Services, Social Protection Fund, said that the applicants must register only from the official website and should avoid following any shared links.

He said that benefits will be disbursed salaries from the end of January 2024 and there is no deadline for registration. "There is no need for children to have an ID because the civil number can be found on the birth certificate," he said.

As per the law, an applicant can be entitled to the child benefit as well the benefits offered to those with disabilities.

It was noted that many applicants reported delays in OTP either due to the system overload or inaccurate bank account number or other details.

Officials said that the bank account is linked to the civil as well as the phone number, providing updated details is necessary at the time of application.

The total number of beneficiaries of the two benefits is 1,467,000 citizens,

of which 167,000 citizens are in the category of elderly, and those eligible for childhood benefit is 1,300,000.

The Social Protection Fund has stated that registration for benefits for widows, orphans, people with disabilities, and family income will be opened in the coming days.

It may be noted that the Article 30 benefit is payable at the rate of RO115 per month if the person fulfils the

following conditions, must be Omani, must have reached the age of the elderly and must be a resident of the Sultanate of Oman.

As per Article 37, the childhood benefit is payable at the rate of RO10 per month for each child if the conditions are met - must be Omani, must not have reached 18 eighteen years of age and must be a resident of the Sultanate of Oman.



The childhood benefit is payable at the rate of RO10 per month for each child



MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

INTERNATIONAL TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
5/2023 2023/276/ 14 - ر / ع (at E-Tendering)	RENOVATION AND INTEGRATION OF THREE RADIO STUDIOS AND THREE DUBBING ROOMS - MUSCAT	Excellent Frst	26/11/2023	31/12/2023	25/-

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

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

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

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

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

3. The Ministry has the right to:

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

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

Polish sailing ship wins Sultan
Qaboos Sailing Trophy

DUNKIRK: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) handed over the winner of the Sultan Qaboos Sailing Trophy (11th edition) to Polish sailing ship Dar Młodzieży in the city of Dunkirk, the Republic of France. The event, which reflects the Sultanate of Oman's interest in sailing at the regional and international levels, coincides with the 53rd glorious National Day.

The award ceremony took place during the closing of an annual sailing conference organized by the International Sail Training Association, under the auspices of Azza bint Hamoud al Busaidiyah, Chargé d'Affaires of the Sultanate of Oman's Embassy in Paris.

The Sultan Qaboos Sailing Trophy is supervised by the RNO in cooperation with the International Sail Training Association. It was first launched in the Kingdom of Norway in 2011 under the Royal orders of late Sultan Qaboos bin Said. It is considered the most prestigious award in the field of sailing.

This award lends great support to sail training worldwide. This is in addition to its humanitarian roles in spreading fraternity, cooperation, love and peace.

The award ceremony was attended by Commodore Mohammed bin Hamoud al Zadjali, Senior Staff Officer at the RNO, the Military Attache at the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Paris (non-resident for Germany, Italy, Spain and Austria), RNO officers, the President of the International Sail Training Association, among other officials and experts. — ONA

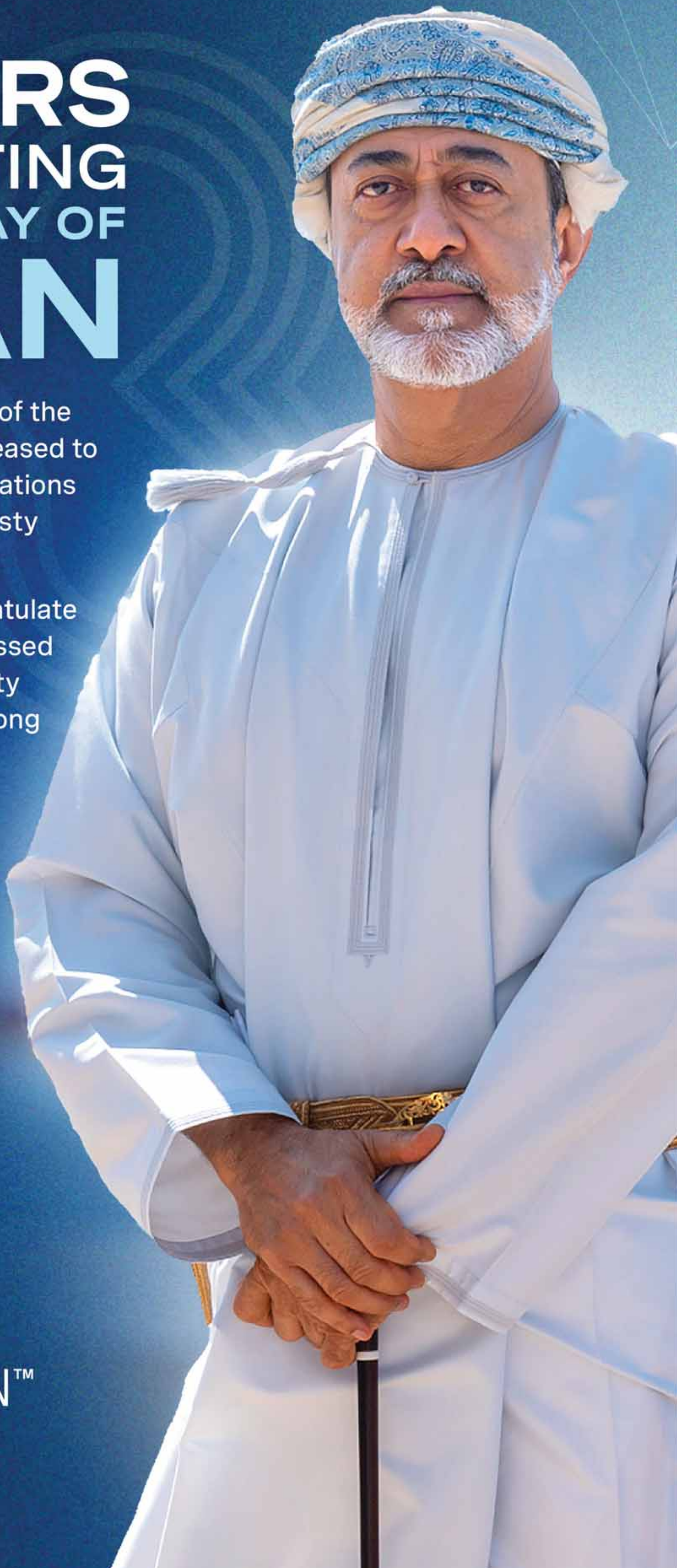


Polish sailing ship Dar Młodzieży

53 YEARS CELEBRATING NATIONAL DAY OF OMAN

On the auspicious occasion of the 53rd National day, Oxy is pleased to extend its sincere congratulations and best wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik.

We would also like to congratulate all Omani people on this blessed occasion, wishing his Majesty good health, wellness, and long life, and for the continued progress and prosperity of the Sultanate.



ZERO IN™



Over RO 13 mn allotted to projects in Sharqiyah North

IBRA: The pillars of the development plan in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate for the coming period include developing the infrastructure and increasing investment opportunities in the governorate. This can be realised by attracting a number of qualitative investment projects in various sectors, boosting the governorate’s annual revenue.

This was stated by Mahmoud bin Yahya al Thuhli, Governor of Al Sharqiyah North.

In comments, the governor said: “The foundations of Oman Vision 2040 are in line with the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate’s robustness in the information technology and artificial intelligence field. The governorate is encouraging and investing in space science and other technologies. The governorate’s hosting of NASA hackathon for space applications recently proves that the governorate has an excellent standing in the IT technology sector which is witnessing strong competition at various levels. In addition, the governorate’s urban strategy aims to place Al Sharqiyah North Governorate as a prominent national centre in applied technology engineering and advanced technology. The governorate strives to encourage and motivate young people at various levels to actively



The governorate strives to encourage and motivate young people at various levels to actively participate in these sectors on which the Sultanate of Oman heavily depends during the next phase of the nation-building process. — ONA

participate in these sectors on which the Sultanate of Oman heavily depends during the next phase of the nation-building process.

He added: “The impact of artificial intelligence on our life require us to keep pace with the national policy in this field which is why we are working side by side

with the the concerned sectors to set up national programmes at the governorate level to contribute to boosting the national industry and economy and to enhance added value. We seek to boost partnership with the private sector based on the main pillars of the digital economy of the Sultanate of Oman.” The governor said that

the wilayats of Al Sharqiyah North Governorate boast many tourist attractions including popular markets, ancient neighbourhoods, wadis, oases, water springs, sand dunes in addition to a number of castles and forts. He explained that with the winter tourism season sees many events and recreational activities that aim to activate

tourism. They include desert, mountain, and water adventure tourism, tourist activities that are peculiar to Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

A number of development projects had been approved for this year with a total amount exceeding RO 3 million some of which have been completed and others are

still under implementation. An amount of RO 13 million has been allocated to development projects that will be implemented in the wilayats of the governorate over the next three years. These projects are related to tourism services and recreational activities, the governor said.

— ONA

AWASR, AMS-IX, and Alliance Launch Oman-IX



Muscat – AWASR, a leading fibre broadband provider in Oman, Alliance Networks, a regional digital infrastructure service provider, and Amsterdam Internet Exchange (AMS-IX), a world-leading Internet Exchange provider, have joined forces to launch Oman Internet Exchange (Oman-IX). The neutral and ground-breaking Internet Exchange aims to revolutionize digital infrastructure services in the region by interconnecting industry-leading organizations, networks, data centres, and cloud services across the Middle East and beyond.

The new Internet Exchange, Oman-IX, will be owned by AWASR, an established player in the telecommunications industry. AWASR aims to establish an Internet Exchange node in Oman as part of its commitment to enhancing connectivity and fostering digital growth in the Sultanate. They will leverage Alliance Networks’ experience in the region, known for its extensive network reach and expertise in providing advanced connectivity and digital solutions, and collaborate with AMS-IX to provide the desired technical world-class experiences in establishing and operating Internet exchanges.

Engineer Adnan Al-Alawi, CEO of AWASR, expressed his enthusiasm for the partnership, stating, “We are thrilled to embark on this transformative collaboration with Alliance Networks and AMS-IX. The launch of Oman-IX will unlock new horizons for the Sultanate of Oman, enabling efficient exchange of internet traffic and promoting digital innovation across industries.”

Adel Al Daylami, CEO of Alliance Networks, emphasized the importance of this collaboration, saying, “Alliance Networks is dedicated to providing reliable and robust digital infrastructure services in the region. Partnering with AWASR and AMS-IX to establish Oman-IX aligns with our mission to interconnect networks and promote seamless data exchange across borders. Together with AWASR, we look forward to creating a strong digital ecosystem in Oman.”

Peter van Burgel, CEO of AMS-IX, highlighted the significance of this venture, stating, “We are delighted to contribute our expertise in Internet Exchange services to this partnership. The collaboration between AWASR, Alliance Networks, and AMS-IX will empower Oman’s digital landscape and accelerate the country’s connectivity to global networks via public peering. Oman-IX will serve as a vital hub for internet traffic exchange, enabling an enhanced user experience and fostering digital innovation.”

Through this mutually beneficial partnership, AWASR, Alliance Networks, and AMS-IX will collaborate to build digital infrastructure services, leveraging Alliance’s infrastructure, AWASR’s expertise, and Oman’s Internet Exchange capabilities. Oman-IX will serve as a hub for aggregating IP peering traffic from both local and global networks within Oman, facilitating the exchange of peering traffic through AMS-IX Internet Exchange to other international internet exchanges.

The new Internet Exchange powered by AMS-IX will be

situated in the MC1 carrier-neutral data centre of Equinix in Muscat. Implementation and go-live of the new Internet Exchange are expected in Q4 of this year.

This partnership marks a significant milestone in the development of Oman’s digital landscape, underlining the commitment of AWASR, Alliance Networks, and AMS-IX to revolutionizing connectivity and digital infrastructure in the region.

About AWASR Oman and Partners SAOC: AWASR Oman and Partners SAOC is a licensed Service Provider that plays a pivotal role in Oman’s telecommunications sector. Awasr is considered the fastest fixed Internet provider in Oman, winning the Ookla Speed test Award for seven years in a row. The company aims to provide cutting-edge connectivity solutions and enhance digital services across the Sultanate.

About Alliance Networks Alliance Networks is a regional digital infrastructure service provider that interconnects industry-leading organizations, networks, data centres, and cloud services across the Middle East and beyond. The company offers advanced digital solutions, driving innovation and digital transformation in the region.

About AMS-IX AMS-IX (Amsterdam Internet Exchange) is a neutral member-based association that operates multiple interconnection platforms around the world. Our leading platform in Amsterdam has been playing a crucial role at the core of the internet for almost 30 years and is one of the largest hubs for internet traffic in the world with over 11 Terabits per second (Tbps) of peak traffic. Connecting to AMS-IX ensures customers such as internet service providers, telecom companies and cloud providers that their global IP traffic is routed in an efficient, fast, secure, stable and cost-effective way. This allows them to offer low latency and engaging online experiences for end-users. AMS-IX interconnects more than 1000 IP-networks in the world. AMS-IX also manages the world’s first mobile peering points: the Global Roaming Exchange (GRX), the Mobile Data Exchange (MDX) and the Internetwork Packet Exchange (I-IPX) interconnection points.

MoTCIT highlights 27 investment opportunities in transport, logistics



About 250 employees from 56 government and private establishments participated in the workshops, in addition to 15 investors from Oman and abroad. — ONA

MUSCAT: The outcomes of the second set of workshops aimed to attract investments in transport and logistics sector were reviewed on Sunday by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

The programme of workshops generated 27 investment opportunities and 6 enabling initiatives for the improvement of the logistics sector.

Organised by the MoTCIT and the CAA, with the support from the National Programme

for Investment and Export Development “Nazdaher”, the programme lasted for two weeks during which the team of organisers held meetings with relevant authorities.

During the workshops, investors and private companies had a chance to identify related challenges, shape their ideas and study investment opportunities in cooperation with ‘Nazdaher’.

About 250 employees from 56 government and private establishments participated in the workshops, in addition to 15 investors from Oman and

abroad.

Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, said that the Ministry developed a schedule to invest about RO 2.5 billion in the transport and logistics sector for the period from 2021 to 2025.

He pointed out that the value of the envisaged projects stood at RO 1.4 billion. This, he said, pertains to declared or yet-to-be-floated investment opportunities. — ONA





Exhibition highlights diabetes care

BALQEES AL HABSI
MUSCAT, NOV 19

In a combined effort of number of health institutions, the Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate in cooperation with the Health and Administrative Supervision Office organised a diabetes awareness event called ‘Access to diabetes care’ at Muscat Mall. The event touched on the topics that revolves around diabetes, its symptoms, causes, treatment plan, and prevention.

Due the increasing cases of diabetes in the Sultanate of Oman, the event aimed at raising awareness among the community and to motivate commitment to regular screening to detect diabetes for its seriousness and its impact on individuals, given that it accompanies the patient throughout his life.

Dr Hassan Abdullah, an expert in diabetes, stated that the main causes for increased cases of patients of diabetes is the changes in life styles, obesity, lack of adequate exercise, in addition to other factors like hereditary factors.

The main dangerous complications is the effect of the disease on all body organs causing damages to nervous system, kidneys, heart and vascular

system.

“There are many patients suffering from vascular problems which lead to amputation of parts of there limbs Unfortunately the community still not aware about the because. We see increasing cases of obesity which is one of main causes,” Dr Hassan said.

Huda al Kiyoumi, a Nutrition Specialist added that diabetic patients are cared for in health centres in particular in a section called ‘Check and Reassure’ due to the lack of clarity of symptoms among patients.

“They are then directed and given health advice to follow a treatment plan using oral medication or injections according to specific doses. Follow a specific nutritional plan and exercise plan to relieve symptoms and control the disease,” she said.

In psychological standpoint, Nawal al Haddabi, health education official at the exhibition said it is also important to devote attention to psychological care.

“This is in addition to therapeutic care for patients to help them accept treatment and understand the stage of their disease in order to avoid worsening symptoms, avoid harm, and motivate them to seek treatment,” Nawal said.

National Employment Programme on track to generate more jobs

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The National Employment Programme (NEP) involves developing employment policies and training citizens to compete in job market.

The National Employment Programme emanates from the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which seek to find sustainable solutions to tackle unemployment and achieve sustainable development.

It also develops training for citizens in technological skills in line with the requirements of the various sectors of the labour market and their academic qualifications.

These initiatives were launched in cooperation with various partners with the aim of improving the competencies of job seekers, support vocational and technical education, provide career guidance service, develop legislation to enhance the role of investment and the business environment, and boost local value addition.

The programme seeks to stimulate and enable self-employment, link education to the needs of the labour market, direct Omanisation policies towards quality jobs and employment opportunities with high economic and social returns, and analyse the sectors’ value chains by creating job opportunities in sustainable projects.

The programme seeks to create jobs in various governmental, military and private sectors. It launched an online platform for professional career guidance on higher education and employment opportunities.

This comes in line with the strategies of the



The programme seeks to stimulate and enable self-employment and link education to the needs of the labour market

Oman Vision 2040 in the education, scientific research, innovation, labour market and employment sectors.

Khuta platform targets students in school and higher education, job seekers, employees, self-employers, entrepreneurs, parents, teachers and academics.

It will not be limited to job opportunities only, but will provide training courses for job seekers, school students and university students to hone their talents.

Khuta platform came as one of the strategic initiatives in the axis of raising the efficiency of the vocational guidance service in the Sultanate of Oman, as it is one of the main components that enhances integration

and harmony between the outputs of the educational system and the actual needs of the labour market.

It will have all data for students and job seekers to link them with available jobs at the level of the public or private sector according to the available specialisations and job opportunities.

NEP also aims to augment in-country value in all economic sectors. It will contribute to enhancing the participation of the private sector in the national economy by providing training and employment opportunities for Omanis, initiating training and operational programmes for jobseekers and improving their readiness to compete in the labour market.

962,000 khareef visitors spent RO 103 million

FROM P1

Spending on food and beverages comprised 24.9 per cent (RO 25,598,657) of the total volume of spending, while spending on travel tickets accounted for 18.8 per cent (RO 19,268,818) and spending on other items stood at RO 24,693,979.

Omani visitors to Dhofar Khareef venues contributed 62.4 per cent of the total volume of spending (a sum of RO 64,007,411), while spending by visitors from GCC states accounted for 22.5 per cent (RO 23,080,186).

Spending by visitors from the Asian continent stood at RO 6,316,147 million, compared to RO 5,776,782 spending by visitors from Arab countries and RO 3,449,459 spending by visitors from other countries. — ONA

Schengen online visa to begin in 2026

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The digitalisation of Schengen visa application procedures, which was approved by the European Council last week, will be completed by the end of 2028.

“In 2026, the EU visa application platform and the digital visa would coexist. After the end of the transition period (end of 2028), all visa applications would be lodged online through the EU visa application platform (except for a few exceptional cases for which a paper procedure would remain possible),” according to Besart Bajrami, the founder of SchengenVisaInfo and VisaGuide, who shared the information to the Observer.

Taking into account the pre-pandemic

In 2022, Schengen consulates in Oman received a total of 30,885 visa applications. Among these, 23,430 visas were approved

trend of visa applications, by the time this platform starts fully functioning in 2028, around 22 to 25 million visa applications worldwide will be processed through this system, saving applicants hours of time and money, and the member states millions of euros in staff and resources.

In 2022, Schengen consulates in Oman received a total of 30,885 visa applications. Among these, 23,430 visas were approved,

while 2,287 applications were denied, representing approximately 7.4 per cent of the total.

Bajrami said, “This is without a doubt a revolution in the sector of EU visa applications, which will completely reshape travellers’ experience on getting a Schengen visa, making it not only less expensive, but also less time and energy consuming, and thus less stressful. The platform will also eliminate the possibility of rejection for applying at the wrong embassy.”

He also expects consulates to avoid a backlog of visa applications and visa decisions to be delivered within the foreseen period. However, Bajrami is a bit sceptical, when it comes to the full functionalisation of the platform by 2028.

25,000 new 5G broadband connections

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has published the half-yearly report (January - June 2023), which indicated that 5G fixed broadband subscriptions is now 25,000 with the total number of 5G stations going up to 4,566.

The growth rate in mobile phone subscriptions reached 4 per cent in the second quarter of 2023 compared to the fourth quarter of 2022, achieving a penetration rate of 142 per cent of the total population, with more than seven million subscriptions.

The growth rate of mobile broadband subscriptions reached 5 per cent compared to the fourth quarter of 2022, achieving a penetration rate of 120 per cent of the total population, with more than 5,900,000.



BIDDING ANNOUNCEMENT

Request for Pre-Qualification tender submission:
MADAYN (Public Establishment for Industrial Estates) invites potential investors to invest in design, construct, operate and maintain the following:

Investing Opportunities	Qualification No
in Phase 7 Park and Recreation area	2/2023

Last Date for Collection of Pre-Qualification Tender Document	31 January 2024
Site visit	6 February 2024
Last Date for Clarification	20 February 2024
Last Date for Submission from Potential Investor	20 March 2024

In this context, Companies with relevant experience in executing similar projects are invited to participate in investing in the project by submitting their Credentials as defined in the Pre-Qualification tender document.
Send a request to the email suhar.info@madayn.om to obtain the pre-qualification documents for any of the investment opportunities .
For inquiries, Please contact us by email at suhar.info@madayn.om.



GS Inima BARKA LLC

Announcement of the tender TND GSI BV 16/11/2023 for the supply of Scissors Lift

GS INIMA (BARKA) LLC now in phase of commissioning of Barka V Desalination Project in Oman, for the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC.
Omani companies are invited to quote their most competitive price for the **supply of Scissors Lift**.
To participate to bidding please send copy of CR, copy of VAT certificate and copy of SME card if any, to e-mail: barka.v.site@inima.com, subject: **TND GSI BV 16/11/2023** within **27th November 2023 1:00 PM**.
A reply with bid documents will be reverted to candidate same working day.
Bid closing date: **4th December 2023 1:00PM**



Sultanate of Oman

The Supreme Judiciary Council

Tender Announcement

The Supreme Judiciary Council announces its desire to Submit the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
26/2023	Maintenance and Operation (H.V.A.C & MEP) Work in the Court Complexes Buildings & (all appendixes)	21/11/2023	10/12/2023	Excellent	RO 25/-

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Bidders shall submit bid commitment letter in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Committee of Tenders in the Supreme Judiciary Council based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, and the latest updates to the electronic tender system.

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Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om



Qatar PM says only ‘minor’ challenges to hostage deal



Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani (R) speaks during a press conference with the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borell, in Doha. – AFP

DOHA: A deal to free hostages seized in its October 7 now hinges on “minor” practical issues, Qatar’s prime minister said on Sunday, without giving details or a timeline.

“The challenges that remain in the negotiations are very minor compared to the bigger challenges, they are more logistical, they are more practical,” Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani told a joint press conference with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell. Qatar has helped broker talks aiming to free some of the 240 hostages in return for a temporary ceasefire, a mediation effort that has so far led to the release of four hostages.

“The deal is going through ups and downs from time to time throughout the last few weeks,” the premier said. “I think that I’m now more confident that we are close enough to reach a deal that can bring the people safely back to their homes.”

Borrell, who was due to

meet with Qatar’s emir before travelling on to Jordan, called for the “unconditional release” of all hostages while denouncing the Hamas attack on Israel.

“There’s no hierarchy between horrors, one horror doesn’t justify another horror,” the EU foreign policy chief added, urging an end to the escalating violence and the creation of “sustainable peace” in the region.

The United States said on Saturday it was still working to secure a deal after the Washington Post reported there was a tentative agreement to free women and children held hostage in Gaza in exchange for a pause in fighting.

Citing unnamed sources, the newspaper said all parties would halt combat operations for at least five days while some hostages were to be released in batches. The White House quickly responded on Saturday evening with a message on X, formerly Twitter, to deny any major breakthrough. — AFP

Babies evacuated from hospital UN

GAZA: More than 30 premature babies were evacuated on Sunday from Gaza’s largest hospital, said a health official in the territory, as Israel’s army struck more targets in its war on the Palestinian lands.

The World Health Organization (WHO) scrambled to evacuate the last remaining patients and staff from Al-Shifa hospital, describing it as a “death zone” after UN officials visited the facility raided earlier this week by Israeli troops.

Mohammed Zaqut, director general of Gaza’s hospitals, said that “all 31 premature babies in Al-Shifa hospital... have been evacuated” along with three doctors and two nurses.

“Preparations are under way” for them to enter Egypt via the Rafah crossing, Zaqut said.

Elsewhere in northern Gaza, a health official said more than 80 people were killed on Saturday in twin strikes on Jabalia refugee camp, the territory’s largest, including on a UN school sheltering displaced people.

In Gaza, the government says 12,300 have been killed in Israel’s relentless aerial bombardment and ground operations. Most of the casualties on are civilians.

Israel said on Saturday its military was “expanding its operational activities in additional neighbourhoods... of the Gaza Strip” where the UN says some 1.6 million people have been internally displaced by more than six weeks of fighting.

The narrow Palestinian enclave has been under an Israeli siege since the war erupted, leaving food, water, medicine and fuel in short supply.

The fighting has rendered more than half of Gaza’s 36 hospitals non-functioning by shortages, combat or damage, the UN has said.

On Sunday, the WHO described dire conditions at Gaza City’s Al-



Palestinians flee north Gaza and move southward, as Israeli tanks roll deeper into the enclave, in the central Gaza Strip. – Reuters

‘Horrendous events’ in past days: UN rights chief

GENEVA: The level of violence ravaging Gaza in recent days is unfathomable, the UN rights chief said on Sunday, with attacks on schools harbouring displaced people.

“The horrendous events of the past 48 hours in Gaza beggar belief,” United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said in a statement.

He spoke as the World Health Organization scrambled to evacuate the last remaining patients and staff from the Al-Shifa hospital, with UN officials describing the Palestinian territory’s largest health facility, raided last week by Israeli troops, as a “death zone”.

Elsewhere in northern Gaza, a health official said more than 80 people were killed on Saturday in twin strikes on Jabalia refugee camp, including on a UN school sheltering displaced people.

“The killing of so many people at schools turned shelters, hundreds fleeing for their lives from Al-Shifa Hospital, amid continuing displacement of hundreds of thousands in southern Gaza, are actions which fly in the face of the basic protections civilians must be afforded under international law,” Turk said.

He described the images purportedly taken in the aftermath of the reported Israeli strike on the UN-run Al-Fakhura



UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk

school as “horrificing,” and “clearly showing large numbers of women, children and men severely wounded or killed”.

The UN rights chief pointed out that in Khan Younis in southern Gaza, the Israeli military “are dropping leaflets demanding residents go to unspecified “recognised shelters”, even as strikes take place across Gaza”.

“Irrespective of warnings, Israel is obliged to protect civilians wherever they are”, he said, pointing to the principles under international law of distinction, proportionality and precautions when carrying out attacks.

“Failure to adhere to these rules may constitute war crimes,” Turk said. Gaza official Turk said at least three other schools hosting displaced people had also been attacked in the past 48 hours.

“The pain, dread, and fear etched on the faces of children, women and men is too much to bear,” he said. — AFP

PALESTINIANS SEARCH FOR SHELTER AS CAMPAIGN MOUNTS

GAZA: As Israel prepares to widen its military campaign in Gaza, Palestinians such as 80-year-old Mahrous Nasrallah wonder if there will be anywhere left to shelter in the tiny enclave where entire neighbourhoods have been reduced to rubble.

“Let them send us to the Negev ... The Negev can take millions of people and they can stop making problems every two years. This is desperate life,” Nasrallah said.

Any hope of a new refuge now in the centre of Israel is a distant and desperate one.

Israel vowed to destroy the Palestinian groups, after they sent fighters rampaging into Israel on Oct. 7.

Since then, Gaza’s Health Ministry says 12,300 Palestinians, including 5,000 children, have died in the Israeli military operation.

The bombardment has flattened swathes of northern Gaza, while some two-thirds of the enclave’s population of 2.3 million have been displaced to the south. Adding to the misery, the weather has turned, sending rain pounding down onto flimsy shelters and tents.

The traumatised population has been on the move since the start of the war, sheltering in



A woman looks on from inside a tent as displaced Palestinians, who fled their houses due to Israeli strikes, shelter in tents at Nasser hospital, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. – Reuters

hospitals or moving from the north to the south and, in some cases, back again.

An expected Israeli offensive in the south could compel hundreds of thousands who fled Gaza City to uproot yet again, along with residents of Khan Younis, a city of more than 400,000, compounding an

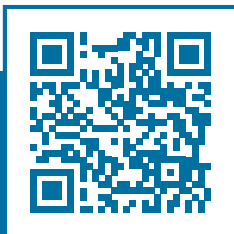
already dire humanitarian crisis.

Many, like Laila Abu Nemer who moved from Gaza City to the south, wonder how her family can survive the Israeli onslaught now in its seventh week.

“There is no bread, if we get a loaf of bread we divide it among the children. There

are vegetables, they gave us vegetables but there is no way to cook, so there is no way the children can eat,” she said.

“It feels hard that everyday when we are sleeping with the children, they wake up terrified because of the sound (of explosions). There is no safety at all.” — Reuters



agency dubs ‘death zone’



The WHO said 29 patients at the hospital with serious spinal injuries cannot move without medical assistance.

Shifa hospital, with a mass grave at the entrance and nearly 300 patients left inside with 25 health workers.

It said it was planning “the immediate evacuation of the remaining patients, staff and their families”.

But it warned that nearby facilities were already overstretched and urged an immediate ceasefire given the “extreme suffering of the people of Gaza”.

The Israeli army said three soldiers were killed on Saturday in fighting in northern Gaza, raising the number of troop deaths there to 62 since the war began.

On Saturday, hundreds fled the hospital on foot as loud explosions were heard around the complex.

Columns of sick and injured were seen leaving with displaced people, doctors and nurses.

At least 15 bodies, some in advanced stages of decomposition, were strewn along the route.

Medical charity Doctors without Borders (MSF) said one person was killed when its convoy came under attack on Saturday while evacuating staff and family members from near Al-Shifa.

The WHO said 29 patients at the hospital with serious spinal injuries cannot move without medical assistance. Israel has told Palestinians to move south for their safety, but deadly strikes continued there too.

— AFP



Yemenis march during a rally to show solidarity with Palestinians on November 18. — AFP

Israel says Yemenis seize ship in Red Sea

TEL AVIV: Israel said on Sunday that Yemeni group had seized a British-owned and Japanese-operated cargo ship in the southern Red Sea, claiming the incident would lead to consequences for international maritime security.

The Yemeni group been launching long-range missile and drone salvos at Israel in solidarity with the Palestinian fighters it has been battling in the Gaza Strip since Oct 7.

Last week, the group’s leader said his forces would make further attacks on Israel and they could target Israeli ships in the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandeb

Strait.

There was no immediate comment from the group on Sunday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office said a ship - which it did not name - had been seized, and stressed that Israel was not involved in its ownership, operation or the make-up of its international crew.

“There were no Israelis on the ship,” it said. “This is another act that represents an escalation in belligerence against the citizens of the free world, with concomitant international ramifications vis-a-vis the security of global shipping routes.”

The Israeli military said in an earlier statement the ship seizure took place in the Red Sea.

“Our eyes are open to constantly monitor and search for any Israeli ship in the Red Sea, especially in Bab al-Mandab, and near Yemeni regional waters,” leader Abdulmalik said in a broadcast speech.

Washington is on heightened alert for activity by several groups since war sparked on Oct. 7.

Israel has escalated its assault on Gaza, where its forces have killed more than 12,000 people, according to Palestinian officials.

— Reuters



A relative mourns over the bodies of a woman and her child from the Palestinian Shaikh el-Eed family, killed along with another child from the household a day earlier, when their home was hit by Israeli bombardment on Rafah in the southern Gaza strip. — AFP

Delegation from Palestinian Authority, Muslim nations to visit China

BEIJING: Top foreign policy officials from the Palestinian Authority and four Muslim-majority countries will visit China on Monday and Tuesday, Beijing announced, as the ongoing conflict claims thousands of civilian lives.

The visiting delegation is set to include the foreign ministers of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and Indonesia, as well as the secretary-general of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

“During the visit, China will have in-depth communication and coordination with the joint delegation of foreign ministers of Arab and Islamic countries to promote a de-escalation of the current Palestinian-Israeli conflict, protecting civilians, and justly resolving the Palestinian issue,” Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said in a statement on Sunday.

In Gaza, the government says 12,300 people have been killed in Israel’s relentless aerial bombardment and ground operations, mostly civilians.

Following the outbreak of the war last month, Chinese officials, including Foreign Minister Wang Yi, have called for an immediate ceasefire and a “cooling down” of the situation.

China has historically been



People walk near a house destroyed in an Israeli strike in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

sympathetic to the Palestinians and supported a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Last month, Wang spoke with the Palestinian Authority’s foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki, telling him Beijing “deeply expresses its sympathy with the Palestinian side”.

The PA was meant to be a first step towards an independent Palestinian state.

The delegation is set to arrive in China days after US President Joe Biden argued that the coastal territory of Gaza and the Israeli-occupied West Bank should come under a single “revitalised”

China will have in-depth communication and coordination with the joint delegation of foreign ministers of Arab and Islamic countries to promote a de-escalation

MAO NING
Chinese spokeswoman

administration.

“As we strive for peace, Gaza and the West Bank should be reunited under a single governance structure, ultimately under a revitalised Palestinian Authority,” he wrote in the Washington Post.

China has criticised US support for Israel and denounced the veto of a UN Security Council resolution by the United States, which wanted a call for Israel’s right to defend itself. Beijing’s diplomatic presence in the Middle East has grown in recent years, as it makes efforts to play peacemaker in a range of longstanding regional disputes. — AFP

Sustainable education is the path to growth



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

As Oman celebrates its 53th National Day, it is important to consider the achievements of the past but also keep an eye on the future. As for every nation, the youth is an indispensable part of this future and ensuring that the youth is capable, educated and motivated is key to national development. In fact, ensuring sustainable education is important to produce a spirited, creative and innovative generation.

According to UNESCO, sustainable education is an inter-disciplinary approach that “gives learners of all ages the knowledge, skills, values and agency to address interconnected global challenges including climate change, loss of biodiversity, unsustainable use of resources, and inequality”. It is a means of ensuring that the impact of education is felt, not only on the individual, but also on their community for a long period of time.

On its own, sustainability itself demands that the focus be on the long term implications of social actions, environmental stability and co-existence between communities, as well as with nature.

Sustained education is participatory and active – not just rote learning or even knowing content and information.

It is a move away from transmissive education to a transformative one: one in which learners are confident about the contributions they are making to society. On its own, content has little importance, now that it can be found at the touch of a button or the swipe of a screen.

What is more important is what we do with this information and knowledge, how it could be used to bring a change in society in terms of its social markers, how it can benefit from the knowledge of our ancestors and our community and merge this knowledge with that of the present.

Sustainable education, effectively, is a series of practices that helps to contribute to an effective ecosystem with the active participation of learners and teachers.

Typically, sustainable learning focuses on real-world and real-time problem solving and using evidence based information rather than anecdotes or hastily put together data. It also focuses on

SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION PRIORITISES ‘LASTING KNOWLEDGE’, WHICH CAN MEAN LIFE-LONG LEARNING AS WELL AS LEARNING AT ANY STAGE OF LIFE

content that is co-created by a community and is multi-modal in that it uses a combination of text, audio and video material.

Sustainable education prioritises ‘lasting knowledge’, which can mean life-long learning as well as learning at any stage of life. It also encourages learners to have future-focused skills and other soft skills like communication. Awareness of the complex problems surrounding us and the confidence to solve them are important components of the goals of sustainable education.

While Oman is well on its way towards implementing sustainable education, it can accelerate and maximise its positive impacts by sharing data, collaborating on projects and involving the community in any research taking place.

Growth, whether economic or cultural is only possible when the youth is made aware of its potential and given opportunities to use its latent talent. Sustainable educational goals ensure that the energy of youth will be used for long term prosperity and environmental stability.

Foreign firms race to open Saudi offices before deadline

ROBBIE COREY-BOULET

A WAVE of ribbon-cutting ceremonies is sweeping the Saudi capital as multinationals face a January deadline to open regional headquarters in the Gulf kingdom or lose out on government contracts.

In what has become a common scene, executives in suits and Saudi officials in white robes gather to inaugurate the new offices, sipping Arabic coffee in a haze of incense smoke while singing the praises of last year’s fastest-growing G20 economy. Announced in February 2021, Saudi Arabia’s regional headquarters (RHQ) programme is widely seen as a bid to compete with Dubai in the neighbouring United Arab Emirates, a favourite base for global firms with business in the Middle East.

Despite complaints from some executives that there remains a lack of clarity on key details of the Saudi programme, the January 1 deadline is holding, the Saudi investment ministry told AFP in a written response to questions.

“Multinational companies that are part of the RHQ Programme will be well positioned to bid for projects funded by the Saudi Government,” it said. So far, 162 regional headquarters licenses have been granted in sectors including pharmaceuticals, IT and construction, “with many others being processed”, the ministry said.

The programme is “an early litmus test of the degree to which foreign businesses are prepared or willing to comply with and buy into Saudi initiatives, or whether they will seek workarounds that see them retain the majority of staff in the UAE and delegate a select few to Saudi,” said Kristian Ulrichsen, a fellow at Rice University’s Baker Institute. It should also offer clues about the implementation of flagship projects such as a new airline and airport, and the \$500 billion, futuristic mega-city known as NEOM, Ulrichsen said.

Riyadh defines a regional headquarters as an office that provides “strategic direction, management, and support services for company subsidiaries, branches, and affiliates in the (Middle East and North Africa) region”, the investment ministry said. One firm, IHG Hotels & Resorts, placed its new office on the 12th floor of a skyscraper in the capital’s financial district, staffing it with 25 employees from departments including revenue management, sales, marketing, design and engineering. — AFP



Sergey Plekhanov

Rasputin: The myth that crushed the empire

GRIGORY RASPUTIN, a simple Russian peasant, remains one of history’s most scandalous figures. His life has inspired numerous books, adventure novels, and countless films and TV series, captivating the imagination of artists and memoirists.

This widespread fascination is rooted in the belief that Rasputin possessed a profound mystical influence over the royal family, an influence that ultimately contributed to the downfall of a great empire. Despite his humble origins, Rasputin gained entry into the royal family due to his unique healing abilities, as he was able to alleviate the severe illness of the royal heir, the future tsar.

To avert the impending danger posed by Rasputin’s perceived influence and protect the monarchy, a group of high-ranking officials in the Russian Empire hatched a conspiracy. Among them was a Grand Duke, the cousin of the tsar, and one of Russia’s wealthiest individuals, Felix Yusupov, who happened to be married to the tsar’s niece. These conspirators decided that Rasputin, who was suspected of being a German Kaiser agent during the First World War and allegedly influencing the tsar and tsarina to withdraw Russia from the conflict, had to be eliminated.

The conspiracy finally came to fruition at the end of 1916. Aware of Rasputin’s fondness for beautiful women, they lured him to a dinner party at Prince Yusupov’s palace, a man married to the tsar’s niece and renowned for her beauty. Rasputin accepted the invitation, flattered by the gesture.

During the dinner, they generously plied him with alcoholic drinks in an attempt to make him intoxicated, but his extraordinary resilience prevented him from getting drunk. As a last resort, they administered poison, testing a method to eliminate unwanted individuals. After dinner, they served tea and desserts, which Rasputin consumed without any apparent effect from the poison. The conspirators began to grow fearful, as it seemed they were dealing with someone of extraordinary constitution.

Subsequently, they resorted to violence and shot Rasputin multiple



A statue of Rasputin has been unveiled in Tyumen, Siberia.

times. He eventually fell lifeless in the palace courtyard. Yusupov ordered his body to be wrapped in a carpet and taken to the Neva River, where they intended to drown him in an ice hole. These ice holes were commonly used during the winter of 1916 for fetching water for household purposes. When the prince’s driver attempted to dispose of the body, Rasputin seemingly came back to life, clutching the edge of the ice floe and trying to escape. This was a testament to his extraordinary strength, though it’s likely a myth.

RASPUTIN’S STORY, LIKE MANY HISTORICAL CONSPIRACIES, SERVES AS A REMINDER OF THE LENGTHS PEOPLE WILL GO TO IN THEIR PURSUIT OF POWER OR ITS PRESERVATION

Contrary to the conspirators’ expectations, Rasputin’s murder did not weaken the supposed treasonous faction invented by unscrupulous politicians and journalists, a faction that likely never existed. Instead, it triggered an internal crisis that led to the collapse of the monarchy within three months.

Those who benefited from the conspiracy were not those aiming to rid the country of Rasputin’s perceived

malevolence but the Bolsheviks, the most extremist group in Russia at that time. Both the royal family and the aristocracy fell victim to their rise. Nevertheless, the notion of Rasputin as an evil genius persisted, as considerable effort was made to portray him in such a light. The question of whether Grigory Rasputin was genuinely sinister has been challenged over time, not by sensation-seeking journalists but by respected figures at the forefront of scientific thought during that era.

One such figure, Russian academician Ukhtomsky, a prominent physiologist closely associated with Prince Esper Esperovich Ukhtomsky, the tutor of the last Russian tsar, offered a different perspective. Despite his noble lineage, Ukhtomsky defended Rasputin’s character as an outstanding and rare talent in the Russian people – a perceptive individual who possessed wisdom and remarkable healing abilities.

Rasputin’s story, like many historical conspiracies, serves as a reminder of the lengths people will go to in their pursuit of power or its preservation. Throughout history, we’ve witnessed similar instances, from the false accusations and subsequent execution of Queen Anne Boleyn in 16th century England to the unjust persecution of Queen Marie Antoinette in late 18th century France. People have not hesitated to lay blame for crimes they did not commit in the relentless quest for power and influence.

A day of national accord

One can only be blind to see each day as a similar one! Every day is a different one as it brings a surprise of its own. It is just a matter of paying attention to the surprise of each single day. However, the National Day is unlike any other day of the year. It is definitely beyond description; it reminds us the glorious history of the great nation. Perhaps, one's hands and mind are unbelievably iced-up while the heart is beating with overjoy to express its profound feelings. It is like on cloud nine with pride and delight.

The National Day of Oman marks a memorable record for our nation; it is a day of honour to the nation and its people indeed. It has a special and precious impact on us for as we commemorate 53 years of the Omani blessed Renaissance. The day is very auspicious for the citizens and residents alike for the prosperity and stability, which the Sultanate of Oman has achieved over the past decades since the late Sultan Qaboos ascended to the throne.

It is a day of thanksgiving for the late Sultan Qaboos for building the new Oman with his far-sighted and prosperous reign. Likewise, the day marks the time to commend the wise governance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik during the past years of his leadership.

The day also brings the time to reaffirm loyalty to our benevolent leader and compassionate father His Majesty Sultan Haitham who is continuing the legacy and leading the nation to a further success and glory. Hence, the National Day is the time to renew our pledge to safeguard, consolidate and take active part in the on-going efforts of nation-building march.

November 18 stands as a day of national accord as every nook and corner of the country erupts in joy and pride. Though, no festivities have been observed across the country to commemorate the 53rd National Day



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NOVEMBER 18 STANDS AS A DAY OF NATIONAL ACCORD AS EVERY NOOK AND CORNER OF THE COUNTRY ERUPTS IN JOY AND PRIDE

anniversary due to Oman's honourable stand along with the Palestinians' suffering. Yet, the day portrayed a clear picture of the citizens' spirit of loyalty and unity to serve their nation and loyalty to the Sultan. This admirable spirit symbolised social concord and harmony in the Sultanate of Oman.

As a matter of fact, such communal accord reflects Oman's traditions and the close social cohesion that exist among the members of the Omani community. Accordingly, this, positively helped in forming a collaborative work between the government and its citizens in building the nation since the days of the Omani Renaissance. This was obviously endorsed by the late Sultan Qaboos as he stated once, "The Government and the people are as one body. If one of its limbs fails to do its duty, the other parts of the body will suffer".

Similarly, His Majesty Sultan Haitham stimulated the same, "Nation building and development are a public responsibility that requires the commitment of all, without exempting any one from their role, in their respective specialities, and within their capabilities". The whole nation has to be proud of the leaders who have transformed Oman to be a renowned nation worldwide. This has undoubtedly given the country and its people a regional and international respect. Further, the remarkable achievements that the Sultanate of Oman has witnessed in different spheres of life are far beyond the feelings of pride.

With no single doubt, Omanis are very proud to be a part of a nation that has achieved globally admired progress. We Omanis have many reasons to be grateful and proud of our beloved country. Oman is the land that defines our identity; a land that we belong to and certainly will be devote to serve and protect. Salute to the nation on the 53rd National Day and happy birthday to Oman and its fellow citizens.

ADORABLE!



Beatrice Borromeo and Francesco Carlo Albert Casiraghi attend a ceremony marking the National Day, at the Prince's Palace of Monaco, in Monaco, on Sunday. – Reuters

What we can do about food insecurity

IN London on November 20, the United Kingdom will host the Global Food Security Summit and launch a new strategy for international development. Despite pressing crises like the conflict in Gaza, we must stay focused on other parts of the global system, where ongoing crises of hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity demand an urgent response. Faced with immense suffering around the world, we need a UK government that is willing and able to offer solutions.

The organisations we lead – the Children's Investment Fund Foundation and the International Rescue Committee – are resolutely committed to protecting vulnerable children and families wherever they are. In Gaza, the IRC has set out detailed proposals for a humanitarian ceasefire to save the lives of Palestinian civilians and increase urgent access to food, while CIFF is helping to lead the charge on issues like child wasting. We each have a clear stake in the success of the summit (which CIFF has helped organise) and the government's new strategy for international development.

The global hunger crisis has become critical. Around 345 million people are facing acute levels of food insecurity this year – more than double the number in 2020 – and 45 million children under five suffer from acute malnutrition. Up to two million of those children die every year, and climate change and violent conflict are making the problem even worse.



David Miliband

is a former British foreign secretary and member of the WHO Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, is CEO of the International Rescue Committee



Kate Hampton
CEO of the Children's Investment Fund Foundation

Over the last decade, CIFF has invested over half a billion dollars in treating and preventing child wasting, and understanding what works to improve nutrition. It is a proud anchor partner to the Child Nutrition Fund, the largest global response to the child wasting crisis, which will be a key focus of the summit.

For its part, the IRC helps people in more than 50 countries whose lives have been shattered by conflicts and crises such as climate change. It constantly tests and scales up innovations to treat problems like malnutrition and food insecurity, for example by providing farmers and families in countries like Niger, Pakistan, South Sudan, and Syria with climate-resilient seeds and secure livelihoods. Proven solutions exist.

But we must all go further. To succeed, the summit needs to deliver on four fronts. First, participants should commit to scaling up proven, cost-saving solutions and innovations. A good example is ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF), a fortified peanut paste that helps 92 per cent of acutely malnourished children recover, but which most children in conflict-affected settings cannot currently access. More than a decade of research from the IRC shows that with simplified, combined protocols, more children can be reached with the same resources. A study in

Mali, for example, found a 30 per cent cost saving.

The World Health Organization will also use the summit to introduce new guidelines on the treatment and prevention of wasting, taking a positive step towards decentralising and expanding treatment globally.

Second, the summit can combine disparate responses to the closely related climate- and food-security crises. A new IRC analysis shows that humanitarian need is particularly concentrated in just 16 conflict-affected, climate-vulnerable countries.

Given the importance of climate finance, we must tie the summit's outcomes to the upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) and

the UK government's own new development strategy. Ensuring that climate finance reaches the most vulnerable communities requires improving local-level climate-risk mapping and access to grants, as well as operationalising the Loss and Damage Fund established at COP27. Loss and damage support should come in addition to existing climate-finance commitments and be proportional to vulnerable communities' needs.

Addressing climate finance also means tackling the global debt crisis and responding to the need for a more sustainable debt regime. It is well known that countries with shrinking fiscal space increasingly lack the capacity to invest in human capital and

prevent food insecurity.

Third, the summit can set the stage for closing the global nutrition-financing gap in 2024. Donor governments must look ahead with ambition to next year's Nutrition for Growth Summit, by increasing their bilateral financial support for food security and starting to mobilise more effective and inclusive pooled funds.

Finally, the summit must mobilise political will, by uniting world leaders and partner governments around a global plan to address food insecurity once and for all. Lofty rhetoric by global leaders must translate into policy implementation that includes practical support for national nutrition and food-security plans. With a concerted, coordinated effort, we can turn the tide on global food insecurity, and the UK can demonstrate its capacity to lead.

The Global Food Security Summit – and the accompanying development strategy – could be a significant catalyst. Ten years ago, Andrew Mitchell, currently the UK minister of state for development and Africa, and David Cameron, the former prime minister who has just returned to serve as foreign secretary, helped unlock hundreds of millions of dollars for nutrition aid at the UK-hosted Nutrition for Growth Summit in 2013. Now, the UK and its partners must deliver again.

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Lofty rhetoric by global leaders must translate into policy implementation.

Hempel and Permoglaze Unite to Shape the Future of Coatings in Oman

The union of Hempel and Permoglaze in shaping the future of coatings in Oman marks a significant milestone for both brands. With over a century of trusted experience, Hempel has established itself as a global leader in providing sustainable coating solutions. Permoglaze, on the other hand, brings its range of colours and regional presence of over 30 years in Oman, making it a trusted brand in the region.

One of the key advantages of this collaboration is the ability to offer both Hempel and Permoglaze products simultaneously and instantly. This diversity allows the brands to cater to the specific needs of every customer in Oman, both in terms of functionality and affordability. Whether it is protecting assets against extreme weather conditions or adding a splash of colour to a building, the collaboration ensures that there is a coating solution to suit every requirement.

In line with its commitment to in-country value, Hempel has established a local manufacturing factory in Rusayl-Muscat. This strategic move allows for shorter lead times, reducing the need for inventory holding and ensuring prompt delivery to end customers. The dedication of Hempel's professional team further enhances the customer experience, as they are readily available to address any queries or concerns and provide personalized solutions tailored to each customer's needs.

In addition to their commitment to customer satisfaction, Hempel and Permoglaze are also dedicated to sustainable practices. The brands have embraced digital platforms, making it easier for customers to place orders, track deliveries, and access product information. This digital approach promotes sustainability by reducing the need for physical materials and embracing a more environmentally friendly way of information sharing.

On the significance of this collaboration Hempel's Vice President and Head of Decorative Middle East, Mark Rees Stated, "This collaboration between Hempel and Permoglaze aligns with Hempel's Double Impact strategy, which aims to double the company's size by 2025 through acquisitions and organic growth."



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Novak Djokovic returns to Spain’s Carlos Alcaraz during the semifinal match.— AFP

Djokovic beats Alcaraz to set up ATP Finals title clash with Sinner

Turin, Italy: Novak Djokovic closed in on a record-breaking seventh ATP Finals title on Saturday after sweeping past Carlos Alcaraz 6-3, 6-2 in a dominating semifinal display he hailed as his best of the tournament. World number one Djokovic will face home favourite Jannik Sinner on Sunday in the final in Turin, as the 36-year-old attempts to cap an age-defying year with yet another major triumph.

“The best match of the tournament for me, without a doubt. It came at right time really, after spending a lot of hours on the court in the first three matches,” said Djokovic.

“Tonight, from the very beginning, I felt the ball well. I approached the match with the right attitude, the right mentality.”

The Serb came into the Finals at the end of a year which has brought three Grand Slams, taking his total to an all-time best of 24, and a 40th Masters 1000 title.

Now only Sinner stands between Djokovic and victory, which would take him past his old foe and retired great Roger Federer for season-ending tournament titles.

Sunday’s final promises to be a tough proposition for Djokovic as he lost to Sinner in the group stage and will have to deal with a partisan Italian crowd that, unusually for him, won’t be on his side.

“He’s been playing fantastic tennis, arguably the best tennis of his life. On this stage, against top 10 players,” added Djokovic.

“We played a very tight match the other night, the atmosphere was electric. I don’t expect anything less than what we had in the group stage matchup.”

Djokovic now has the better of his five matches with Wimbledon champion Alcaraz, who at 20 is already a two-time Grand Slam winner and was bidding to become

the youngest finalist since Pete Sampras won the title back in 1991. Saturday’s match didn’t live up to the previous four dramatic clashes however, as Djokovic put on a show of force which put pretender Alcaraz firmly in his place.

“I feel like I am not on his level on indoor courts,” a dejected Alcaraz told reporters.

“He has more experience than me playing in these tournaments, in these courts. But he’s unbelievable.”

SINNER DELIVERING

Sinner said he has the recipe for glory after his convincing 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 6-1 win over Daniil Medvedev made him the first Italian to ever reach the final.

The Italian has risen to fourth in the world rankings in 2023, and backed by passionate home support, the 22-year-old has a chance to cap the best season of his young career with what would be his biggest title to date.

“It’s like the first time you cook pasta with tomato sauce, maybe it’s not that good. You realise that it needs more salt so the next time you add it. Then you might start using fresh tomatoes, and then add in basil,” Sinner told reporters.

“You learn things as you go along, until you get the dish right. That’s what I’m doing. But you have to be careful, you can’t just keep adding new things, because if you put in too many ingredients the dish won’t be good any more. There’s always a balance to be struck.”

He faces Djokovic after his third straight win over world number three Medvedev, who he also beat in finals in Vienna and Beijing.

Medvedev predicted big things for Sinner after Saturday’s defeat, saying that the Italian will win Grand Slams and top the world rankings if he keeps playing as he has in Turin. —AFP

Himam Trail Run Race kicks off on Thursday

WITH AN UNPRECEDENTED 600 ATHLETES FROM 62 COUNTRIES



Muscat: The eagerly anticipated Himam Trail Run Race is set to commence this Thursday, with a diverse lineup of races and elite runners from across the globe.

The race organised by the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, this year’s edition will take place in the scenic terrains of Al Hajar Mountains and features over 600 participants from 62 countries competing in the main distances, and approximately 2,000 individuals in the fun and kids’ races.

The classic and challenging

Al Hajar Ultra 110km kicks off on November 23, starting from Al Hamra. In this challenging trail, runners will embark on a journey through the rugged beauty of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar before descending into Birkat Al Mouz. Along the way, they will navigate rocky paths, climb steep inclines, and take in the stunning views of the surrounding landscape, ultimately gaining a total of 5,700 metres of elevation.

Another race is the technical and scenic Skyward Canyon 55km or Scenic Sprint 20km races, both starting on November 24 in Izki and Birkat

Al Mouz consecutively.

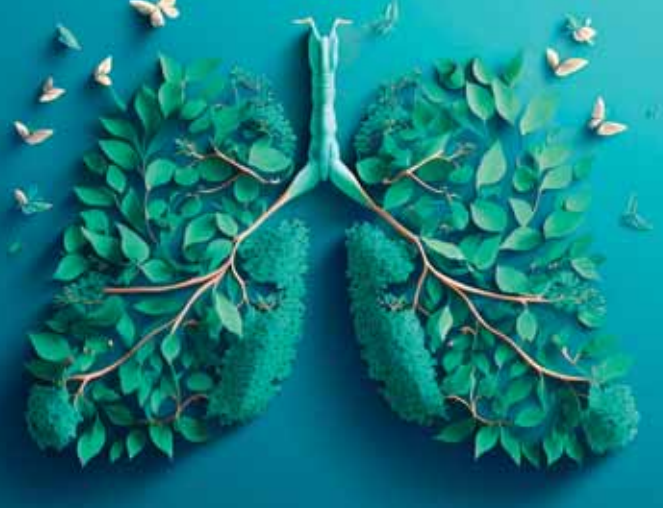
Runners will expect a truly unforgettable experience as they navigate rocky paths, climb steep inclines, and take in the breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape. The 20km distance is a completely new trail designed to give runners scenic views of authentic Omani landscapes.

A range of shorter distances are also on offer to enable more members of the community to embark on the wonders of trail runners with the Hilly Haven 10km, Village Rush 5km, Mini Marvels 4km, and the Tiny Titans races (2km and 1km)

taking place over the weekend. These trails are designed to cater to all levels of runners, from elite athletes to young enthusiasts.

The event will see a roster of elite runners includes Jason Schlarb (USA), Kristina Schou Madsen (Denmark), Mohammad Reza (Iran), Aziza El Amrany and Rachid Al Emrany (Morocco), Salama Alaqra (Jordan), and Perrine Fages (France), adding a competitive edge to the race. Their presence is a testament to the race’s growing prominence in the international mountain running community.

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Australia win sixth World Cup title after Travis Head hundred sinks India



Australia's Pat Cummins celebrates with the trophy and teammates after winning the ICC Cricket World Cup. – Reuters

AHMEDABAD: Australia won a record-extending sixth 50-overs World Cup title after opener Travis Head smashed a magnificent century to fashion their six-wicket victory in Sunday's final against the tournament's form team India.

Put into bat, India rode battling half-centuries by KL Rahul and Virat Kohli to post a below-par 240 all out in exactly 50 overs at a packed Narendra Modi Stadium.

Australia suffered a top order wobble of their own but Head's 137 off 120 balls saw them romp home with seven overs to spare in match that never reached great heights.

Around 93,000 predominantly Indian fans sat mostly in deathly silence as the home team, who had won 10 matches in a row to make the final, succumbed to their first loss of the tournament in the all-important summit clash.

Earlier, Pat Cummins's decision to field, primarily to avoid operating with a dewy ball in the night, bemused many but Australian bowlers, aided by some superb fielding, stifled their opposition.

India captain Rohit Sharma had been playing tone-setting knocks in their batting template in the tournament and it was no different in the final despite the early loss of Shubman Gill.

Rohit smashed three sixes in his entertaining 47 but fell just before the end of powerplay.

The opener stepped out against Glenn Maxwell but miscued his shot on the offside. Head ran backwards from cover to take a tumbling catch to get rid of the India captain.

Kohli (54) hit Mitchell Starc (3-55) for three boundaries in a row but India slumped to 81-3 in the 11th over when Cummins dismissed Shreyas Iyer caught behind.

Kohli and Rahul (66) then combined in a dour rebuilding job even if it meant going 16.1 overs without a boundary.

Kohli brought up his ninth 50-plus knock in 11 innings but soon departed after chopping a Cummins delivery on to his stumps.

Rahul hit just one four in his half-century illustrating how difficult the pitch was for shot-makers like him. Australia wicketkeeper Josh Inglis took five catches, which is a record in a World Cup final. Australia, when they came out to bat, slumped to 47-3 seven overs into what had looked like a straight-forward chase for them.

Head combined with Marnus Labuschagne, who made 58 not out, in a 192-run stand to kill off the contest. — Reuters



Australia players celebrate after winning the ICC Cricket World Cup. – Reuters





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Wage Protection System secures workers’ rights

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, NOV 19

The Ministry of Labour has made significant progress in implementing the Wage Protection System (WPS), a joint electronic system with the Central Bank of Oman that aims to safeguard workers’ wages in the private sector.

As of November 10, 2023, 26.17 per cent of commercial establishments with at least one worker had registered in the system.

Large enterprises have shown the highest compliance rate, with 99.3 per cent registered, followed by medium enterprises at 91.75 per cent. Small and micro enterprises have lower registration rates, with 25.89 per cent and 21.12 cent respectively.

According to Shaikh Mohammed bin Ghalib al Hinai, Adviser for Human Resources Planning at the Ministry of Labour and Chairman of the WPS Main Committee, large and medium enterprises were given a six month extension to bring



Oman’s Wage Protection System secures workers’ rights

their companies into alignment with the WPS by 50 per cent as of November 9, 2023, and 100 per cent by January 9, 2024. As for small and small enterprises, the deadline is January 9, 2024 for 50 per cent, rising to full 100 per cent compliance by March

9, 2024. The latter were given an extension of eight months to achieve compliance.

The WPS ensures that employers transfer workers’ wages directly to their bank accounts, protecting them from delayed or non-payment.

It also provides the Ministry of Labour with a comprehensive database on wages in the private sector, which can be used for strategic planning and policy development. The Ministry has been actively promoting the WPS through a wide media campaign

The WPS is programmed to automatically monitor the annual increase in wages through updated electronic contracts.

and awareness-raising workshops. It has also published a file of frequently asked questions in Arabic, English, Urdu, and Bengali to ensure that workers have access to information about the system.

The Ministry is also working with the General Union of Workers of the Sultanate of Oman to raise awareness among private sector employees.

Employers who do not register in the WPS may face administrative penalties, including warnings, suspension of work permit services, and fines.

If the violation is referred to the judicial authorities, even higher fines may apply.

The WPS has been integrated with the Ministry of Labour’s

other systems, including licensing, work leave registration, the wage subsidy initiative, and training contracts.

This integration ensures that private sector institutions must be registered in the WPS in order to access these services.

The WPS is programmed to automatically monitor the annual increase in wages through updated electronic contracts.

It also links with the Public Authority for Social Insurance to ensure accuracy.

The Ministry of Labour emphasises that the wage data of workers in the private sector is confidential and cannot be accessed by its employees except in cases of labour disputes.

Employers are exempted from transferring wages to workers’ bank accounts in certain cases, such as when there is a legal dispute between the worker and the employer, when the worker leaves work without legal justification, when new employees have not completed 30 days of employment, or when workers are on unpaid leave.

Sohar Port and Freezone a key contributor to Oman’s growth

MUSCAT: Sohar Port and Free Zone, with an annual contribution of 2.1 per cent of Oman’s gross domestic product (GDP), is an engine of the country’s economic development.

According to Emile Hoogsteden, CEO, investments in the port and free zone have topped \$27 billion since its establishment.

The port also handles around RO 18.4 billion worth of import and export cargo annually, representing around 45 per cent of Oman’s aggregate trade volumes.

During Q3 2023, liquid bulk products handled by the port increased 13 per cent to 18 million metric tonnes, up from 16 million metric tonnes during Q3 2022. Ship calls climbed 2 per cent to 2,427 calls, up from 2,384 calls in 2022, reflecting an improvement in the port’s handling capabilities.

Sohar Port also witnessed a 4 per cent increase in calls by vehicle carriers, which are cargo ships designed to transport wheeled goods, including cars, trucks, construction equipment, and others.

In cooperation with industrial tenants, Sohar Port and Freezone also launched Net-Zero Alliance, which is an initiative dedicated to accelerating Oman’s transition towards carbon neutrality by 2050. The Charter serves as a platform for stakeholders to meet to exchange ideas and



Sohar Port handles around 45 per cent of Oman’s cargo throughput

strategies and contribute together. In advancing the region’s path towards sustainability, said the CEO.

Omar bin Mahmoud al Mahrezi, CEO of Sohar Free Zone and Deputy CEO of Sohar Port, said the hub provides a range of services including warehousing, logistics and manufacturing facilities, making it an integrated centre for companies looking to start their operations in the Sultanate of Oman.

The port covers about 80 per cent of the import and export activities in the Sultanate of

Oman, he said

Since the start of the year, a total of 11 agreements have been signed, covering a total investment of \$632 million, he stated.

Warehousing capacity has grown 86 per cent, underscoring the port’s strategic location and its ability to store and distribute large quantities of goods with high efficiency.

Also during the year, a sub-usufruct agreement was signed with the International Fine Chemicals Company to establish a polymer manufacturing factory in Sohar Port with an investment

value of \$300 million.

Covering an area of 240,000 square metres, the project will serve various industries, including energy production, agriculture, wastewater management and industry.

A land lease agreement was also signed with the Green Ferro Alloys Company to establish Oman’s first silicon metal factory in Sohar Free Zone with a total investment amounting to \$68 million US dollars. It will meet the growing demand for silicon metal in the regions of Asia, Europe and North America. — ONA

UK’s Hunt says won’t implement tax cuts that fuel inflation

LONDON: British finance minister Jeremy Hunt said on Sunday that he would not implement tax cuts that would push up inflation, days before he announces a major budget update that is widely expected to contain tax cuts.

The Sunday Times reported that Hunt was considering cutting income tax or national insurance in his Autumn Statement budget update on Wednesday.

Hunt is due to present his Autumn Statement on November 22, hoping to revive the fortunes of both a stagnant British economy and the governing Conservative Party ahead of an election expected next year.

“The one thing we won’t do is any kind of tax cut that fuels inflation,” Hunt told Sky News.

When asked if he would cut inheritance tax — a move The Sunday Times said could be delayed owing to bad press — Hunt said “everything is on the table” ahead of his statement.

Rachel Reeves, the opposition Labour Party’s finance spokeswoman, said cutting inheritance tax would be the wrong priority in a cost-of-living crisis. “Lower taxes on working people — if the government can explain where the money is coming from — is something I would support,” Reeves told Sky News.

Hunt’s options are limited



British Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt leaves Downing Street in London, Britain

after heavy state spending on the Covid-19 pandemic and last year’s surge in energy prices. Public debt now stands close to 100 per cent of economic output, more than three times its size 20 years ago.

Still, official forecasts due next Wednesday are expected to show Hunt has more room for giveaways before running into trouble with fiscal rules than in his annual budget published in March.

Hunt said the only way to bring personal taxes down was to spend public money more efficiently.

“I want to bring down our tax burden, I think it’s important for a productive, dynamic, fizzing economy that you motivate people to do the work, take the risks that we need,” he said.

— Reuters

Al Mouj Muscat claims dual win at the Arabian Property Awards

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Muscat, solidifying its status as a distinguished developer, secured two prestigious accolades at the Arabian Property Awards 2023-24.

The company triumphed in the categories of ‘Best Office Development in Oman’ and ‘Best Residential Developments with 20+ Units’ for its recently launched Business Park and Jinan Island, respectively.

Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, expressed his satisfaction, stating, “The recognition from the Arabian Property Awards is a testament to our vision for Jinan Island and our innovative Business Park.

Our commitment to delivering ultimate quality and luxury has been unwavering from day one.

Today, Al Mouj Muscat stands among the industry leaders, offering unparalleled life, work, and leisure experiences.”

The Business Park, launched in early 2023 within Al Mouj Golf, comprises eight mid-rise buildings in two distinct districts: Business Park East and Business Park West.



Al Mouj Muscat Triumphs: A Double Win at the Arabian Property Awards for Innovation in Business Park and Luxury Residences on Jinan Island.

Occupiers enjoy an oceanfront setting with picturesque views of the golf course. The park offers excellent connectivity, transport links, and access to world-class

leisure, commercial, and tourism amenities. Spanning 39,000 square metres and meeting stringent grade A standards, the buildings are interconnected

by landscaped gardens and communal spaces, fostering a conducive environment for business networking. In addition to the Business

Park, early 2023 marked the launch of Jinan Island at the heart of Al Mouj Muscat.

The private island features 43 five and six-bedroom luxury villas, representing a masterpiece of luxury living and exceptional design.

The exclusive island enclave offers three distinct styles of villas, creating a blissful environment for modern family life.

The residents-only neighbourhood is centrally located between Al Mouj Marina, Al Mouj Golf, and the vibrant Ghadeer District, connecting to nearby amenities and attractions.

The Arabian Property Awards, recognised as the largest and most prestigious awards in the region, are synonymous with excellence in the real estate sector.

Judged by an independent panel of over 90 industry experts, the awards focus on design, quality, service, innovation, originality, and commitment to sustainability.

The 2023-24 panel was chaired by Lord Best and Lord Waverley, members of the House of Lords in the UK Parliament.

How big tech generated billions in fines



PARIS: Almost every month, major tech companies face hefty fines for various infractions, yet it often takes years before any payments are made. Meta, TikTok, Amazon, Google, and Apple are among those challenging fines, totalling billions of euros, raising questions about the effectiveness of financial penalties in curbing their behaviour.

Ireland’s data regulator confirmed to AFP that Meta has not paid the two billion euros (\$2.2 billion) in fines issued since last September, while TikTok also owes hundreds of millions. Amazon is still appealing a 746 million euro fine from 2021, and Google disputes EU fines exceeding eight billion euros for market abuse between 2017 and 2019. Apple continues to contest a French antitrust fine of 1.1 billion euros and a 13 billion euros tax order to Ireland. This trend is not exclusive to the major players, as X (formerly Twitter) in Australia has not paid a fine for failing to outline plans to combat child sexual abuse content. Critics argue that imposing fines alone does not deter bad behaviour and call for more drastic measures.

Margarida Silva, a researcher at the Centre for Research on Multinationals, noted that big tech’s reluctance to pay fines aligns with their history of challenging enforcement. — AFP

National Finance and Sharakah enhance SME empowerment

MUSCAT: National Finance, the leading finance company in the Sultanate of Oman, continues its successful collaboration with Sharakah, reaffirming its commitment to empower local projects and foster entrepreneurial spirit through its Corporate Responsibility arm, Imtidad. This strategic partnership aims to propel SMEs towards sustained growth and contribute to the holistic development of the nation.

The primary objective of the initiative is to support SMEs and aspiring entrepreneurs by identifying areas for operational improvement and guiding them in implementing effective strategies to enhance business profitability.

A key component of the initiative is the “Zaad Al Ruwad” workshop, providing prospective entrepreneurs with insights into the intricacies of starting a

business.

Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, CEO of National Finance, stated, “Our collaboration with Sharakah, rooted in shared successes, reflects a collective vision for positive change and holistic national development.

This partnership not only fosters significant growth in SMEs but also plays a pivotal role in contributing to the GDP.”

Ali bin Ahmed Muqaibal, CEO of Sharakah, emphasised the importance of such partnerships in creating a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem in Oman.

He said, “These collaborations are crucial for knowledge sharing, facilitating access to financing options, and establishing a supportive network for SMEs, contributing to a holistic ecosystem for startups and SMEs.”

The success of the Imtidad Programme, tailored specifically to the Omani market,



National Finance Strengthens Partnership with Sharakah, Empowering SMEs through “Imtidad” Program and Sustaining Support for Youth and High Intellectual Capabilities.

demonstrates the effectiveness of corporate partnerships in fostering entrepreneurship.

These market-specific tools, developed through extensive experience, cater to local needs,

offer scalability, and contribute to the resilience of Oman’s economic landscape.

SpaceX Starship launch failed minutes after reaching space

NEW YORK : SpaceX’s uncrewed spacecraft Starship, developed to carry astronauts to the moon and beyond, failed in space shortly after lifting off on Saturday, cutting short its second test but making it further than an earlier attempt that ended in an explosion.

The two-stage rocketship blasted off from the Elon Musk-owned company’s Starbase launch site near Boca Chica in Texas, helping boost the Starship spacecraft as high as 90 miles (148 km) above ground on a planned 90-minute test mission to space and back.

However, the rocket’s Super Heavy first stage booster, though it achieved a crucial manoeuvre to separate with its core Starship stage, exploded over the Gulf of Mexico shortly after detaching, as



SpaceX’s next-generation Starship spacecraft to lift off from launchpad, near Brownsville.

shown in a SpaceX webcast.

Meanwhile, the core Starship stage boosted further towards space, but a few minutes later, a company broadcaster announced that SpaceX mission control had suddenly lost contact with the vehicle.

“We have lost the data from the second stage... we think we may have lost the second stage,” SpaceX engineer and livestream host John Insprucker said.

He added that engineers believe an automated flight termination command was triggered to destroy the rocket, though the reason was unclear.

About eight minutes into the test mission, a camera view tracking the Starship booster appeared to show an explosion, suggesting the vehicle failed at

that time.

The rocket’s altitude was 91 miles (148 km).

The launch was the second attempt to fly Starship mounted atop its towering Super Heavy rocket booster, following an April attempt that ended in explosive failure about four minutes after lift-off.

The US Federal Aviation Administration, which oversees commercial launch sites, confirmed a mishap occurred that “resulted in a loss of the vehicle,” adding that no injuries or property damage have been reported. The agency said it will oversee a SpaceX-led investigation into the testing failure and will need to approve SpaceX’s plan to prevent it from happening again. — Reuters



Research study focuses on heavy metal concentrations in road dust samples

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, NOV 19

A recent study conducted by Dr Hilal bin Khalfan al Shidi, Senior Lecturer at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), focused on assessing heavy metal concentrations in road dust samples across Muscat.

The research, titled 'Heavy metals levels in road dust from Muscat, Oman: Relationship with traffic volumes, and ecological and health risk assessments,' aimed to understand the environmental and health risks associated with different traffic levels.

For this investigation, Dr Al Shidi and his team collected dust samples from roads classified based on traffic volumes—low, medium, and high—in Muscat, Oman.

The samples underwent detailed analysis for the presence of various metals, including arsenic, copper, lead, mercury, iron, and zinc.

The findings unveiled a notable variation in heavy metal concentrations across the samples.

Mercury and iron, in particular, exhibited the lowest and highest concentrations, ranging from ppm 0.59 to 0.80 and ppm 406.10 to 429.00, respectively.

Interestingly, mercury and arsenic not only demonstrated increasing trends from low to high traffic categories but also displayed significant correlations with each other and traffic volumes.

This correlation suggested a potential origin of these metals from vehicular emissions.

Assessments based on the potential ecological Risk Index (RI) indicated a considerable level of risk associated with selected metals in the dust samples. However, the Hazard Index (HI) remained within the safe threshold value (HI

1), implying a lower risk to human health.

While the study implied minor prejudicial health risks to the general public, it underscored the potential vulnerability of children to the impact of metals associated with dust.

Dr Hilal recommended a thorough evaluation of heavy metal presence in dust and an understanding of their ecological and health risks, emphasising the importance of informing appropriate environmental policies to

While the study implied minor prejudicial health risks to the general public, it underscored the potential vulnerability of children to the impact of metals associated with dust

address particulate matter emissions.

The outcomes of this research project were published in the International Journal of Environmental Health Research, and the collaborative effort involved Dr Al Shidi, Dr Hassan al Reasi, and Dr Hameed Sulaiman. Dr Al Shidi's research provides insights into the complex interplay between traffic, heavy metal concentrations in road dust, and potential environmental and health risks.

The findings call for proactive measures to mitigate the impact of particulate matter emissions, particularly in urban areas with varying traffic intensities.

Omantel Group bolsters portfolio with fresh stake acquisitions

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, NOV 19

As many as four tech businesses have been added to majority state-owned Omantel Group's ballooning portfolio of subsidiaries and associates so far this year – acquisitions aimed at strengthening its positioning in the regional telecom industry.

The most recent of these acquisitions was reported last month, when Omantel Group acquired 100 per cent equity interest in Specialised Technical Services Company (STS), which provides digital transformation solutions in the Middle East and North Africa.

The acquisition was finalised for a purchase consideration of \$32 million (RO 12.2 million), Omantel stated in its financial report for the Jan – Sep 2023 period.

Earlier, in the previous quarter, the Group acquired 83.39 per cent equity interest in Xenon Prepaid Electronic Card Payment WLL (Bookeey) for a purchase consideration of RO 3 million.

Incorporated in Kuwait,



Omantel has been strengthening its position in the regional telecom sector

Bookeey is engaged in electronic payment and settlement systems services.

Also in the same quarter, the

Group acquired 65 per cent equity interest in Adfolks Software Trading LLC for a purchase consideration of AED 15.823

million (RO 1.633 million).

Incorporated in the UAE, Adfolks specialises in cloud and related services.

In January, Omantel Group acquired the entire equity interest of Business Integrated Operating Systems (BIOS) for a purchase consideration of AED 157.57 million (RO 16.225 million). Also incorporated in the UAE, BIOS operates multiple subsidiaries engaged in business of IT related activities and cloud services.

An Omani joint stock company listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), Omantel is principally focused on the establishment, operation, maintenance and development of telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman. The Company and its subsidiaries (the Group) along with its associates provide telecommunications services in Oman and 8 other countries in the Middle East.

Total revenue posted by the Group for the first nine months of 2023 climbed 10.6 per cent to RO 2.192 billion, up from RO 1.981 billion for the corresponding period of 2022.

UN plastic treaty talks navigate recycling challenges

NAIROBI: The third round of United Nations negotiations aimed at establishing the world's first treaty to control plastic pollution has generated over 500 proposals from involved parties, participants revealed on the talks' last day on Sunday. While some see this as progress, environmental campaign group Greenpeace deems it "chaos."

Negotiators, convened in the Kenyan capital for talks known as INC3, have until the end of next year to reach an agreement on controlling plastics, responsible for generating an estimated 400 million tonnes of waste annually.

The plastics industry, alongside oil and petrochemical exporters

like Russia and Saudi Arabia, argues that a global deal should emphasise recycling and reusing plastic. However, environmental campaigners and certain governments contend that the emphasis should be on reducing overall production.

Greenpeace stressed that a successful deal would necessitate greater leadership from the United States and the European Union. Graham Forbes, head of delegation for Greenpeace, expressed disappointment, stating, "The hard truth is that INC3 has failed to deliver on its core objective: delivering a mandate to prepare a first draft of a treaty text. This is not



Workers offload plastic bottles for recycling from a truck at the Dawn to Glory PET flakes export company in industrial area of Nairobi

progress. This is chaos." On the other hand, the International Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN), a global network of non-

governmental organisations, viewed the numerous proposals as indicative of the robustness of the Nairobi talks. — **Reuters**

US transition to electric vehicles faces delays

NEW YORK: The US transition to electric cars faces a formidable hurdle as concerns about vehicle range, limited charging capacity, and core affordability issues hamper progress.

In recent weeks, automakers have revised EV sales targets and deferred capital projects in a bid to reduce inventories of unsold EVs at dealerships.

Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData, noted that the slowdown in EV sales is more pronounced than in other vehicle categories and is not merely an economic issue. "The EV has a problem attached to it," he said. "It's a much more difficult and complex purchase due to the range of the vehicles and the charging infrastructure."

American consumers, accustomed to lengthy road trips given the country's vast size and limited public transit options, find the current network of EV charging stations unreliable, with many areas lacking infrastructure or equipped with undependable machines.



US transition to electric vehicles faces delays

While more than three-quarters of drivers consider EVs reliable, according to a Consumer Technology Association CTA survey, significant doubts persist. Concerns revolve around inadequate charging infrastructure 36 per cent, battery range 39 per cent, and vehicle affordability 38 per cent.

In October, the average EV sold

for \$51,762—\$13,000 below the year-ago level but almost \$4,000 above the average price of all autos.

In Europe, the higher gasoline prices provide an incentive for consumers to overlook the lofty upfront cost of the vehicle.

This factor is less influential in the United States, where gas prices are only about half the level

in France or Britain, according to Observatoire Cetelem 2024.

Industry leaders like Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk also highlight increased borrowing costs as a challenge following a series of Federal Reserve interest rate hikes over the last year and a half.

Tesla continues to dominate the EV market, representing over 55 per cent of the 873,000 EV autos sold in the first 10 months of 2023, as reported by industry researcher Kelley Blue Book.

Ford Chief Executive Jim Farley anticipates "some bumpiness" in the evolving US market, attributing it to dynamic changes in pricing, adoption rates, and regulations that necessitate further cost reduction for EVs.

General Motors, Ford's rival, recently postponed its plan to convert its Orion, Michigan plant for EVs until the end of 2025. This move aims to better manage capital investment while aligning with evolving EV demand.

Ford and Tesla are also focusing on simplifying manufacturing

processes to limit costs. Tesla's Chief Financial Officer, Vaibhav Taneja, emphasises, "Reducing the cost of our vehicles is our top priority."

For its upcoming Cybertruck, expected to begin deliveries before the end of 2023, Tesla is striving to "simplify that vehicle" to achieve efficiency "that is unheard of in the auto industry," according to Musk.

Ford has similarly committed to tweaking its vehicle design and manufacturing to reduce complexity.

However, the results remain unproven, warns Deutsche Bank analyst Emmanuel Rosner, expressing concerns that automakers have not yet cracked the economics to make easy, affordable EVs.

Washington has rallied behind EVs during Joe Biden's presidency, approving \$7.5 billion in funds for EV chargers and extending tax credits up to \$7,500 for consumer purchases of EVs. The Biden administration aims for 50 per cent of vehicle sales to be electric by 2030. —**AFP**

Moody's maintains Italy's debt rating, upgrades to stable

BENGALURU: On Friday, Moody's retained Italy's sovereign debt rating at Baa3, one notch above junk, while surprising many by upgrading the outlook to stable from negative, providing an unexpected boost for Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's government.

Most analysts had anticipated the agency to keep both Italy's rating and outlook unchanged. Moody's had placed the euro zone's third-largest economy on a negative outlook in August last year amid a government collapse and an energy crisis.

"The decision to change the outlook to stable from negative reflects a stabilisation of prospects for the country's economic strength, the health of its banking sector, and the government's debt dynamics," Moody's stated.

Moody's was the fourth agency to review Italy in the last month. — **Reuters**

Product-market fit: finding your niche



KAMLA SAID
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WHETHER YOU'RE ON THE VERGE OF LAUNCHING YOUR STARTUP OR FINE-TUNING AN EXISTING PRODUCT, THE PURSUIT OF PRODUCT-MARKET FIT IS A JOURNEY WORTH THE EFFORT

UNDERSTANDING
PRODUCT-MARKET FIT:

Product-market fit is more than a milestone; it's a continuous process of aligning your offering with the desires and pain points of your audience. It's the moment when your product becomes the solution customers not only want but need.

CUSTOMER-CENTRIC
APPROACH:

Achieving product-market fit requires a deep dive into the minds of your customers. What are their challenges? What solutions are they seeking? Embrace a customer-centric approach to tailor your product to fit seamlessly into their lives.

ITERATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

The path to product-market fit is rarely linear. It involves constant iteration based on customer feedback. The ability to adapt and evolve your offering based on real-world insights is a hallmark of successful startups.

Metrics and Feedback Loops: Quantifying product-market fit involves analysing metrics and creating feedback loops. Are your customers not just using but actively advocating for your product? Monitoring user engagement, satisfaction, and retention rates provides invaluable data.

COMPETITIVE
DIFFERENTIATION:

In a crowded market, differentiation is key. Your product needs to stand out, offering a unique value proposition. Product-market fit goes beyond meeting expectations; it's about exceeding them in a way that makes your offering indispensable.

SCALABILITY AND
GROWTH:

As you fine-tune your product-market fit, scalability comes



Securing funding is not just about capital; it's about strategic partnerships.

into focus. How easily can your product adapt to a growing user base? A product poised for success should not only satisfy current demand but also have the potential for seamless scalability.

THE TEASER FOR WHAT'S
NEXT:

Funding Rounds As we navigate the terrain of product-market fit, the next article is poised to unlock the secrets of financial

growth: "Funding Rounds: Seed to Series C and Beyond."

Securing funding is not just about capital; it's about strategic partnerships, growth trajectories, and navigating the complex landscape of funding rounds.

Get ready for insights into the nuances of seed funding, the challenges of scaling during Series A, and the strategic considerations for Series B and beyond.

The journey from initial

funding to scaling your startup is a saga, and the next chapter promises to be both enlightening and empowering.

In Conclusion: Product-market fit is the anchor that prevents startups from drifting into obscurity. It's the synergy between what you offer and what the market demands.

As you embark on this quest, remember that achieving product-market fit is not a one-time triumph; it's an ongoing commitment to understanding, adapting, and delivering value to your customers.

So, whether you're on the verge of launching your startup or fine-tuning an existing product, the pursuit of product-market fit is a journey worth the effort.

Stay tuned for the next chapter, where we'll delve into the intricate world of funding rounds.

The path to sustainable growth awaits, and your startup is poised to navigate it with finesse. Until then, may your product find its perfect niche, and may your journey towards product-market fit be both rewarding and transformative.

Why mainstream economics misjudged inflation



JAMES K. GALBRAITH

The author is Professor of Government and Chair in Government/Business Relations at the University of Texas at Austin, is a former staff economist for the House Banking Committee and a former executive director of the Joint Economic Committee of Congress.

In his November 7, 2023, New York Times newsletter, economist Paul Krugman raises a pertinent, albeit belated, question: Why did so many economists misjudge the inflation outlook? Despite the near-consensus among mainstream economists that inflation would persist and even accelerate, justifying substantial interest-rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve, the quasi-inflation of 2021-22 turned out to be transitory.

Krugman tactfully questions the illogic of certain inflation pessimists who, long after the absorption of the 2021 fiscal stimulus packages, provided new, unrelated justifications for their belief that inflation would stubbornly remain high. With little mainstream dissent, their doomsaying dominated the discourse into 2023.

Though Krugman refrains from naming Lawrence H. Summers, who justified inflation pessimism with concerns about supposedly excessive savings, the Fed's debt purchases, and forecasts of essentially zero interest rates, Krugman dismisses these worries as nonsense. As Krugman rightly points out, savings cannot cause inflation, and a technical forecast holds no causal power.

Adopting the persona of a naïf, Krugman suggests that economists might have been searching for reasons to be pessimistic, citing two possibilities: fear that well-supported American workers might be harder to manage and the belief that high interest rates support the dollar internationally.

Krugman acknowledges that various Fed officials have openly stated their commitment to maintaining a strong dollar, with an obsession with wages permeating Fed Chair Jerome Powell's speeches.

Krugman hints at a third possibility — that some mainstream economists might advocate for high interest rates to curry favour with bankers, who



ECONOMIST PAUL KRUGMAN'S REFLECTION ON INFLATION MISJUDGMENTS, MAINSTREAM ECONOMICS, AND THE NEED FOR CRITICAL INTROSPECTION.

benefit from larger profit margins when rates are high.

As Krugman concludes, a thorough examination of how so many economists erred in their predictions, coupled with introspection about their motivations, is warranted. However, he expresses doubt about the likelihood of such an introspective exercise within the economics profession.

Krugman notes that the economists he mentions, including himself, are very much part of the economics profession's mainstream.

However, he subtly suggests a larger issue: the repeated failures of mainstream economists in predicting significant economic events, such as the 2007-09 financial crisis and the ill-advised

turn to austerity in 2010.

The core of the problem, as Krugman highlights, may lie in the fact that many leading mainstream economists were trained in the 1970s, and their worldview, both in terms of facts and theory, remains fixed in that era.

The influences of general equilibrium theory, inflation-unemployment trade-offs, and monetarism continue to shape their perspectives.

Notably, Krugman's reflection on disinflation makes no mention of economists who accurately predicted the disinflation, such as Isabella M. Weber of the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and L. Randall Wray and Yeva Nersisyan of the Levy Institute.

Despite their correct predictions, economists with alternative ideas often go unnamed and unrecognised, possibly due to resistance from the old guard seeking to preserve their academic, political, and media monopolies since the 1970s.

In offering a polite critique of his colleagues, Krugman diplomatically raises questions about the direction of mainstream economics.

James K. Galbraith, Professor of Government and Chair in Government/Business Relations at the University of Texas at Austin, concludes by suggesting that mainstream economists should re-examine their core beliefs or perhaps consider the need for a new mainstream

altogether.

James K. Galbraith, Professor of Government and Chair in Government/Business Relations at the University of Texas at Austin, is a former staff economist for the House Banking Committee and a former executive director of the Joint Economic Committee of Congress.

From 1993-97, he served as chief technical adviser for macroeconomic reform to China's State Planning Commission.

He is the author of Inequality: What Everyone Needs to Know (Oxford University Press, 2016) and Welcome to the Poisoned Chalice: The Destruction of Greece and the Future of Europe (Yale University Press, 2016).

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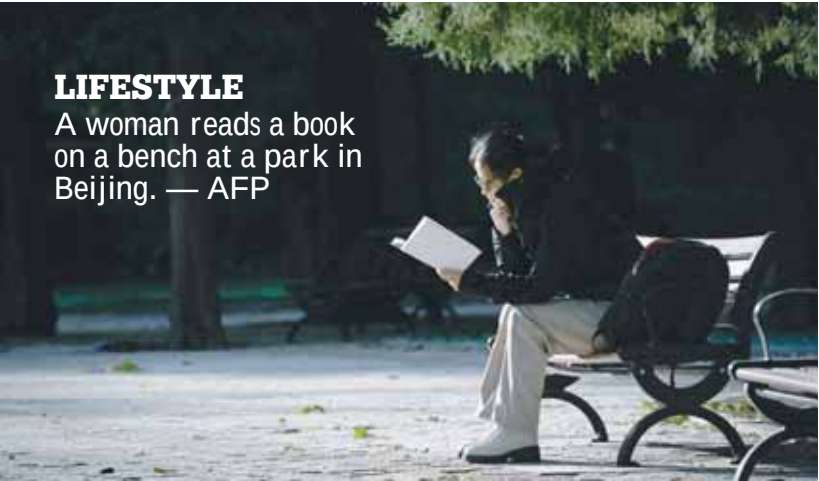
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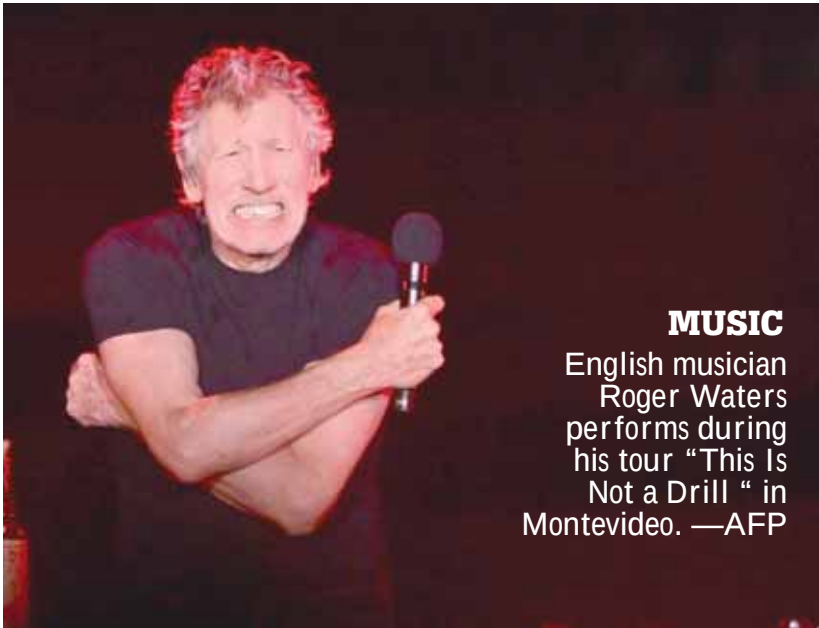
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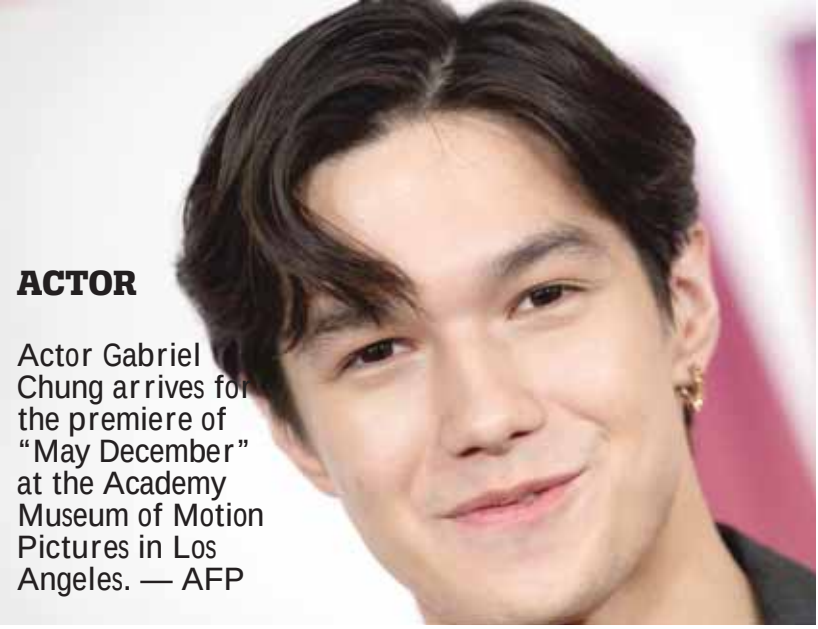
LIFESTYLE
A woman reads a book on a bench at a park in Beijing. — AFP



MUSIC
English musician Roger Waters performs during his tour “This Is Not a Drill “ in Montevideo. —AFP



FASHION
British actress Riana Duce poses on the red carpet upon arrival for the UK Premiere of the movie “Napoleon” at the Odeon Luxe Leicester Square, central London. — AFP



ACTOR
Actor Gabriel Byrne arrives for the premiere of “May December” at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
A tourist plays cricket at Kuta Beach near Denpasar on Indonesia's resort island of Bali. — AFP

art & life

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Mutrah Souq's charm extends beyond a mere marketplace

It encapsulates a myriad of elements that etch indelible memories into the hearts of those who traverse its labyrinthine alleys. Let's delve into six compelling reasons why Mutrah Souq commands a loyal following and fosters a deep sense of connection...P20

New York's Met presents 1,000 years of Byzantine influence on Christian African art

MOSAICS, PAINTINGS, jewelry, ceramics, manuscripts from the 4th to the 15th century: the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is showing 200 ancient and medieval works that reflect a thousand years of influence of the Byzantine Empire on the Christian communities of Egypt, Tunisia and Ethiopia. One of the wealthiest in the world, the museum has brought together gems from collections from Africa, Asia and Europe for an exhibition called “Africa & Byzantium,” from Sunday until next March. The Met presented a preview this week to a few journalists with its partners, the

Egyptian and Tunisian governments and the oldest Coptic Orthodox monastery in the world, Egypt's Saint Catherine of Sinai. Bringing together artistic, religious, literary and archaeological treasures, “Africa & Byzantium” shows the impact of the Byzantine Empire from its capital Constantinople — which was formerly Byzantium and is now called Istanbul — on Christianity, which spread in the Horn of Africa from the 4th to the 7th centuries. According to Met CEO Max Hollein, the exhibit is “brings new focus and scholarship to an understudied field, expanding our knowledge of



Byzantine and Early Christian Art within an expansive worldview.” Visitors will be able to view painted manuscripts, textiles, marble mosaics, carved ivories from Nubia, gold jewelry from Egypt, wall paintings — many of them appearing part for the first time in

the United States. The pieces explore the links between cultural and multi-faith communities from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, mixing Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Christian and Jewish traditions, the Met said. Tunisian Cultural Affairs



Minister Hayet Guettat Guermazi said the pieces show the world her country's “rich cultural heritage that is the result of a mix of different civilisations that have occupied the Mediterranean” along with a “local African foundation.” Archbishop Damianos,

from Saint Catherine of Sinai, praised the exhibition, saying it “provides us with the opportunity to recall the universality of Byzantium, which is a proposal for freedom, unity, reconciliation, respect and peace, the peace that is so needed in our world today.” —AFP

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AROUND THE WORLD

FILM



Harry Potter's paralysed stunt double found making new documentary "cathartic"

THE LIFE AND WORK of stuntman David Holmes who was left paralysed after an accident in 2009 on the set of Harry Potter has been turned into a documentary, which he said was "cathartic" to make but cannot yet watch.

"David Holmes: The Boy Who Lived", which premiered in London on Thursday, features archive footage of Holmes working as actor Daniel Radcliffe's stunt double as well as scenes of his life today and interviews with his former colleagues and friends, including Radcliffe.

"It's been really nice for my boys to get together and talk about it. We are living in a society where men don't really talk. So I'm really chuffed," Holmes said.

A skilled gymnast, Holmes was a teenager when he was chosen to work on the Potter franchise. But a rehearsal for a stunt in which Holmes was pulled back on a harness during a fight scene in "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part One" went wrong and he broke his neck.

"It just happened so quickly. It didn't look real. We just thought, this can't be happening," said Marc Mailley, a fellow stunt artist who was there at the time.

"You can either be a victim or a survivor. I choose to be a survivor," said Holmes, whose challenging medical journey is seen in the new film.

Directed by former Harry Potter crew member Dan Hartley, the film is executive produced by Daniel Radcliffe.

"He's one of my best friends," Holmes said, explaining how proud he is of Radcliffe, who has continued acting and is starring in on Broadway in the musical "Merrily We Roll Along".

Holmes hopes his raw documentary might start conversations about stunt performers' work and what it is like to be disabled.

"I am lucky and fortunate enough to be able to live with a broken neck and project past my injury. There are a million people that feel lost and forgotten about in society," he said.

CINEMA



African cinema seeks bigger role on world stage

AS A FILM-MAKER and head of Ghana's film agency, Juliet Yaa Asantewa Asante said she always had the same sense when attending international industry events: African cinema had so much more potential to deliver.

CEO of Ghana's National Film Authority, Asante joined forces with Nigerian and other African film-makers and distributors this week in Ghana's capital to debate how the continent's industry can do just that.

Africa's film and audio-visual businesses generate about \$5 billion annually, but could potentially reach \$20 billion and create 20 million jobs, according to the UN cultural agency UNESCO citing a pan-Africa film-makers' federation.

The continent with the youngest population also has fewer than 1,700 cinema screens. That compares to around 44,000 in the United States and 75,500 in China.

Even with the recent success of African movies on streaming platforms such as Netflix, the continent's potential remains largely untapped, UNESCO's report said.

"There are spots of sunshine or spotlights happening on the continent," Asante told AFP in an interview.

"But if you look at the continent's potential, what is happening really is barely scratching the surface, so we began to ask ourselves why?"

Asante, who directed the Ghanaian film "Silver Rain", met this week for the first Africa Cinema Summit with cinema leaders such as Nigeria's FilmOne Group, Ghana's Silverbird Cinema and international industry representatives.

Among the topics discussed were new technologies to improve content quality, marketing in the digital age, better policy-making for the industry and Africa's impact on global cinema storytelling.

"We are largely spectators to stories happening everywhere," Asante said. "We know that we have so many stories in our backyards that haven't been told."

On the continent, Nigeria's Nollywood industry is a leader churning out around 2,500 films a year, second only India's Bollywood movie giant.

But even in Nigeria, the continent's most populous nation, there is more to do, Asante said.

- 'Shoot in Ghana' -

African countries face different challenges from lack of funding, poor investment in studios and cinemas to some governments only now seeing the potential of the industry to create jobs.

UNESCO's report notes only 44 per cent of Africa has a national film commission and just over half of the

continent has established film policies.

"If governments are able to pass tax incentives then the private sector will also feel encouraged to invest," Asante said.

Still, positive developments for African cinema are plenty.

The Nigerian crime thriller movie "The Black Book" became a global hit on Netflix soon after release this year.

"This still feels so surreal. More South Koreans watched The Black Book than Nigerians," the film's director Editi Effiong wrote on X, formerly Twitter, reflecting on its global success.

Lagos State government is building a Hollywood-style film and studios city in Lagos to help bolster Nollywood and entertainment industries.

Ghana has been promoting itself as a movie location with its "Shoot in Ghana" campaign, with British actor Idris Elba recently visiting the country where he said he would shoot some of his next films, local media reported.

"Those who lose out are not just Africans, it is the global community, because the global community will be more enriched by African stories playing out," Asante said. "We have seen there is a definitely a place for African stories told with the right quality." — AFP

MUSIC



Guitar from Kurt Cobain's last tour fetches over \$1.5m

THE GUITAR THAT the late Nirvana front-man Kurt Cobain used during his last tour sold for more than \$1.5 million, an auction house announced on Friday.

The American grunge icon played the sky-blue, left-handed Fender Mustang during the band's In Utero tour, Julien's Auctions said in a statement.

"Nirvana played their final show on March 1, 1994 in Munich, Germany and all available concert footage confirms that



Cobain played this guitar that night," the auction house said.

Cobain died by suicide in April 1994, aged 27 and at the height of his fame.

Julien's listed the final sale price as \$1,587,500.

The Mustang guitar was still intact, unlike many that Cobain destroyed on stage.

In May, a smashed-up black Fender Stratocaster of his fetched \$595,000 at the Hard Rock Cafe in New York.

On Thursday, Julien's also sold a guitar belonging to Eric Clapton for \$1.27 million.

Nicknamed "The Fool", the Gibson SG is associated with the English musician's time with the band Cream, where he produced one of rock's most distinctive sounds.

Its personalised decoration, in a psychedelic style, makes the instrument one of the most easily recognisable in rock and a symbol of the "Summer of Love", the counter-culture movement of 1967 which marked a generation.

A portion of the proceeds from the sale of the two guitars will go to mental health charity Kicking the Stigma. — AFP

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A woman wearing a white hijab and a long white coat is walking past a highly cluttered outdoor market stall. The stall is densely packed with various goods, including jewelry, metalware, and small figurines, displayed on shelves and hanging from the stall structure. The scene is set in a narrow street, with the stall occupying most of the frame. The woman is walking from left to right, looking towards the stall. The stall is filled with a wide variety of items, including metal pots, bells, and small figurines, creating a vibrant and busy atmosphere.