

P13

SOCIAL INSURANCE
DISBURSEMENTS
BY PASI TOTAL
RO 214M IN 2022



P19

A SPECTACULAR
SHOW OF
AUTOMOTIVE
HERITAGE



P12

INDIA'S ANNU
RANI GRABS
WOMEN'S
JAVELIN GOLD



MUSCAT

CRUDE PRICE AT \$91.01 A BARREL

Oman oil price for December delivery on Tuesday reached \$91.01, comprising a decline by \$1.99 from the price of Monday, which stood at \$93. The average price of Oman oil for October delivery has stabilised at \$86.57 per barrel, thus \$6.03 per barrel higher than September delivery. World oil fell for a second day, with Brent crude futures, which slid by almost 5 per cent the day before, down another 0.6 per cent at \$90.17 a barrel, while US crude fell 0.4 per cent to \$88.45.

26.7% INCREASE IN HOTEL REVENUES

The revenues of 3 to 5-star hotels in Oman by the end of August 2023 grew by 26.3 per cent to RO 138 million as against RO 109 million by the end of August 2022. Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that the total number of hotel guests and tenants increased by 26.7 per cent to 1,284,640 by the end of August 2023, compared to 1,013,876 in the corresponding period in 2022. Also, the rate of hotel occupancy grew by 10.4 per cent. The NCSI statistics indicate a rising trend in the number of hotel guests. The Omani guests grew by 5.3 per cent to 499,840 while other GCC hotel guests increased by 25.1 per cent to 137,367. **DETAILS ON P13**

OPINION

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Dr Imran Khalid
Asian Games proves
China's resilience

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Nicholas Kristof
Why unions are
good for America



OMAN CLINCH BRONZE IN CHINA

The Sultanate of Oman won their second medal at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, with Hussain al Farsi claiming a bronze medal in the men's 800 metres final on Tuesday. Last week, Oman won their first-ever silver medal in the Asian Games. (L-R) Silver medallist India's Mohammed Pulikkalath, gold medallist Saudi Arabia's Essa Ali Kzwani and bronze medallist Oman's Husain al Farsi celebrate on the podium during the medal ceremony. **DETAILS ON PAGE 10**

Oman's pavilion at Expo 2023 Doha inspired by Artificial Intelligence

DOHA: The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in Expo 2023 Doha Horticultural Exhibition, held under the slogan "Green Desert, Better Environment."

Oman's pavilion showcases 1,600 specimens of trees and plants transported from the Botanical Garden and planted on the designated land at Oman's pavilion.

The pavilion constitutes an embodiment of different types of Omani environments. It offers a simulation of terraced farming environments at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, the Dhofar monsoon environment and the semi-arid environment. It also comprises some perennial



Oman's pavilion at Expo 2023 Doha Horticultural Exhibition.

trees in Oman, including the frankincense tree and the perennial baobab tree found in Dhofar Governorate - the last

extension of such plants in the Arabian Peninsula.

The pavilion allows the visitors to learn about the engineering heritage of the centuries-old Omani aflaj irrigation system, which reflects the values of cooperation, tolerance and dialogue among local communities.

The visitors are also given a treat through exhibits of the Omani Botanical Garden and a fountain made of high-density Peridotite rocks. The rocks are common in all parts of Oman and they are known for their property of capturing and storing carbon dioxide gas, which contributes to protecting the ozone layer. — **ONA**

GCC countries to share data to fight diseases

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman



Technical teams would conduct risk assessments simultaneously for all Gulf countries while tailoring recommendations based on distinct factors

DR AMAL BINT SAIF AL MAANIYAH
D-G at Ministry of Health

The Gulf Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (GCDC), an integral part of the Gulf Health Council, marked a significant milestone by forging an agreement on health data sharing among its member nations. Established just two years ago, the GCDC has rapidly progressed towards its mission of enhancing public health across the Gulf region through collaboration and information exchange.

Dr Amal bint Saif al Maaniyah, Director-General of Diseases Surveillance Control at the Ministry of Health in Oman, emphasised the importance of this new framework. She highlighted how the GCDC's technical teams would now conduct risk assessments simultaneously for all Gulf countries while tailoring recommendations based on distinct factors. This proactive approach ensures that all member nations are well prepared to efficiently manage any emerging health risks or hazards.

Dr Amal, who represented the Sultanate of Oman in leading the supervising committee of the Gulf CDC, shared her insights during the recent ministerial meeting hosted in Oman. She underlined the productive year that the Gulf CDC had experienced in 2023, as it laid the foundation for preventing and controlling both communicable and non-

communicable diseases. Notably, the CDC had also launched its website and secured approval for sharing communicable disease data among Gulf Council countries.

REGIONAL CAPACITY

Dr Amal stressed the vital role played by the Gulf Health Council in consolidating resources to bolster regional capacity for disease management. Given the Gulf region's shared environment and epidemiological characteristics, countries provide mutual support in disease prevention and management.

She cautioned that while the Covid-19 pandemic was not over, effective preventative strategies, including immunisation, had transformed it into a manageable seasonal disease, akin to influenza.

Trio wins physics Nobel for illuminating electrons

STOCKHOLM: France's Pierre Agostini, Hungarian-Austrian Ferenc Krausz and French-Swedish Anne L'Huillier won the Nobel prize in physics on Tuesday for research using ultra quick light flashes that enable the study of electrons inside atoms and molecules.

Their technique employs pulses measured in attoseconds, a unit so short that there are as many in one second as there have been seconds since the universe's birth over 13 billion years ago, the jury said. The laureates' research has made it possible to examine

moves or changes so rapid that they were previously impossible to follow, with potential applications in both electronics and medical diagnostics.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences likened the process to how the flapping wings of a humming bird turn into a blur for the human eye, but can be slowed and examined using high-speed photography.

"We can now open the door to the world of electrons. Attosecond physics gives us the opportunity to understand mechanisms that are governed by



NOBELPRISET I FYSIK 2023
THE NOBEL PRIZE IN PHYSICS 2023

Pierre Agostini
The Ohio State University, USA

Ferenc Krausz
Max Planck Institute of Quantum Optics & Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany

Anne L'Huillier
Lund University, Sweden

"for experimentella metoder som genererar attosekundpulser av ljus för studier av elektrondynamik i materia"

"for experimental methods that generate attosecond pulses of light for the study of electron dynamics in matter"

This year's Nobel laureates US-based physicist Pierre Agostini, Hungarian-Austrian physicist and French physicist Anne L'Huillier during the announcement of the winners of the 2023 Nobel Prize in Physics at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm. — **AFP**

electrons," Eva Olsson, chair of the Nobel Committee for Physics, said in a statement.

NOBLE GAS

In 1987, L'Huillier "discovered that many different overtones of light arose when she transmitted infrared laser light through a noble gas," the Nobel Committee noted, adding that she has continued to explore this phenomenon, "laying the ground for subsequent breakthroughs".

In the early 2000s, Agostini and Krausz worked on experiments that made it possible

to isolate light pulses that lasted only a few hundred attoseconds. Agostini is a professor at Ohio State University in the United States, while Krausz is a director at the Max Planck Institute in Germany.

L'Huillier, only the fifth woman to be awarded the Physics Prize since 1901, is a professor at Lund University in Sweden. L'Huillier told reporters she was in the middle of teaching a class when she received the call from the Academy, making it "difficult" to finish the class, to whom she told nothing. — **AFP**



SAI detects rule violations in health sector

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The State Audit Institution's (SAI) Community Brief in the Annual Report 2022, released on Tuesday, highlighted several discrepancies in the practices of health professionals in both private and public sectors.

"It was noticed that private health establishments allowed visiting doctors to practice the medical profession and allied medical professions without obtaining licenses or with expired licenses — 19 such violations were detected against one private health establishment," the report said.

Repeated violations were also committed by some government doctors by practising in private health establishments without

obtaining a license or practising with an expired license. As four violations against one doctor were detected in one year, the Ministry of Health tried to enhance its human resources to monitor the work of doctors and assess their commitment to working hours. It was pointed out that there needed to be more specialised staff in following up on the data of visiting doctors working in private health establishments.

A number of 150 field visits for 1,600 institutions were carried out by only seven employees, with a coverage rate of nine per cent from January to July 2022.

MoH took a number of regulatory actions including issuing circulars to all private health establishments to comply



Picture for illustration

with the systems, not permitting private practice by doctors during their official working hours, forming a working team to study and evaluate some specialisations in private health establishments to ensure their compliance with the ministry's specifications and requirements

Health establishments issued a number of 17,521 referrals under the Ministry of Health

to outpatient clinics at Khoula Hospital, and 12,018 surgeries were not scheduled during the period from 2017 to 2021.

LONG WAITING

Waiting periods have been scheduled, and names of surgical patients have been entered into a system whereby appointments are prioritised based on each case. Long waiting periods from the date of appointment arrangement to the actual date for meeting doctors in outpatient clinics and performing surgeries in Royal, Khoula, and Al Nahdha hospitals will be tackled on a priority basis. A team has been formed to work on developing mechanisms to reduce waiting periods in specialised clinics and diagnostic radiology, and develop a methodology to ensure the continued provision of such services in a timely manner. Another team has been formed to work on increasing the capacity of general and specialised surgeries.

Long waiting times for appointments scheduled to perform some types of radiology in both Royal and Khoula Hospitals were found, in addition to variations in some kinds of radiology and other diagnostic methods such as endoscopy. The ministry took several actions, including the introduction of a triage system in the Al Shifa Healthcare Information Management System to determine urgent and other cases and the conclusion of a financing agreement between the Royal Hospital and a private hospital for MRI scanning.

■ LEBANESE MINISTER VISITS GRAND MOSQUE, SQU



MUSCAT: Ziad Makary, Minister of Information of the Republic of Lebanon, and his accompanying delegation visited the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque on Tuesday. The visit comes within the framework of the Lebanese minister's official visit to Oman. The guest was briefed on grand mosque's history, and its Omani and Islamic architectural designs. He also toured the grand mosque's facilities, such as the Institute of Islamic Sciences, the Library, the lecture hall and other facilities. Makary and his accompanying delegation also visited Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). Upon his arrival at the university, he was received by HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University. HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU was present at the meeting. The Lebanese minister's visit to SQU aims to view the university's cultural and scientific aspects. — **ONA**

Qurayat walkway nearing completion

YAHYA ALSALMANI
MUSCAT, OCT 3

Muscat Municipality is putting the finishing touches on the public walkway project in the Wilayat of Qurayat (90 km from Muscat). This project serves the areas of Daghamar and Al Kereeb. More than 90 per cent of the project has been completed. The aim of the project is to increase green cover and beautify public space. The project also includes a dedicated cycling lane that ensures road safety for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.

Previously, the municipality implemented similar projects in various wilayats of the governorate, including Al Mahaj Walkway and the Grills Project in Al Amerat, the Jal Walkway in Bausher, the Exhibition Street Walkway in Airport Heights area and the Soor Al Hadeed in Wilayat of Al Seeb. Moreover, there are a number of walkways under construction including the Golden Jubilee project in Al Mawaleh.

There are 137 gardens and parks spread across the various wilayats of Muscat Governorate. The municipality is planning to increase them to promote healthy living and enhance space for



The public walkway in the Wilayat of Qurayat. Photo by Yahya al Salmani.

leisure and entertainment.

According to official statistics, the total green area in Muscat Governorate is 2,730,446 square metres. The governorate has 19,565 date palms and 51,831 other trees. The number of shrubs and green fences is estimated at approximately 336,777 and seasonal flower bearing plants are spread over 84,205 square metres.

The municipal nursery plays

a vital role in propagating trees and crops such as Al Sidr, Neem, African tulips, Indian Aloe vera and many other species that are suitable for Oman's weather.

It is noteworthy that Muscat Municipality is keen to build a community partnership with various private sector institutions in implementing development projects to ensure environment-friendly urban areas.

"This is the first project of its-kind in this area in Qurayat. In addition to entertainment facilities, this project will undoubtedly contribute to encouraging people to go for walking and cycling. More physical activity will help reduce the risk of lifestyle diseases like diabetes and high blood pressure. We thank Muscat Municipality for this initiative," a citizen told the Observer.



Akshaj Udaiwal and his mother V Anuradha

Eight-year-old boy hikes to second base camp of Mt. Ararat

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

An eight-year-old Oman resident has made it to the second base camp of Mount Ararat in Türkiye, followed by his recent expedition on Mount Everest in Nepal.

Akshaj Udaiwal, a class three student of Indian School Al Ghubra, and his mother, V Anuradha, hoisted the Indian national flag after reaching the second base camp, 4,200 metres above sea level.

Akshaj started the trek on September 2, braving the hostile weather before reaching the first base camp, 3,200 metres above sea level.

The next day, he got acclimatised by reaching 3,800 metres above sea level before returning to the first base camp. On September 4, the mother-son duo resumed climbing to reach the second base camp of Mount Ararat, where they hoisted the national flag at the height of 4,200 metres above sea level, and were issued with the certificates by the Mount Ararat authorities.

"It was very windy, but my urge to reach the top was stronger. Though the

temperature was -6 degrees Celsius, it felt as though it was less than -11 degrees Celsius," Akshaj said.

The 'mountain boy' had earlier made it to the Asia Book of Records and the India Book of Records for being the youngest to climb Mount Nangakarshang, Everest Region, Nepal (5,077 metres) on April 28, 2022, when he was only 6 years and 11 months old.

He was also awarded the 'Honour of Appreciation' from the India Book of Records for climbing the Chandrashila Summit in Uttarakhand (4,000 metres) on December 29, 2021. He was also the youngest to climb the Mount Everest Base Camp in Nepal (5,364 metres). Anuradha, his mother, said he had been trained by the Indian Army's retired Colonel Pradeep Bist, who spotted the talent in him at a very young age. Retired Lt. Colonel Romil Barthwal later honed his skills.

"I want to explore other heights across the world, and my next attempt will be to hike to Annapurna Base Camp in Nepal in 2024," a jubilant Akshaj told the Observer.



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The workshop on 'Education for sustainable development' will conclude on October 5.

Workshop discusses education for sustainable development

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 3

A three-day workshop themed 'Education Laboratories' opened on Tuesday in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Omani National Committee for Education, Culture, and Science. It discussed the role of teachers in achieving sustainable development goals.

The workshop on 'Education for sustainable development' is being held in partnership with the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ICESCO) at the W Hotel in Muscat. The workshop will conclude on October 5.

The workshop's opening session began under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority. Present on the occasion were Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, workshop convenors, educators, school administrators, curriculum developers, and supervisors.

The primary objectives of this workshop include introducing

the importance of education for sustainable development, spreading community awareness about it, brainstorming to draw a road map for achieving sustainable development goals through education, building participants' capacities around the five action priorities related to education, and exploit the transformative power of education in enhancing the environment. Sustainable in all sectors.

The workshop commenced with an address by Amina bint Salim al Balushiyah, Secretary of the Omani National Committee for Education, Culture, and Science. She emphasised and affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education, considers the fourth goal of sustainable development, related to education, of utmost importance. "Our national team comprising active members from various stakeholders such as government entities, research institutions, civil society organisations, and youth got recognition to monitor achievements in August 2021," she said.

WHO DELEGATION VISITS WAD HEALTH VILLAGE



A delegation led by Dr John J Jabbour, WHO Representative of Oman, visited Wad Health Village in the Wilayat of Sur in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate to review the initiatives and implemented projects, on Tuesday. The delegation reviewed the health indicators and community initiatives at the health village and watched a visual display about the achievements made by the Wad Health Village committees, the municipal projects and the walk track project. – ONA

Forum reviews non-custodial measures in juvenile justice

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The Social Inspectors Forum themed "Non-custodial Provisions and Measures in Juvenile Justice" began under the auspices of Sayyid Salim Musallam al Busaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, in Muscat on Tuesday. The two-day event is organised by the Ministry of Social Development, represented by the Department of Juvenile Affairs.

This year's forum aims to review the Sultanate of Oman's alternative non-custodial provisions and measures in juvenile justice, benefit from Arab developments in this field, and focus on the efforts of institutions in the public and private sectors in implementing these alternative provisions and measures.

The forum seeks to identify the role and efforts of various agencies and institutions in the Sultanate of Oman in facilitating the implementation of the measures, and to create ongoing



The two-day event is organised by the Ministry of Social Development.

partnership and cooperation between the various sectors in the country. It will reduce the problems of juvenile delinquency.

Fahd bin Zaher al Fahdi, Director of the Juvenile Affairs Department at the Ministry of Social Development, in his speech said: "Oman Vision 2040 aims to keep pace with regional and global changes, and enhance social welfare. The priority of welfare and social protection is considered one of the national priorities of this vision, which aims to achieve the protection

of an integrated social network directed to the most needy groups to enable them to become self-reliant and contribute to the national economy." He also mentioned that the Ministry of Social Development adopted the Social Work Strategy "2016-2025" with regard to social protection as one of the basic pillars that seeks to provide the necessary social care and protection in its development plans and programs.

Al Fahdi pointed out that juvenile delinquency constitutes

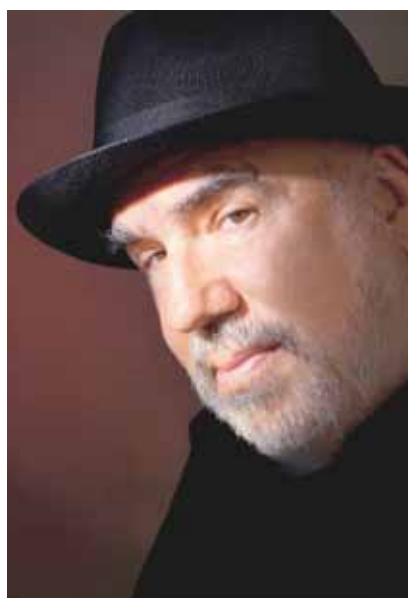
a growing threat to society's security, stability, development plans, and family structure.

In 2022, Oman reported 398 juvenile offenders, including 358 juvenile delinquents, and 40 juveniles at risk of delinquency. It is also considered an important requirement for juveniles to integrate with their families and peers of the same age in their natural environments, ensuring change their behavior and overcoming the difficulties hindering their adaptation and integration into society.

ROHM to present amazing events



Xi'an Acrobatic Troupe of China



Randy Brecker



Majida El Roumi

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) announced the line-up of performances for October. Following the successful launch of the season with the stunning opera The Barber of Seville, October is packed with shows, which offer variety and choice to audiences.

On October 11 and 12 at 7pm, dynamic jazz duo Igor Butman and Randy Brecker will perform a soul stirring concert with a sextet of charismatic jazz musicians, filling the ROHM Musical Arts with a magnificent jazz fusion.

Omani Women's Day hits the right notes on October 17, drawing together the community of Oman to celebrate the extraordinary contribution of women to music, society, and industry. Majida El Roumi will star, alongside the phenomenal orchestra of visually impaired young women in Al Nour Wal Amal Orchestra, brilliant Moroccan pianist, Nour Ayadi, and ROSO's pioneering Ladies' Ensemble.

On the following two nights, Majida El Roumi will come to the stage for two solo concerts, performing favourite hits from her wide repertoire of songs, delivering messages of hope, unity, and love to her loyal crowds of fans.



Igor Butman

Lastly, over the final weekend of the month, join ROHM for the awe-inspiring acrobatic ballet from the Xi'an Acrobatic Troupe of China. They will perform their stunning version of Swan Lake, taking classical inspiration from this historical ballet, harnessing the magic of Tchaikovsky's music, and bringing to the show a unique cultural explosion of Chinese heritage, costumes, and fresh choreography. From the startling acrobatic feat of ballet 'en pointe' performed on the head of the supporting dancer, this ballet is mesmerising. Choose from shows on either the 26 or 28 October, with an evening and matinee performance.



TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI



WINTER IS THE BEST TIME
TO WATCH BIRDS IN OMAN
AS THE COUNTRY SITS ON
CENTRAL ASIAN PATH,
WHICH IS THE SECOND
LARGEST BIRD MIGRATION
PATH IN THE WORLD

Birds open windows to a different world and unlock secrets of nature. Unlike other hobbies, birdwatching is only a pleasure for its practitioners. For others it is a waste of time.

The birder feels touching the feathers of the bird, even if he or she is metres away from it. One needs patience and passion in equal measure to pursue this hobby.

Some birders prefer to watch seabirds, while others enjoy observing birds of prey while they are tamed and trained. Some who are known as twitchers travel long distances to see rare species and their habitats.

Birdwatching is becoming increasingly popular among European tourists. Birdwatching tourism or avitourism refers to travel where the main purpose is to observe birds in their natural habitat. It is very much related to nature tourism and adventure tourism. Therefore, many tour operators offering birdwatching tourism also offer nature and adventure-based trips.

Globally, around three million international trips are dedicated to birdwatching every year. It has been a rapidly growing market, with the largest share coming from Europe. At least 20 per cent of European travellers that engage in wildlife tourism are interested in birdwatching activities as well.

Thanks to technological development and the use of modern tools for

BIRDWATCHING OPENS WINDOW TO A DIFFERENT WORLD

monitoring birds. Birdwatchers today are able to distinguish between their species, identify their sounds, and know the angles of their movement and the nature of their behaviour. Therefore, birders today see themselves as the most knowledgeable people about the details of bird life, and they have become one of the primary sources that provide a long list of data on bird life.

Oman is a popular birdwatching destination. Citizens and residents often combine hobbies of birdwatching and photography. During the winter season, Oman's natural reserves, oases, swamps, islands, creeks and mountains see the arrival of migratory birds from Europe, West and East Asia.

Official statistics conducted by the Environment Authority indicate that "more than 400 species of birds visit these sites during

the winter season. Migratory birds constitute more than 80 per cent of the total number of birds recorded in Oman. The country sits on the Central Asian Path, which is the second largest bird migration path in the world.

In addition to field studies and identifying protected areas to enrich environmental tourism and secure the lives of resident and migratory birds, the government has been keen to issue many environmental laws and legislation that contribute to reducing risks to bird life.

Oman's commitment to conservation is reflected in the setting up of many nature reserves and its

accession to international pacts like the Convention on Wetlands, an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

To encourage avitourism, the Environment Authority has identified around 70 sites as important bird nesting areas in the Sultanate. The most important of these sites are Al Daymaniyat Islands, Al Hallaniyat Islands, Barr Al Hikman, Duqm coast, Al Shuwaymiya, Ras Al Hadd, Al Batinah coast, Masirah Island, wadis and mountains of Dhofar Governorate, Al Ansab lake, in addition to the dumping sites that provide main meals for birds of prey namely Egyptian Vulture.

According to the latest statistics, there are more than 546 bird species in marine and mountainous environments, whether for breeding or resting. The most important birds that are easy to see are flamingos, herons, sea gulls, bulbuls, sparrows and grey-headed kingfishers.

Birdwatching is not an expensive hobby. One needs a pair of binoculars, sunglasses and books like Common Birds in Oman by Hanne & Jens Erikson. One can also find plenty of reading material on the Internet and social media on birdwatching.

For those who wish to take high-quality photographs, one must have a DSLR camera with a telephoto lens. If you respect the birds' privacy and are patient, you can learn about these avian friends.





Singapore reputation on line as laundering case tops \$2 billion

SINGAPORE: Singapore defended its reputation as a global financial hub on Tuesday after a massive money laundering case crossed \$2 billion in seized and frozen assets, with a senior minister saying it was likely among the world's biggest.

The scale of the investigation has exposed potential loopholes in the city-state's anti-money laundering laws that crime syndicates could exploit, prompting questions in parliament on why it was not detected sooner.

"This case is a reminder that even the most stringent preventive measures can be circumvented by determined criminals," Second Home Affairs Minister Josephine Teo said in a speech to lawmakers in parliament.

Authorities have seized and frozen assets now worth more than \$2.04 billion in a series of raids since August against the suspected international money laundering ring, said Teo.

Police arrested 10 foreign nationals — from China, Turkiye, Cambodia, Cyprus and Vanuatu — accused of being members of the ring suspected of laundering proceeds from overseas criminal activity including



A view of the city skyline in Singapore. — Reuters file photo

scams and online gambling.

More arrests and asset seizures are expected as police continue with their investigation, Teo said.

Last month Singaporean police said they had seized and frozen more than \$1.76 billion worth of assets in sweeping raids but those have since grown by hundreds of millions.

Teo said the latest trove included 152 properties, 62 vehicles, thousands of bottles of liquor and wine, cash, cryptocurrencies,

gold bars, luxury bags and watches and expensive pieces of jewellery.

Police first received "disparate information" about suspicious transactions in 2021, including the use of suspected forged documents to support sources of funds, and began conducting raids after they had collected much more evidence, she said.

It was not only one of the biggest anti-money laundering cases in Singapore but also "likely the world", Teo told MPs.

An average of 43,000 suspicious transactions were reported annually in Singapore between 2020 and 2022, or more than 150 per working day, she said.

Reports that China had put any pressure on Singapore to resolve the case were "completely untrue," she added.

Second Minister of Finance Indranee Rajah said an inter-ministerial committee will be formed "to keep our regime up to date with increasingly sophisticated crimes".

Alvin Tan, a minister of state for trade, said some of the accused may have been linked to family offices — entities that manage the controlling assets of one family — that were granted tax incentives. — AFP



Niger's military seized power from democratically elected president Mohamed Bazoum. — AFP file photo

Niger begins three-day mourning for soldiers killed in terror attack

NIAMEY: Niger began three days of national mourning on Tuesday after 29 soldiers were killed in a suspected group attack, the deadliest since the military took power in July.

The latest violence comes as the country's coup leaders indicated they were considering neighbouring Algeria's offer to mediate talks for a transition back to civilian rule.

Niger is battling two insurgencies — a spillover in its southeast from a long-running conflict in neighbouring Nigeria, and an offensive in the west by groups crossing from Mali and Burkina Faso. When military leaders overthrew democratically elected president Mohamed Bazoum on July 26, they cited the deterioration of the security situation in the country as justification.

Monday's attack in western Niger involved "improvised explosive devices and kamikaze vehicles by more than a hundred terrorists," the Ministry of Defence said in a televised statement.

It added that two soldiers were seriously wounded and "several dozen terrorists" were also killed.

The attack took place northwest of Tabatol near the border with Mali,

which is plagued by fighting with groups affiliated with the IS and Al-Qaeda.

Violence in the "three borders" area between Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso has fuelled military takeovers in all three countries since 2021.

Algeria, Niger's influential neighbour, said on Monday that Niamey has accepted its offer to mediate talks on a transition to civilian rule. Hours later, Niger's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it had "indicated the availability of the Nigerien authorities to examine Algeria's offer of mediation".

Niger's military leader, General Abdourahamane Tiani, has previously said he wants a transition of no more than three years.

In August, Algeria proposed a six-month transition plan under the supervision of a "civilian authority led by a consensual figure accepted by all sides of the political class".

Algiers made no mention of an exact timeframe in its statement on Monday but said Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf would visit Niamey "as soon as possible with the aim of launching discussions... with all stakeholders". — AFP

Schumer confirms US Senate trip to China, Japan and South Korea

WASHINGTON: A bipartisan US Senate delegation will visit China, Japan and South Korea in October, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's office said on Tuesday.

The six-senator group will be co-led by Republican Mike Crapo, whose office said earlier the trip is planned for next week and that the senators hope to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Schumer has repeatedly urged the United States to take a harder line on China, and urged lawmakers earlier this year to begin new legislation aimed at addressing concerns about the world's second-biggest economy. The trip will follow visits by a series of Biden administration officials, including Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo in August.

Schumer's office said the trip's goal is to advance US economic and national security interests in the region and will feature meetings with government leaders and business leaders from each country and from US companies operating in each country.

Schumer "will focus on the need for reciprocity in China for US businesses that will level the playing field for American



US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) leaves after speaking to the news media on Capitol Hill in Washington. — Reuters file photo

workers, as well as on maintaining US leadership in advanced technologies for national security," his office said.

Other senators on the trip include Republicans Bill Cassidy and John Kennedy and Democrats Maggie Hassan and Jon Ossoff. The Chinese Embassy declined to comment Monday on the planned trip.

Raimondo said in August that US companies had complained to her that China has become "uninvestable," pointing

to fines, raids and other actions that made it risky to do business in the country.

"For US business in many cases, patience is running thin, and it's time for action," she said, adding that companies face "exorbitant fines without any explanation, revisions to the counterespionage law, which are unclear and sending shock waves through the US community; raids on businesses — a whole new level of challenge and we need that to be addressed." — Reuters

Japan slams MP's surprise visit to Russia

TOKYO: Tokyo on Tuesday condemned a surprise visit to Moscow by a Japanese lawmaker who met with Russia's deputy foreign minister. Muneo Suzuki's trip, the first known visit by a Japanese lawmaker since Russia invaded Ukraine last year, comes after Japan joined Western allies in sanctioning Moscow over the conflict.

"The government wasn't briefed by Suzuki on the Russia visit this time, before or after," spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno said. "We're issuing a warning... of cancelling travels to Russia and no matter what the purpose is, we're urging all citizens to refrain from travelling to Russia," Matsuno told reporters.

— AFP



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/ 2023/144	Drilling of Water Production Wells at Jabjat and Bathoor (Taqaq)	18/10/2023	15/11/2023	RO. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/145	Drilling of Water Production Wells at Ardait and Thetenety (Rakhyut)	18/10/2023	15/11/2023	RO. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/146	Drilling of Water Production Well at Matoorah (Al Mazayounah)	18/10/2023	15/11/2023	RO. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/156	UNE-LOT 09 B-2023	18/10/2023	26/10/2023	RO. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/157	UNE-LOT 09 A-2023	18/10/2023	26/10/2023	RO. 52.500

- To view the tender details, you can visit www.dhofarservices.nama.om / scan the QR code
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 3.00pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through using "isupplier portal". No hard copies are accepted.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.
- For any clarifications contact us on:
Tel No. 23232554
email: purchase@dhofarservices.nama.om



Dhofar Integrated Services Company S.A.O.C.
CR Number 2105229, P.O. Box 2609
PC 211, Salalah - Sultanate of Oman
Phone Number 23232523, Fax 23201183
www.dhofarservices.nama.om



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH
ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health - Ibri Regional Hospital - invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
3704/ 2023	Provision of Loading and Unloading Services for Medical and Non- Medical Items for Ibri Regional Hospital	THURSDAY 19/OCT/2023	Before 9 am on SUNDAY 12/NOV/2023	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25/= Per set

Notes:-

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Ibri Regional Hospital is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24402200
Email id etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om



An ambulance leaves Siam Paragon shopping centre in Bangkok, following a shooting incident in the mall. – AFP

One dead in Bangkok mall shooting, 14-year-old boy arrested

BANGKOK: One person was killed and six wounded in a shooting in a packed Bangkok shopping mall on Tuesday, a Thai medical official said in revising down an earlier toll, with police arresting a 14-year-old boy over the shooting.

Hundreds of people fled the upmarket Siam Paragon mall in the heart of the Thai capital as shots rang out around 4:30 pm, witnesses said.

The Metropolitan Investigation Bureau of the Royal Thai Police said on its official Facebook page that officers had arrested a 14-year-old boy over the shooting.

Video footage showed a long-haired boy wearing a black shirt, glasses and a cap with a US flag motif being taken into custody by police.

Yuthana Srettanan, director of the Erawan Emergency Centre, told reporters that one woman had been killed, correcting his initial

report of three deaths.

“The deceased is a Chinese national, according to the preliminary examination,” Yuthana told reporters.

Six people were wounded, he said, with five in critical condition. All but one of those who were shot were women.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin said he was monitoring the situation closely.

“What I care about most right now is the safety of all citizens,” he wrote on X.

Witnesses described chaotic scenes as the attack unfolded at Siam Paragon, one of Bangkok’s top shopping destinations, hugely popular with tourists and Thais alike.

“At around 4.30 pm, I heard loud gun noises, continuously, about 10 times,” Thanpawasit Singthongkham said, who works at a Japanese restaurant in the mall.

In a shared footage, he recorded a scrum of terrified shoppers scrabbling under metal security gates blocking shop entrances, before they fled down emergency stairwells as sirens blared.

In another video, scores of people can be seen in the mall’s basement car park being directed by loudspeakers.

Dozens of police vehicles and a number of ambulances could be seen outside one of the shopping centre’s main entrances in the wake of the shooting.

People were still being escorted from the mall, while bystanders could be seen walking along the gridlocked road outside. The shooting comes just days before the one-year anniversary of one of the bloodiest days in recent Thai history, when an ex-police officer armed with a knife and gun attacked a nursery, murdering 24 children and 12 adults — AFP

Pakistan orders illegal Afghans to leave

ISLAMABAD: Hundreds of thousands of Afghans living illegally in Pakistan have been given until November 1 to leave voluntarily or face deportation, the interior minister said Tuesday, a crackdown Kabul’s embassy in Islamabad.

The order comes as Pakistan grapples with a rise in attacks the government blames on groups operating from Afghanistan, a charge Kabul routinely denies.

Around 1.3 million Afghans are registered refugees in Pakistan and 880,000 more have legal status to remain, according to the latest United Nations figures.

But caretaker Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti said a further 1.7 million Afghans were in Pakistan illegally.

All will have to return home in the coming months, according to a report by the state-run news agency APP.

“The illegal immigrants and illegal foreign nationals who are

living in Pakistan are given a deadline of November 1,” Bugti told reporters in Islamabad.

“If they do not go... then all the law enforcement agencies in the provinces or federal government will be utilised to deport them.”

APP went further, citing government sources as saying the government wanted all Afghans to leave.

“In the first phase, illegal residents, in the second phase, those with Afghan citizenship, and in the third phase those with proof of residence cards will be expelled,” it said.

In a statement on Tuesday, Afghanistan’s embassy said more than 1,000 Afghans have been detained in the past two weeks -- half of them despite having a legal right to be in Pakistan.

“Despite the repeated promises of the Pakistan authorities, the arrest and harassment of Afghan refugees by the police in Pakistan continues,” it said.

Bugti said also that from November 1, Pakistan would only allow entry to Afghans with valid passports and visas.

For years, Afghans entering Pakistan through land borders have been allowed to use their national identity cards as a travel document.

There is a huge waiting list in Afghanistan for nationals seeking to get passports, and obtaining a Pakistan visa can take months.

Bugti also warned of a crackdown on property and businesses owned by Afghans in Pakistan.

“A task force has been formed for that purpose at the interior ministry. All the properties and businesses of those living here illegally are out of our tax net,” he said.

“Our intelligence agencies will search them out and their business will be confiscated by the government.”

— AFP



A general view of the border post in Torkham, Pakistan. – Reuters file photo

Congolese families weep for victims of protest killings

GOMA: The smell of decomposing bodies filled the air as cemetery workers in eastern Congo unloaded dozens of coffins at the final resting place for victims of one of the deadliest crackdowns on protests in recent local memory.

As rain poured down on the funerals in mid-September, distraught family members cried out and clasped each other for support.

The burials continued as darkness fell. At least 56 people were killed on Aug. 30, according to a military prosecutor, after Congolese soldiers in the city of Goma opened fire on protesters ahead of a demonstration against

the presence of UN peacekeepers. A military court on Monday sentenced some of those accused of orchestrating the bloodshed, and the government has paid for burials and offered compensation to the grieving and angry families.

Many are struggling to come to terms with their loss. “It’s criminal, what they’ve done,” said 26-year-old widow Tumaini Barumana Biluge, decrying the two weeks she and the other bereaved had had to wait to identify the victims. “We couldn’t recognise people’s faces anymore, relatives only recognised their own by the clothes they were wearing,” she said. In recent months, soldiers gunned down anti-UN protesters



Families mourn over the victims killed during a demonstration by followers of the Wazalendo church before burial at the Makao cemetery in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo. – Reuters

in the eastern city of Goma, and the body of a prominent opposition lawmaker was found in his car.

Police have dispersed opposition rallies with tear gas, and at least two journalists have been detained on allegations of spreading fake news.

On Monday, three of six soldiers on trial for their role in the killings were sentenced to 10 years behind bars, while the head of the Republic Guard unit in Goma was handed the death penalty, which is expected to be commuted to life imprisonment.

The two others were acquitted. During the trial, the prosecutor described the sound of crackling of gunfire as soldiers started

firing before dawn on Aug. 30 in what he called a massacre. Decades of conflict between the army and myriad rebel groups has destabilised eastern Congo and civilians rarely see justice for the abuses committed by both sides.

The new military governor of eastern North Kivu province, Major-General Peter Cirimwami, said the army needs to work harder to build people’s trust. “This is why I was sent by the higher-ups so that we can develop an approach with the local community that will change attitudes,” he told journalists during his first field visit in the province.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

JAMBI

City closes schools over peatland fire haze

An Indonesian city with a population of hundreds of thousands has shut schools for three days because of haze caused by large peatland fires, its mayor said on Tuesday.

The city of Jambi on the western island of Sumatra, which has a population of around 600,000, has forced students to online learning.

“The thick smog made us lay off students from preschool to junior high school,” the city’s mayor Syarif Fasha told reporters



at Jambi city hall.

The school ban was from Monday to Wednesday, but would be extended if the haze continued from Peatland fires.

— AFP

KANO

At least 40 are missing in boat accident

At least 40 people are missing and presumed to have drowned in northwest Nigeria’s Kebbi state after a passenger boat capsized in strong currents, a local official said on Tuesday.

“We are still searching for 40 passengers with the help of local divers and believe they have drowned,” said Bala Mohammed, the administrator of Yauri district, where the accident happened. “It is a difficult search due to the high water level and strong currents as a result of the



rainy season.”

Last month at least 24 bodies were recovered and 50 went missing when a boat ferrying more than 100 farmers across the Niger river.

— AFP

ISTANBUL

Türkiye arrests dozens after Ankara attack

Türkiye on Tuesday arrested dozens of suspected Kurdish militants and their supporters after an attack on the government district in the capital Ankara injured two policemen.

The raids across a swathe of Türkiye’s predominantly Kurdish southeast came two days after a branch of the PKK —listed as a terror group by Türkiye and its Western allies —claimed responsibility for Sunday’s attack.

Turkish police shot dead one of the attackers while the other



died in an apparent suicide blast outside Türkiye’s interior ministry.

The attack came hours before President Erdogan attended an opening session of parliament.

— AFP



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In brief

UNITED NATIONS



UN APPROVES HAITI FORCE AFTER YEAR OF PLEAS

The United Nations Security Council on Monday approved a Kenyan-led mission aiming to bring stability to Haiti, a year after leaders in the violence-ravaged Caribbean nation first pleaded for help.

Monday's resolution passed with 13 votes in favour, with China and Russia abstaining. It was hailed by Haitian Foreign Minister Jean Victor Geneus as bringing a "glimmer of hope for people who have been suffering the consequences."

The resolution calls for the deployment of a "multinational security support mission" — not officially a UN force — with a "lead country" coordinating with the Haitian government.

— AFP

MADRID



KING TASKS SANCHEZ WITH FORMING GOVT

Spain's King Felipe VI on Tuesday tasked outgoing Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez with forming the next government.

The move comes just four days after right-wing opposition leader Alberto Nunez-Feijoo failed in his own bid to win parliamentary support to be inaugurated as prime minister.

After talks with Spain's political parties, the king has "informed me of his decision to put forward Pedro Sanchez as the candidate for prime minister", speaker Francina Armengol announced.

Sanchez will now have to seek support from at least 176 lawmakers within the 350-seat parliament in the vote which must take place before November 27. — AFP

LISBON



PORTUGAL TO END TAX SCHEME FOR FOREIGNERS

Portugal will stop providing income tax exemptions to foreigners living part-time in the country from 2024 to fight against a housing affordability crisis.

The rules created in 2009 to attract foreign capital to Portugal, badly hit by the 2008 financial crisis, offered a total and later a partial exemption from taxes.

The rules applied to foreigners living at least half the year in Portugal and until 2020 meant their income was exempt.

The measure has contributed to soaring house prices over the last decade. — AFP

US lawmakers gear up to vote on McCarthy



US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy speaks with reporters after a House Republican conference meeting at the Capitol in Washington. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: Embattled US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy teed up a vote on a challenge to his leadership by a fellow Republican, in an intra-party dispute that could plunge Congress into chaos.

McCarthy said the House of Representatives will vote later in the day on a motion by Representative Matt Gaetz, a McCarthy antagonist, that could potentially remove him from his post. If successful, it would be the first time in US history that House lawmakers voted their leader out.

"I'm confident I'll hold on," McCarthy told reporters.

The leadership fight comes just days after Republican infighting took Washington to the brink of a partial government shutdown.

Several Republicans said they were sticking with McCarthy as they emerged from a closed-door meeting in which they said he received multiple standing ovations.

"I don't think there's any

question that there's only one person prepared to lead our party. That's understood by over 95 per cent of the members," said Republican Representative Darrell Issa.

McCarthy's party controls the chamber by a narrow 221-212 majority, and it would take as few as five Republican defections to threaten his hold on power if all Democrats vote against him.

Democrats have not said whether they will vote against McCarthy or extract concessions to keep him in power. Many say they view him as untrustworthy after he broke an agreement on spending with Democratic President Joe Biden, and are angered by his decision to green-light an impeachment investigation of the president.

"I'm interested in hearing what every single member of the House Democratic family has to say on this issue. And then we'll come to a collective decision at the end," House Democratic Leader

Hakeem Jeffries said.

Jeffries said he had spoken with McCarthy on Monday night, but declined to say what was discussed.

Republicans said the House would take up Gaetz's motion early on Tuesday afternoon. The chamber could hold a straight up or down vote, or could hold a vote to sideline it. If McCarthy hangs on to his job, Gaetz could potentially push for another vote.

Gaetz and other far-right Republicans are angered that McCarthy relied on Democratic votes to pass a temporary funding extension on Saturday that headed off a partial government shutdown. A faction of about 20 Republicans, Gaetz included, had forced McCarthy's hand by repeatedly blocking other legislation.

"It seems very personal with Matt. It doesn't look like he's looking out for the country or the institution," McCarthy said.

— Reuters

Warsaw, Kyiv make breakthrough on Ukrainian grain transit

WARSAW: Warsaw and Kyiv announced on Tuesday they had agreed to speed up the transit of Ukrainian cereal exports through Poland to third countries, a first step towards resolving their "grain war".

It is the first breakthrough since the start of a diplomatic spat between the two allies that was triggered when Poland slapped a ban on imports of Ukrainian grain.

The populist government in Warsaw, which faces a general election on October 15, said the embargo was designed to protect local farmers against a collapse in cereal prices.

Ukrainian exports transiting Poland on route to world markets — in Africa and the Middle East in particular — remain authorised.

Under Tuesday's agreement, which also involves Lithuania, some Ukrainian grain destined for world markets will transit directly through Poland without undergoing quality checks at the Polish border.

"We have agreed on an important question," Polish Agriculture Minister Robert Telus told journalists after an online meeting with ministers from Ukraine and Lithuania.

"From tomorrow, grains that transit to world markets via Lithuania will undergo checks at a Lithuanian port and not at the Poland-Ukraine border."

The Ukrainian agriculture ministry said the deal would "speed up transit through

Poland".

Ukraine and Lithuania "support this control mechanism and consider it to be a constructive step", it said.

After Russia blocked Ukraine's Black Sea ports — the main route for its exports — the European Union lifted customs duties on Ukrainian grains in May 2022 so the commodities could transit to world markets by land via the bloc.

But because of logistical problems, the grain began instead to pile up in EU states neighbouring Ukraine, driving down local prices.

The EU allowed several countries to impose a temporary embargo on Ukrainian cereals, on condition that transit routes remained open.

Brussels ended those restrictions in mid-September and Kyiv pledged to better control its flow of exports.

But Poland, Hungary and Slovakia unilaterally extended the ban, prompting Kyiv to file a lawsuit against them at the World Trade Organization.

Negotiations on allowing Ukrainian grain to enter the Polish domestic market have started but are progressing slowly.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on September 28 the grain war was detrimental to both countries.

"We have conveyed clear signals to Poland about our commitment to a constructive solution," Kuleba told Interfax-Ukraine. — AFP



The bulk carrier Equator, under the flag of Marshall Islands, floats to collect grain from one of the ports of Odesa, Ukraine. — AFP

Armenia ratifies ICC founding treaty, angering Russia

YEREVAN: Armenian lawmakers approved a key step towards joining the International Criminal Court (ICC) on Tuesday, a move that was expected to escalate tensions with the ex-Soviet country's traditional ally Moscow.

Russia said it was "wrong" to ratify the treaty to join The Hague-based court, which in March issued an arrest warrant for President Vladimir Putin over the war in Ukraine and the illegal deportation of children to Russia.

ICC members are expected to make the arrest if the Russian leader sets foot on their territory.

The vote illustrated a growing chasm between Moscow and Yerevan, which has grown angry with the Kremlin over its perceived inaction over Armenia's long-standing confrontation with Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani forces last month swept through the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh



French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna, accompanied by Armenian Health Minister Anahit Avanesyan, visits the National Burn Center in Yerevan. — AFP

— where Russian peacekeepers are deployed — and secured the surrender of Armenian separatist forces that had controlled the mountainous region for decades.

An online broadcast from the Armenian parliamentary session showed a majority of 60 deputies voting in favour of the proposal, with 22 — mainly opposition

lawmakers — voting against joining the ICC. The Kremlin immediately criticised Armenia's decision. "We are doubtful that, from the point of view of bilateral

relations, Armenia's accession to the Rome Statute is correct," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Tensions have also been rising between Yerevan and Moscow over the role of Russian peacekeepers in the self-proclaimed republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, which announced its dissolution last week following the lightning military operation by Baku.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan last week sought to assuage Kremlin fears, saying the initiative was not "directed against" Russia.

"It comes from the interests of the country's external security, and taking such a decision is our sovereign right," he said.

The Kremlin reiterated on Tuesday that Armenia has no alternative to a Moscow-led security alliance known as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). — AFP

Asian Games proves China’s resilience



Dr Imran Khalid

The writer is freelance columnist on international affairs

The on-going 19th Asian Games being held in Hangzhou, China, stand as a grand spectacle of unity, athleticism, and cultural exchange. However, beyond the thrilling sporting events and dazzling activities, this event serves as a testament to China’s remarkable and stable economic trajectory.

The organisation of these games demonstrates China’s commitment to international engagement and its investment in infrastructure and technology. Organising an event of this magnitude serves as a corroboration of China’s economic prowess. In recent times, Western media outlets have persistently propagated a negative perception that China’s economy is on the verge of a severe downturn. But the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou reflect China’s stable economic trajectory through various dimensions, including infrastructure development, financial investments, and global influence.

This edition of the Asian Games is remarkable for its immense scale; About 12,000 athletes from 45 countries participating in the largest Asian Games

ever. With 40 major sports, 61 disciplines, and an astonishing 481 events, these Games encompass a wide array of athletic endeavours. As a bridge for communication, reconciliation, and friendship, the Asian Games transcend the boundaries of sport. They provide strength and inspiration for unity and cooperation not only in Asia but also in the wider world.

One of the most visible signs of China’s stable economic trajectory is the extensive infrastructure development undertaken to host the Asian Games. The city of Hangzhou has undergone a remarkable transformation in preparation for the event. New stadiums, state-of-the-art sports facilities, modern transport networks, and upgraded accommodation options have been built to cater to the needs of athletes, officials, and spectators. Infrastructure projects for such mega-events require substantial investments and planning. Hangzhou, already known for its modernity and technological advancements, has undergone a significant transformation in preparation for the Games. The Hangzhou Asian Games venues are not just world-

CHINA’S STABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH IS CLOSELY LINKED TO ITS TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS, AND THE 19TH ASIAN GAMES IN HANGZHOU SERVE AS A SHOWCASE FOR THE COUNTRY’S INNOVATION.

class but also environmentally sustainable, indicating China’s commitment to green and intelligent development.

Although the expenditures related to the Games have not been made public, but the Hangzhou government did confirm investments exceeding 200 billion yuan (\$30 billion) from 2015 to 2020 in various areas, including transportation infrastructure, stadiums, accommodation, and other essential facilities.

China’s stable economic growth is closely linked to its technological advancements, and the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou serve as a showcase for the country’s innovation. Cutting-edge technology has been integrated into various aspects of the event, from ticketing and security systems to athlete performance analysis and communication infrastructure. This commitment to technological excellence is a reflection of China’s broader strategy to become a global leader in innovation and technology. Moreover, China’s stable economy provides a sense of assurance to its Asian neighbours and trading partners.

US aid cuts would be ‘devastating’ for Ukraine

WG DUNLOP

Ukraine’s troops would soon run short of essential ammunition and equipment if Republican hardliners succeed in stopping US military aid, undermining operations on the ground and reducing their ability to defend against Russian strikes, experts say.

Top American officials have repeatedly insisted the United States would back Kyiv for “as long as it takes,” and Washington has committed more than \$43 billion in security aid since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 — over half the total from all Western donors.

But Republican opposition led Congress to remove new funding for Ukraine from a recent compromise bill to avoid a US government shutdown, highlighting that continued American support is not guaranteed.

“It would be devastating for the Ukrainians” if US aid is halted, said Mark Cancian, a senior advisor at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

“The Ukrainian military would weaken and then ultimately perhaps collapse,” though it “might be able to just hold on the defensive,” he said.

The United States has supplied a vast arsenal to help Kyiv fight to regain territory seized by Russia, ranging from small arms ammunition and artillery rounds to vehicles, sophisticated rocket launchers, tanks and mine-clearing equipment.

“Militaries in conflict need a continuous flow of weapons and supplies and munitions to replace what’s destroyed and gets used up,” Cancian said.

If US aid were completely cut off — something the White House insists will not happen — the impact would not be immediate, given that previously authorised assistance is still in the pipeline.

“It would take probably a couple of weeks before we see effects on the battlefield,” he said, and Moscow might not be able to capitalise even then as “the Russians are pretty exhausted at this point.”

Away from the front lines, an end to US aid would leave gaps in Ukraine’s air defences, which are made up of systems from multiple countries that cover different altitudes and must be continually resupplied with munitions.

These defences play a key role in protecting Ukrainian civilians and infrastructure from frequent drone and missile attacks by Russia.

“You can’t really just... replace one system with another system if they operate in slightly different ways and deal with different threats,” said James Black, assistant director of the defence and security research group at RAND Europe. — **AFP**

How to land that dream job or university place?



Karim Easterbrook

The author is an educational counsellor

EQUIP YOURSELF, PRACTISE, AND WALK IN WITH CONFIDENCE TO SECURE THAT COVETED UNIVERSITY PLACE OR DREAM JOB

Education isn’t just a field of study for me, it’s a passion. With experience spanning over 25 years as an educational counsellor and former School Principal of two private schools in Cambridge, UK, I’ve had the privilege of advising countless young adults. Most of my guidance has been directed towards preparing them for university interviews and job applications.

One of my schools notably stood out, producing more successful candidates for the University of Cambridge than any other education institution in the UK. Whilst these students were bright the fierce competition for a place at the University of Cambridge often boiled down to their interview performance.

To my astonishment many bright students faltered during the mock interviews I gave them. A classic example was a student aspiring to study Medicine at King’s College Cambridge. When asked about his motivation he delved into a lengthy discourse on India’s sewage system. While his intentions were noble, the response was misdirected and overly detailed. This brings me to my first piece of advice: Stay relevant. Ensure your answers align with the interviewer’s questions and are concise.

Interviews are not casual conversations, they are oral examinations. Just as you wouldn’t sit for a written exam unprepared, you shouldn’t walk into an interview without thorough preparation. Anticipate potential questions, draft thoughtful responses and practice mock interviews.

A common pitfall I’ve observed is candidates being lured by the prospect of a lucrative salary. Interviewers seek genuine passion, not monetary motivations.

Another challenge is the “trap questions.” These are designed not to test your knowledge but to gauge your reaction under pressure. For instance, I once quizzed a student applying to read engineering at university about how he would sell an embedded engineering product to a hospital, a topic he was clearly unfamiliar with. His flustered



Interviewers seek genuine passion, not monetary motivations.

response highlighted two critical mistakes: dishonesty by pretending he knew the answer and evasion. My advice? Maintain Integrity. If you’re unsure, seek clarification from the interviewer rather than pretending to know.

Here are my top easy-guide tips to help you ace that interview!

1. Research the Company. Before stepping into an interview arm yourself with knowledge about the company’s history, culture, values, and recent developments. This not only shows your genuine interest but also helps in tailoring your responses.
2. Know the Job Description: understanding the position you’re applying for is crucial. Familiarise yourself with the skills and qualifications required and be ready to demonstrate how your experience aligns with what the job requirements are. Prepare answers for common interview questions. Anticipate potential questions like “Tell me about yourself” or “Why do you want this job?” and rehearse concise, relevant answers.
3. Showcase your achievements and be upbeat and positive. Use the STAR method: “Situation, Task, Action, Result” to highlight specific instances where you’ve excelled. Your past successes are the best predictors of your future performance for the interviewer.
4. Dress professionally: First impressions matter. Choose attire that aligns with the company’s dress code and culture. When uncertain, it’s always better to be slightly overdressed than under dressed.
5. Arrive early. Punctuality is a subtle indicator of your professionalism and respect for the interviewer’s time. Arrive between five to ten minutes before the interview starts.
6. Bring essential documents. Have extra copies of your CV and any other requested documents such as academic certificates with you on hand.
7. Listen carefully to the questions being asked of you and be prepared ask relevant questions at the end of the interview. Active listening is key to giving good answers. Also, prepare thoughtful questions that demonstrate your keen interest in the role and the company’s culture and activities.
8. Follow Up. A short thank you e-mail post-interview can make a lasting impression. It’s a gesture that showcases your gratitude and continued interest.
9. Be yourself. While preparation is paramount, authenticity is equally vital. Let your genuine self shine through and remember that interviews are as much about your evaluating the company as they are about assessing you. You will be a bit nervous. It’s normal so accept it.

In conclusion, interviews are intricate dances of knowledge, composure, and authenticity. While there are numerous nuances to consider, the key lies in preparation. Equip yourself, practise, and walk in with confidence to secure that coveted university place or dream job. Good luck!

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

End the sedentary lifestyle...

Of the many changes that have taken place during the 21st century, one of the negative aspects has been in the form of an emerging and increasing trend toward a sedentary lifestyle.

The more we become inactive, the more we experience health scares in life. Experts confirm it, and we read it right! A sedentary lifestyle can take a toll on our health and cause many ailments!

“Sedentary lifestyles make it one of the more serious yet insufficiently addressed public health problems of our time”, states a World Health Organisation (WHO) report. This has worrying implications for future health, as physical inactivity is one of the main risk factors for death, it adds.

The number of people leading sedentary lifestyles is increasing due to a rise in occupational behaviours such as long office hours, increased use of electronic devices, and travel. Accordingly, the prevalence of relevant non-communicable diseases has registered a steep increase.

Studies show that 31 per cent of the global population consists of inactive individuals over the age of 15. This contributes to the death of 3.2 million people annually. It is estimated that nearly two-thirds of children are also insufficiently active, with serious implications for their future health.

According to the WHO report, almost 500 million people will develop heart disease, obesity, diabetes, or other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) attributable to physical inactivity.

The report points out those non-communicable diseases affect people of all age groups, regions, and countries. “Although they are often associated with older age groups, evidence shows that 17 million NCD deaths occur before the age of 70”, it says.

In the Sultanate of Oman, according to a 2018 WHO study, NCDs are the leading cause of premature mortality, killing 18 per cent of Omanis between the ages of 30 and 70. Cardio-vascular diseases (CVDs) account for 36 per cent of NCD deaths, plus 11 per cent from cancer, 8 per cent from diabetes,



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The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

OMAN, AS PART OF ITS PLANS TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF NCDs, HAS SET A TARGET TO REDUCE PREMATURE MORTALITY RATE BY ONE-THIRD BY 2030

and 2 per cent from chronic respiratory diseases.

The Government of Oman, as part of its plans to reduce the impact of NCDs, has set a target to reduce the premature mortality rate by one-third by the year 2030 by implementing comprehensive strategies and interventions.

While describing sedentary lifestyles as being among the 10 leading causes of death and disability in the world, the United Nations’ health agency reveals that of the premature deaths, 86 per cent are estimated to occur in low- and middle-income countries.

Children, adults, and the elderly are all vulnerable to the risk factors contributing to NCDs, whether from unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, exposure to tobacco smoke, or the harmful use of alcohol or air pollution.

Tobacco use accounts for over 8 million deaths every year, including from the effects of exposure to second-hand smoke. Nearly 1.8 million annual deaths have been attributed to excess salt or sodium intake.

More than half of the 3 million annual deaths attributable to alcohol use are from NCDs, including cancer, and 830,000 deaths annually can be attributed to insufficient physical activity.

Among the preventive measures recommended by WHO are moderate physical activity for up to 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week or 75 minutes each week of strenuous physical activity, tobacco cessation, and healthy nutrition.

At the same time, it’s important to educate people, starting in childhood, to adopt and increase exercise. We know that only active children can become healthy adults. So the authorities should take steps to make physical activity an integral part of education.

While ultimate responsibility may rest with each individual, our lifestyle affects us not just individually but also has an impact on our surroundings and, thus, on society.

So we need to change and become healthier. And if you don’t, no doubt, as experts suggest, lack of physical activity and its consequences would be the pandemic of the 21st century!

SKY FEATS!



Airmen from Indonesian military units jump from transport planes during a rehearsal for the 78th anniversary of the Indonesian military in Jakarta on Tuesday. – AFP

In Libya’s devastated Derna, families still search for the missing

AYMAN AL-WARFALI

Since a huge flood swept away whole neighbourhoods of Libya’s city of Derna last month, Abdulsalam al-Kadi has been searching for his father and brother. He doesn’t expect to find them alive but he wants to bury them so he has a grave to mourn over.

With friends, he has scoured mudbanks where his family’s house once stood. He has asked every hospital. He has pored over many of the photographs of the 4,000 bodies recovered so far.

“We thought maybe the sea took them. Maybe they were in the harbour. Those were really tough days. They still are really tough days,” said the 43-year-old who spent two days travelling to Derna from his new home in the United States.

Three weeks after the flashflood killed thousands of people, many survivors have yet to find their loved ones, even as Libya’s rival factions squabble over who to blame for the disaster and how to rebuild the ruined city.

Many families now face the prospect that they may never find out what happened to parents, children or other relatives despite efforts to

identify bodies — many buried hastily in mass graves — using photographs or DNA testing.

Kadi, who could barely recognise his home town when he arrived, says his mother and sister still hold out hope his father and brother survived. But Kadi says he has had to come to terms with the fact that they died.

“What was difficult in the first few days was hope. People would say they saw them somewhere. For us it was as if they died again every day,” he said. “It drove me crazy.”

Derna, a coastal city in eastern Libya known as a cultural centre, was built on a seasonal river that ran from a mountain range into the sea. The city had suffered in the chaos that followed Libya’s 2011 Nato-backed uprising. IS militants seized the city in 2015 — killing one of Kadi’s two brothers — before eastern forces under commander Khalifa Haftar captured it.

The devastation now is on a different scale. Overnight, a narrow valley that ran between neat streets and buildings was turned into wide expanse of mud,

rocks and lumps of masonry.

But organising Derna’s reconstruction will be complicated, with Libya split between an internationally recognised government in Tripoli in the west and eastern regions controlled by Haftar with parallel institutions.

Aid efforts are visible on the

streets, with mechanical diggers clearing debris. But residents, speaking to Reuters last week, complained that they had not received any help in repairing or rebuilding homes or businesses.

Mohamed al Ghoeil, 49, was trying to clear mud that caked shelves of a grocery store owned by his brother.

“There is a total absence of the state to reassure citizens,” he said. “We decided to lessen some of our pain by cleaning what we can to bring life back to the afflicted areas.”

The government in the east, which is not internationally recognised, said on Sunday it was postponing an international reconstruction conference it had planned. The Tripoli government has also said it would hold a conference, without giving a date.

In a fractured nation, reconstruction and the coordination required could fuel another tussle for power, analysts say.

The cost of casual labourers has already shot up too high for Khaled al Fortas, who said he could not afford the elevated wages demanded by workers to help clear his damaged home.

For Kadi, the priority remains finding his lost family members — a daunting task for him and thousands of others. “A whole city was underwater, with people in the buildings,” he said. “It is impossible to pull them out with our capabilities.” — Reuters



Abdul Salam al Qadi looks inside his home for his father and brother who are missing after the deadly floods in Derna, Libya. – Reuters

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OMAN EARN SECOND MEDAL IN ASIAN GAMES

HUSSAIN AL FARSI BAGS BRONZE IN 800 METRES

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, OCT 3

The Sultanate of Oman have won their second medal at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, with Hussain al Farsi finishing third in the men's 800 metres final on Tuesday.

Earlier, Oman had ended their 13-year medal drought in Asian Games with a historic first-ever silver medal last week.

Oman Sail's 49er team of Musab al Hadi and Walid al Kindi achieved the feat for Oman in sailing competition.

Hussain al Farsi came home in 1 minute 48.51 seconds for his bronze behind gold medallist Saudi Arabia's Essa Ali S Kzwani (1:48.05) and silver medallist India's Mohammed Afsal Pulikkalakath (1:48:43).

Al Farsi qualified for the 800 metres finals after clocking a personal best record of 1:47.68 in the heats topped by India's Mohammed Afsal.

"Thank God, I was able to make my dream come true. It was a strong competition that lasted until the last seconds. I'm delighted to contribute a second medal for Oman," Al Farsi said after his feat.

Al Farsi dedicated the medal to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

"I had put in my best in the final. I will strive for more excellence in my future races," he said after the medal ceremony.

The youngster had promised to get one of the top three positions in the final earlier after finding his best timing with a national record in the heats.

In 200 metres, Oman's Mohammed al Saadi and Rashid al Asmi ended their campaign in the semifinals.

Mohammed al Saadi came in sixth place in the second group with a time of 21.32 seconds, while Rashid al Asmi came in seventh place in the first group with a time of 21.32 seconds.

Meanwhile, Oman were disqualified for committing a technical foul in the men's 4x100 metres relay in the preliminary qualifiers.

The team consisting of Barakat al Harthi, Ali al Balushi, Mohammed al Saadi and Rashid al Asmi had finished fifth (39.87 seconds) before they were disqualified for a technical foul during the race course.

In hockey, Oman suffered a 16-2 drubbing against South Korea finishing last in the Pool B.

SECOND MEDAL

Al Farsi's bronze added up the Oman tally for the first time with a second medal in an Asian Games.

Oman's first medal came in 1986 at the Seoul Asian Games when sprinting great Mohammed al Malki claimed a bronze medal in the 400-metre race. Al Malki bettered his performance and took the gold medal in the 1990 Beijing Asian Games.

In 1998, Oman won another bronze when the men's 4x100m relay



Oman's Hussain al Farsi (right) on his way to finish third in 800 metres.

 19TH ASIAN GAMES MEDALS TALLY					
RANK	COUNTRY	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
1.	CHINA	161	90	46	297
2.	JAPAN	33	47	50	130
3.	SOUTH KOREA	32	42	65	139
4.	INDIA	15	26	28	69
5.	UZBEKISTAN	14	15	21	50
6.	TAIWAN	12	10	18	40
7.	THAILAND	10	11	19	40
8.	NORTH KOREA	7	10	6	23
9.	BAHRAIN	7	1	4	12
10.	HONG KONG	6	15	24	45
11.	IRAN	6	14	16	36
12.	INDONESIA	6	3	13	22
13.	KAZAKHSTAN	5	10	32	47
14.	SINGAPORE	3	6	4	13
15.	MALAYSIA	3	4	16	23
16.	QATAR	3	4	2	9
17.	KUWAIT	2	3	1	6
18.	SAUDI ARABIA	2	2	1	5
19.	TAJIKISTAN	2	1	3	6
20.	VIETNAM	1	3	14	18
29.	OMAN	0	1	1	2

team finished third in the Bangkok Asian Games.

New sprint icon Barakat al Harthi joined the elite list when he bagged a bronze in 100 metres.

Last week, silver medallists Musab and Walid sailed excellently throughout and kept their composure in the final intense races to take silver. This achievement means the team has secured automatic qualification to the Asian

Qualification Regatta in Chon Buri, Thailand, in December where they will look to confirm their place at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

The Asian Games are considered the largest sporting event on the Asian continent and the second largest global event after the Summer Olympics. More than 12,000 male and female athletes are currently competing, representing 45 Asian countries in 40 sports.

Oman's Husain al Farsi clocked a personal best time to qualify for the 800m final.



AL NAHDHA TOP AFC CUP GROUP

OMANI CLUB SECURE CRUCIAL VICTORY AGAINST JABAL AL MUKABER

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 3

Oman's Al Nahdha bounced back strongly as they registered a 4-0 win over Jabal Al Mukaber Club of Palestine in Group A of the AFC Cup 2023/24 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex late on Monday.

The Oman national representative team had lost 2-1 against Lebanon's Al Ahed in Muscat on September 19. The win of Al Buraimi-based team took them to lead the group standings after Al Ahed lost to Syria's Al Futuwa SC 1-0 in another encounter of Group A at the Prince Abdullah bin Jalawi Stadium on Monday.

Al Nahdha grabbed their first winning points and led the table with advantage of goals than Lebanon's Al Ahed team and Jabal Al Mukaber Club of Palestine who are positioned in second and third places with the same three points respectively.

Oman national team striker Issam al Subhi took the lead for Al Nahdha in the 33rd minute. Bilal bin Saha doubled the score as he netted in the 38th minute before Abdulaziz al Shmoussi made it 3-0 after the second half started by six minutes. Abdullah Fawaz concluded the goalscoring spree

as he scored the fourth goal in the 64th minute.

Coach Hamed al Azani's men showed top performance in this game against the Palestinian team in comparison to the previous game which featured some defending mistakes. Al Nahdha were organised and discipline in all the lines and created series of scoring attempts throughout the fixture.

Post the match, Hamed al Azani appreciated the players for their thrilling show. "Congratulations to all the players after the top performance and ending the match on a 4-0 triumph. This is the actual technical performance for the team and I hope the stars will continue with this level in the forthcoming games. We came back strongly after our opening defeat. The team learned from the mistakes," Al Azani said.

The former Oman Olympic coach affirmed that the previous defeat did not impact negatively on the team. "The players entered this match after closing the chapter of the previous match. They were fully focused to capture the required three points. Our target now is to continue in this winning line and I am confident on my team to deliver again in the coming matches," he signed out.



Al Nahda players celebrate a goal during the AFC Cup match against Jabal Al Mukaber Club of Palestine.

England, New Zealand warm-up for World Cup opener with rain-hit wins



Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan Miraz is bowled out by England's David Willey during a warm-up match between Bangladesh and England ahead of the ICC World Cup, at the Assam Cricket Association Stadium in Guwahati. — AFP

GUWAHATI, India: England and New Zealand clinched rain-hit victories on Monday in their final World Cup warm-up matches before they clash on Thursday in the tournament opener.

Defending champions England edged out Bangladesh by four wickets in Guwahati while New Zealand claimed a seven-run win over South Africa at Thiruvananthapuram.

Both matches were decided by rain-adjusted targets.

Worryingly for teams and officials, only two of the seven warm-up games so far played have escaped the rain. Two were abandoned without a ball being bowled.

Chasing a revised target of 197 in 37 overs after Bangladesh made 188-9, England comfortably knocked off the runs with 77 balls to spare.

Moeen Ali top scored with 56 in a 39-ball innings peppered with six sixes. "We didn't have the first warm-up because it was rained off against India," Moeen told Sky Sports. "But it was important for the bowlers to bowl, us to spend time in the field and some batters to get time in the middle in these conditions. It is very valuable before the World Cup."

For Bangladesh, who won the toss, Mehidy Hasan Miraz and opener Tanzid Hasan were in the runs for the second consecutive

game. Mehidy, who made an undefeated 67 in the seven-wicket win over Sri Lanka, cracked 74 with 10 fours off 89 balls.

Tanzid, the top scorer with 84 on the same ground against Sri Lanka, hit 45 off 44 balls. His innings featured seven fours and a six.

England, whose opening warm-up against hosts India was abandoned without a ball being bowled on Saturday, saw 6ft 7ins left-arm fast bowler Reece Topley take 3-23. Leg-spinner Adil Rashid, England's leading wicket taker in ODI cricket in the squad, returned 2-27.

At Thiruvananthapuram, New Zealand piled up 321-6 in their 50

overs against South Africa.

Opener Devon Conway made 78 off 73 balls with 11 fours and a six while wicketkeeper Tom Latham also passed the half century mark, his 52 runs coming from 56 balls.

DE KOCK HIT ON HEAD

It was New Zealand's second successive 300-plus total in the warm-ups, having chased down Pakistan's 345 in their opener.

South Africa fast bowlers Lungi Ngidi and Marco Jansen took three wickets each but fellow quicks Kagiso Rabada and Gerald Coetzee went wicketless for a combined 90 runs in 14 overs.

Kiwi skipper Kane Williamson made 37 to add to his 54 against Pakistan but he will sit out Thursday's opener in Ahmedabad as he continues his recovery from injury.

In reply, opener Quinton de Kock smashed an undefeated 84 but his side fell just short of a rain-revised target of 219 off 37 overs.

De Kock, who will retire from international cricket after the World Cup, hit 12 fours and a six in an 89-ball innings.

The 30-year-old stood firm in the draining humidity and also survived being hit on the head by a Daryl Mitchell bouncer.

Rassie van der Dussen hit 51 off 56 balls while Trent Boult took an economical 2-20 off five overs.

The final round of warm-ups take place on Tuesday when Afghanistan face Sri Lanka in Guwahati, India tackle the Netherlands at Thiruvananthapuram while Pakistan and Australia clash in Hyderabad.

— AFP

ORSC marks Oman Day of Physical Activity



SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 3

The Oman Racket Sports Committee (ORSC) launched their official activities through marking Oman Day of Physical Activity, which was organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Monday at Al Sahwa Parks. ORSC took part in the event through an introductory corner that showed all the events and activities of the ORSC. Furthermore, the committee arranged an open area for exercising Air Badminton.

Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti Minister of Health and top dignitaries of the event were briefed on the ORSC plans and the forthcoming events besides the importance of Air Badminton and its advantages on a healthy body.

ORSC focused on presenting Air Badminton during the event as it is one of the sport supported by Badminton World Federation (BWF). According to BWF, Air Badminton is an ambitious new development project designed to create opportunities for people of all ages and ability to play badminton on hard, grass and sand surfaces in parks, gardens, streets, playgrounds and beaches

around the world.

Khalid bin Ali al Sulaimani, member of ORSC, said that taking part in the Oman Day of Physical Activity is a vital opportunity to show the activities of racket sports which fit for all the community categories. "Racket sports supports to raise the physical activity level and the health of a person. The ORSC will work hard towards providing different range of activities that are mixed of competitive events for the professionals and fun activities to assist people's developing their physical activity and health care," he said.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth had announced the formation of Oman Racket Sports Committee in July. The committee is headed by Dr Abdulrahim al Daroushi as chairman while Tahir al Barwani is Secretary-General. The committee members are: Khalid al Sulaimani, Ruqaya al Omairi and Amal al Mahrouqi. The committee will be responsible for badminton and squash sports in the Sultanate of Oman and work in accordance to the set international and regional standards, rules and regulations by the international and Asian federations.

Adekoya wins again after doping ban

Japan set up North Korea showdown in women’s football

HANGZHOU, China: Reigning champions Japan held off a spirited fightback from hosts China on Tuesday to set up an Asian Games women’s football final against North Korea, while a runner previously banned for doping won gold.

Japan silenced the partisan crowd in Hangzhou to lead 4-1 at the break and put one foot in the final, as the China players trudged off the pitch into the dressing rooms.

But a China team made up of players from the recent World Cup refused to go quietly and they pulled it back to 4-3 with half an hour left, setting up a grandstand finale.

But Japan kept their concentration and nerve to hold out for victory and teed up a showdown with North Korea on Friday for gold.

North Korea thrashed Uzbekistan 8-0 in the day’s other semi-final to set up a repeat of the 2014 final, with striker Kim Kyong Yong scoring four goals.

On the fifth day in track and field, Bahrain’s Kemi Adekoya — who was stripped of the 2018 title for doping — won 400m hurdles gold.

The 30-year-old won at the 2014 Asian Games in Incheon after switching allegiance from Nigeria, and again came first at Jakarta four years later. But she was stripped of her 2018 hurdles and mixed 4x400m relay golds after testing positive for the prohibited steroid stanozolol. She was banned for four years.

A former world indoor champion, she claimed at the time her food was spiked.

“I just wanted to fight and get the gold medal, and fight for a



Bahrain's Kemi Adekoya crosses the finish line to win the women's 400m hurdles final. —AFP

new record,” she said on Tuesday after clocking a Games-record 54.45sec for gold.

Adekoya, who only recently returned to action, won the 400m title on Saturday.

FOCUS ON PARIS

China’s Wu Yu enjoyed an afternoon stroll to the first boxing gold of the Games as she easily defeated Thailand’s Chuthamat Raksat in the final of the women’s flyweight (50kg) on unanimous points.

Tajikistan’s Davlat Boltaev won the first men’s gold with a controversial 3-2 split decision over China’s Han Xuezhin in the heavyweight (92kg) division.

Wu, who barely broke sweat, and whose face was completely unmarked, said: “It was as comfortable as it looked.”

But the Chinese boxer, who won the world championship in the non-Olympic 52kg weight class in Delhi earlier this year, said she thinks she can do even better.

Gold at the Paris Olympics next year is already on her mind.

“My main rival is myself. I will not be afraid of even the strongest rivals if I keep breaking through my limits and making myself stronger,” she said.

“I think it’s better to stay down to earth. I am only at the second stage now that I’ve got a ticket to the Paris Olympics.”

BLOCKBUSTER IN OFFING

In road cycling, Kazakhstan’s Alexey Lutsenko, a 2020 stage winner on the Tour de France, won gold in the men’s individual time trial by two minutes from China’s Xue Ming.

Olga Zabelinskaya of Uzbekistan took the women’s crown.

It was a fourth Asian Games gold for Lutsenko, stretching back to Incheon in 2014, but he does not intend to stop there with the road race still to come.

“That’s very important to me. I hope that I can get another gold medal for my country,” he said.

Arch-rivals India and Pakistan remain on course for a blockbuster men’s cricket final.

Explosive opener Yashasvi Jaiswal smashed seven sixes in a sublime maiden T20 century as India opened their first Asian Games campaign with a 23-run defeat of Nepal to reach the semifinals. Pakistan kept up their end of the bargain, crushing Hong Kong by 68 runs with experienced all-rounder Khushdil Shah taking 3-13. — AFP



India's Annu Rani competes in the women's javelin throw final athletics event during the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou. Rani won the gold with a 62.92 metres effort, ahead of Sri Lanka's Dilhani Lekange and China's Lyu Huihui. — AFP

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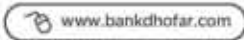
Bronze medallist Japan's Yuma Maruyama (R) and silver medallist India's Tejaswin Shankar celebrate after the men's decathlon 1,500m athletics event. — AFP

India's Parul Chaudhary celebrates after winning the women's 5,000m final athletics event. —AFP

China's Guanfeng Chen, Zhenye Xie, Haibin Yan and Jiapeng Chen celebrate after winning the men's 4x100m relay final. — Reuters



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An overview of a 5-star hotel resort in Oman.

Oman 3 to 5-star hotels revenues exceed RO 138 million

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's 3 to 5-star hotels revenues reached RO 138.38 million at the end of August 2023, compared to RO 109.535 million during the same period last year or an increase of 26.3 per cent. As per the data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the increase in revenues was commensurate with the growth in the total number of hotel guests, which showed an increase of 26.7 per cent, as well as the occupancy rate, which registered a growth of 10.4 per cent. These hotels recorded about 1,284,640 guests by the end of August 2023, compared to 1,013,876 guests in the same period in 2022.

The number of Omani guests reached 499,840 guests, showing an increase of 5.3 per cent, while the number of Gulf guests increased by 25.1 per cent, recording 137,367 guests. Among guests from other nationalities, the total number of European guests increased by 44.1 per cent, reaching 275,672; number of American guests reached 36,970, recording an increase of 2.8 per cent; number of guests from the African continent reached 7,336, with a growth rate of 39.5 per cent; number of Asian guests also increased by 44.2 per cent, reaching 187,486; and guests from Oceania numbered 27,110, an increase of 228.7 per cent.

— ONA

Social insurance disbursements by PASI total RO 214m in 2022

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, OCT 3

Insurance disbursements by the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) in Oman totalled around RO 214 million in 2022, the authority said in its newly unveiled Annual Report for the year. The report documents PASI's commitment to providing social security and financial support to the people of the Sultanate of Oman, notwithstanding adverse impacts stemming from challenges posed by a volatile global economy. Beneficiaries included 2,886 new pensioners during the year, affirming the authority's role supporting retirees and their families. By the end of 2022, PASI had paid a total of 24,030 active pensions — part of a robust financial safety net created for retirees. In addition, 2,918 pensions were disbursed to beneficiaries of deceased insured persons in 2022, helping supporting families during difficult times. An additional 2,336 beneficiaries of deceased policyholders or pensioners received financial assistance. In line with its funding support for victims of occupational hazards, it extended protection to 13,453 beneficiaries under the



PASI plays an important role in providing a financial safety net for the Omani workforce and its dependents.

occupational safety insurance scheme at the end of 2022. On the investment front, a remarkable 76 per cent of PASI's investments were allocated to local and Gulf markets, with the remaining 24 per cent was ploughed into foreign markets. This diversified approach mitigates financial risks associated with market fluctuations, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organisation, the authority said. Significantly, 38.7 per cent of total income during the year came in the form of Employer's Contribution. The contribution of the insured was about 24.8 per cent, while the government's contribution was 16.3 per cent.

The balance 17 per cent came from investment and other sources. PASI also reported an increase in subscription revenue compared to the previous year, showcasing its ability to attract and retain policyholders. Notably, the report highlights a significant decrease in the contribution rate of insured individuals working abroad, while the contribution rate of self-employed Omanis and similar categories saw a substantial increase. These trends indicate shifts in the workforce and the adaptability of PASI's insurance programmes. The distribution of insurance expenses revealed the following

allocations during 2021 and 2022: the lion's share went to the elderly, disability, and death insurance segment; followed by old-age pension, unemployment job security, and insurance against work injuries and occupational diseases: 1.9 per cent. The high number of beneficiaries under the occupational safety insurance scheme demonstrates PASI's crucial role in safeguarding the well-being of workers in Oman. This is particularly significant in a region with a relatively high rate of occupational accidents, emphasising the organisation's commitment to occupational safety and social welfare.

State audit crackdown yields RO 17.8 million in recoveries in 2022

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, OCT 3

The annual audit of government and public sector institutions yielded a total of RO 17.8 million in recoverable dues owed to the state treasury in 2022, thy State Audit Institution (SAI) revealed in its report on Monday. According to the report, the bulk of these recoveries, amounting to RO 14 million, came from various state authorities, investments and state-owned enterprises, while the remaining RO 3.8 million was collected from government units. In an interview featured on Oman TV, Senior Control Specialist and Director-General of Legal Affairs, Shabib al Busaidi, explained the difference between fund collection and recovery. According to Al Busaidi, fund collection refers to the process of collecting amounts due to the General Treasury, through "taxes, contracts or similar matters." Recovery, on the other hand, refers to "the retrieval of funds that have been disbursed and spent from the State's General Treasury." In terms of tax collection, the report



View of the headquarters of the State Audit Institution in Muscat.

indicated that several companies failed to adhere to the Income Tax Law and its Executive Regulations. It noted that income totalling RO 206.7 million was not included in their tax returns. Out of this total, RO 112.2 million is attributed to companies that have not submitted tax returns, as a result of which they were not assessed for tax. Additionally, some companies "intentionally" did not disclose revenues totalling RO 95.4 million in their submitted tax returns. The report indicates that these cases are currently under examination.

Furthermore, certain companies failed to adhere to the provisions for deducting withholding taxes on revenue totalling RO 23.6 million. According to the report, RO 726,000 has been collected so far on this amount, while the rest is currently in the process of collection. In terms of recovery, the State Audit Institution addressed 113 "financial and administrative irregularities" cases in 2022. The term encompasses various corrupt practices including: bribery, document forgery, embezzlement, misuse and abuse of position, misuse of public funds. In terms of embezzlement, an assistant director of property credit in a government company was convicted of embezzling RO 78,830 through forgery, while another government employee embezzled a total of RO 66,642 in fuel filling cards through by misusing their position. Additionally, three other government employees were convicted of embezzling amounts of RO 14,400, RO 8,299, and RO 4,146 respectively. These employees were prosecuted and ordered to pay back the stolen amounts.

Oman crude benchmark surges to 11-month high

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, OCT 3

In a strong start to the month of October, the Middle East crude benchmark Oman saw a significant jump, buoyed by anticipations of constrained supplies and heightened demand for regional crude. On the first trading day of the month on Monday, October 2, Oman's premium to Dubai soared to an impressive \$3.57 per barrel, marking an 11-month peak. This substantial surge has grabbed the attention of global oil markets and is linked to several key factors shaping the current energy landscape. One of the primary drivers behind this surge in Oman crude prices is the expectation of tight supplies. The growing appetite for regional crude, particularly in Asian markets, has played a pivotal role in supporting Oman's premium. Asian economies have been rebounding strongly, with



Oil pumps are seen in this illustration.

countries like China and India witnessing robust economic growth. This has translated into a higher demand for energy, including crude oil, which has benefited Middle Eastern producers like Oman. Meanwhile, another crude oil benchmark, Murban, escalated to \$5.31 a barrel over the Dubai quotes on Monday, reaching a level not seen since late February. Oman and Murban's premium to Dubai reaching an 11-month peak underscores the resilience of the region's oil market. Despite the uncertainties and challenges, Middle Eastern crude has remained a key player in the global energy landscape.

TURN TO PAGE 15

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Inside BankDhofar's branch.

MUSCAT: With unparalleled flexibility, competitive returns, and sustainable growth, BankDhofar's Recurring Deposit (RD) Account is designed to transform aspirations into achievements; it is a dynamic savings solution that redefines the art of saving.

Designed to empower customers to achieve their financial goals, the Account seeks to elevate their savings journeys with flexible and hassle-free solutions. It is integrated with unique features and benefits to set new standards for discerning customers, who seek dependable and rewarding financial solutions.

The Account, available for all segments of customers, can be opened with a minimum amount of RO 10, for deposit frequencies fixed at the time of opening the account. This unique deposit product is designed for children starting from 6 months till 18 years.

As per the deposit structure, customers can commit as low as RO 10 every month to the account in order to earn higher returns rather than a regular account, with maximum amounts of RO 1,000, RO 250, RO 50 and RO 10, respectively. The deposit amount matures 30 days after payment of the last instalment or on due date, whichever is later.

Ghada al Raisi, Head of Capital Branches at BankDhofar stated, "Our Recurring Deposit Account exemplifies our commitment to enhancing our customers' financial well-being. We have incorporated unmatched flexibility into the Account by allowing customers to deposit a fixed amount of money every month on a regular basis."

Scratch & win prizes, attractive instalments & more with Toyota Oubess campaign

MUSCAT: Get closer to owning your favourite Toyota vehicle and stand a chance to scratch and win fuel cards from 50 litres up to 100 litres or cash vouchers from RO 100 up to RO 2000.

Apart from that customers can also avail attractive instalments and benefits that include service from 2 years/20,000 kms up to 5 years / 50,000 kms (whichever is earlier) and insurance 1 year.

(Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. EMI calculated are for base models with 20 per cent down payment for 10 years.

Loan approval is based on the sole discretion of banks. Terms & conditions apply. Customers can visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom for exact details.)

Toyota's range in Oman includes a mix of SUVs, sedans, MPVs and more.

The **Toyota Land Cruiser** is available with attractive instalments starting from RO 192. The Land Cruiser leads the pack with its powerful performance and inspiring capability. Powering the Land Cruiser is a choice of two powertrain options. The V6 twin-turbo 3.5-litre petrol engine achieves class-leading performance that surpasses that of a conventional V8, producing 409 hp and up to 650 nm.

This is paired to a 10-speed automatic transmission. Also available is a naturally aspirated 4.0-litre V6 petrol engine that produces 271 hp and up to 385 nm paired to a 6-speed automatic



Toyota's range in Oman includes a mix of SUVs, sedans, MPVs and more.

transmission.

The **Toyota Hilux** is available with attractive instalments starting from RO 83. The popular pick-up choice of many in Oman – the Toyota Hilux is available as rugged Hilux with J-Deck and the sporty 4.0 Litre V6 Hilux Adventure with the A Deck.

The 4.0 Litre V6 Toyota Hilux Adventure is a truly exciting mean machine that's been developed by Toyota to get your pulse racing.

The powerful Hilux Adventure is equipped with a mighty 4.0 Litre V6 Engine packing a mighty punch with 235 HP & 38.3 Kg-m Torque. It has an Auto Disconnect Differential to keep the tempo going. Similarly the Hilux 4X4 is equipped with a 2.7 Litre Petrol Engine that is available in 5-speed

Manual Transmission and 6 Speed Automatic Transmission, outputting 164 HP.

The **Toyota Urban Cruiser** is available with attractive instalments starting from RO 75. The Toyota Urban Cruiser is a five-seater vehicle which features a 1.5-litre gasoline engine and Integrated Starter Generator (ISG) that functions as both an electrified generator and motor. Combined with a compact Lithium-Ion battery, the powertrain delivers 102 hp and 135 Nm of torque, with an average fuel consumption of 19.8 km/l and is paired with six-speed automatic transmission.

The **Toyota Crown** is available with attractive instalments starting from RO 188. The all-new

Toyota Crown with its exceptional design, stunning technology and a host of features is becoming popular with enthusiasts here in Oman. The new Crown comes exclusively with a choice of two environmentally friendly powertrains.

The first hybrid electric powertrain consists of a front electric motor and Toyota's first-ever 2.4-litre inline four-cylinder turbo engine, paired with direct shift six-speed automatic transmission with a combined power of 340 HP and 40.7 Kg.m. torque.

The second hybrid electric powertrain consists of two electric motors and a 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol engine, generating a total power of 222 HP. The

hybrid-electric system, paired with an Electric Continuously Variable Transmission (e-CVT), achieves the lowest fuel efficiency, with a consumption rate of 21.6 km/l.

The **Toyota Camry** is available with attractive instalments starting from RO 96. The reliable partner for many customer – the Toyota Camry is available with a choice of three powertrain options. They include a 2.5-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine that produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg.m of torque which is paired with an eight-speed Direct-Shift Multi-mode automatic transmission.

A 3.5-litre V6 engine with D-4S fuel injection system that produces 298 hp and 36.3 kg.m of torque and which is mated to an eight-speed multi-mode automatic transmission. And an electrified hybrid system, which combines a petrol engine and two electric motors.

The combined power of the two power sources is 208 hp. It is also paired with an Electrically Controlled Continuously Variable Transmission (ECVT), delivering heightened driving pleasure.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade.

Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories. Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications.

OCCI to host seminar on funding SMEs in Oman

MUSCAT: The Arabian Women Media Services will hold a seminar on financing Omani small and medium enterprises, opportunities/ challenges, on October 16, 2023, at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

The seminar seeks to raise awareness of the importance of entrepreneurship in the Sultanate of Oman, especially among young people of both sexes.

Speakers from legislators and those responsible for financing small and medium enterprises in the government and the private sector will shed light on developments in this aspect, as well as how to overcome the difficulties facing small companies and the



Omani private sector in order to grow and increase their contribution to the national economy according to Oman Vision 2040.

Aziza al Habsi, Executive Director of the Arabian Women Media Services confirmed that the seminar topics will address working papers on government financing support for small and medium enterprises and its role in enhancing the added value to the economy.

The seminar will also discuss the importance of financial support for small and private enterprises in achieving sustainability and growth, in addition to the contribution of government financial support to the private sector in enhancing the GDP of Oman.



ahli islamic announces OQGN IPO subscription via mobile app

MUSCAT: In an industry-first move, ahli Islamic has announced a 1:1 profit-free financing (Al-Qardh Al-Hassan) option, accessible through its mobile banking app, for the historic OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) IPO in the Sultanate of Oman. Customers can use the mobile banking app to subscribe to the IPO at their convenience. ahli islamic will provide 1:1 profit-free financing (Al-Qardh Al-Hassan) option service digitally at competitive rates.

In addition, ahli Islamic has become the first Islamic financial institution in Oman to provide 1:1 profit-free financing (Al-Qardh Al-Hassan) through a user-friendly digital platform. Its unwavering commitment to innovation and customer convenience underscores this transformative offering.

Noora Sultan, AGM - Head of Retail Banking at ahli Islamic, said, "This prominent step is a milestone in ahli islamic's promising success journey. By offering 1:1 profit-free financing (Al-Qardh Al-Hassan) through our mobile banking app, we are making Islamic finance more accessible and convenient than ever before. Customers will be delighted by the ease of the subscription process, which exemplifies ahli islamic's dedication to making financial transactions hassle-free."

Shell Oman inaugurates new service stations

MUSCAT: Shell Oman Marketing Company (Shell Oman) is on a mission to make life journeys better for everyone by actively participating in serving the country's mobility needs.

In a significant step forward, Shell Oman has introduced two new service stations, raising the total number of its strategically located sites to 211 across the Sultanate of Oman.

Simultaneously, the company is celebrating the inauguration of its 50th Shell Select store, reinforcing its commitment to delivering top-notch services to its expanding customer base of motorists.

The newly opened service stations, new Maabela Industry and Ghala Industry, along with Shell Select shops, mark a pivotal moment in Shell Oman's mission to enhance convenience, fuel accessibility, and meet the needs of the society serving



Shell Oman's new service station in Maabela.

their mobility needs throughout the country.

Aligned with Shell Oman's broader mobility mission, and enabling superior journeys for its customers, the strategic placement of these new service stations is poised to meet the growing demand for fuel and automotive services.

With the addition of these sites, Shell Oman has successfully launched six new locations this year, underlining its dedication to providing accessible hubs for its customers. The service stations boast a wide array of fuel options, including the high-performance Shell V-Power, powered by Shell's cutting-edge Dynaflex

Technology.

This premium fuel offering from Shell is designed to provide motorists with its best performance and efficiency, complementing other fuel choices such as Shell mogas 95, Shell mogas 91, and Shell diesel.

Mahmoud al Abri – General Manager – Corporate Relations at Shell Oman, commented, "At Shell Oman, we believe that service stations are more than just a place to refuel; they are the catalyst for happy motorists.

You can be sure that at Shell, our commitment is to provide valued customers at our service stations with a seamless and unique experience, which includes quality fuels, a place to refresh and rejuvenate, and Select Stores filled with snacks and drinks. These strategically positioned stations are curated to meet the ever-evolving needs of our customers."



SQU forum to promote financial literacy among youth



Guests arrive at the SQU Financial Forum 2023.

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, OCT 3

A key forum designed to promote financial literacy among the Omani youth began at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Monday. The two-day event has been organised by the Economics and Finance Group and the Accounting Club at SQU. The Financial Forum, previously known as the Muscat Stock Market Forum, has consistently provided a platform for individuals to expand their understanding of economic and financial matters.

Its primary objective is to increase awareness within society about economic and financial concepts and keep participants updated on the latest global economic developments that can impact both the nation's economy and individuals.

As the lifeblood of society, money demands a deep understanding, making this event

a crucial gathering for financial and economic knowledge and expertise, said the organisers.

The Financial Forum 2023 has set forth clear objectives to achieve its mission by increasing financial awareness.

The forum aims to enhance financial and engage institutions by economic awareness among its target audience and encourage relevant institutions involved in the country's economic and financial aspects to participate and contribute to spreading financial literacy.

Spanning a total of four days, the first part of the forum took place during October 2 – 3, 2023, while the second part resumes on October 10-11, 2023.

Participants will have ample opportunities to engage with experts and expand their financial knowledge. The event will conclude with a grand closing evening, bringing together participants for networking and reflection.

Cleantech firm plans rollout of reverse vending machines in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 3

Having established a strong presence in key markets in the Gulf, global AI driven cleantech company Sparklo is planning to include the Sultanate of Oman in the next phase of its expanding footprint.

Well known for its distinctive, user-friendly reverse vending machines (RVM), known as 'Sparklomats', Sparklo says its plastic bottle and aluminium can recycling solution can be a "game-changer" for Oman's circular economy goals.

In remarks emailed to the *Observer*, Sparklo Founder and CEO Maxim Kaplevich, affirmed the company's intention to launch operations in the Sultanate of Oman. "Absolutely!" he said, adding: "While Sparklo is already active in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, our strategy revolves around expanding our presence across all GCC countries."

Oman holds a significant place in our near-future plans. After conducting market research, we are confident in the viability of the Sparklo model in Oman. Our mission is to collect all single-use plastic in the GCC region, and introducing Sparklomats, our recycling machines, in Oman can be a game-changer for the nation's environmental efforts."

At the heart of the Sparklo model is an expanding chain of Sparklomats – recycling machines typically installed in public areas that allow members of the public to deposit waste cans and plastic bottles in return for points that can be redeemed for gifts and bonuses.



Sparkloamat, a reverse vending machine, of the kind that Sparklo plans to roll out in large numbers in Oman.

"Our approach is about creating a positive perception of recycling and environmental efforts," said Kaplevich.

"We've introduced the Sparklo Rewards Club and an app that gamifies the collection process. Users can track their collections, compete with others, and redeem bonuses at popular vendors like Lulu, Spinneys, Carrefour, Namshi, Jazp, Otaxi, VOX, and many more."

The model has the potential to make a significant impact in helping Oman rein in plastic pollution, according to the cleantech entrepreneur. Plastic waste currently accounts for roughly half (by volume) of solid waste ending up in landfills in the country, he noted, citing research conducted by Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah).

"Therefore, launching

Sparklo in Oman is an integral part of our mission and aligns with Oman Vision 2040 goals. We believe our model can be a significant step towards addressing these environmental challenges. Our experience and success in markets like the UAE and Qatar demonstrate that Sparklo's approach is effective and adaptable," Kaplevich stressed.

Potentially thousands of Sparklomats are proposed to be installed across Oman – a move that will also open up business opportunities for established recyclers, logistics companies and other small businesses operating in the circular economy, according to the CEO.

"We collaborate with local logistics companies and various businesses. Since our model relies on motivation, we work with local establishments like restaurants, shops, and beauty salons. Our

partnerships revolve around shared interests—motivating people to collect bottles and attracting new customers. People can use their bonuses for purchases at these places.

Sparklo is enthusiastic about collaborating with Omani SMEs to deploy our RVMs and motivate local communities" Kaplevich said.

"We excel at what we do: combining advanced technology with strong B2C relationships to motivate people to collect and deposit packaging. We then work with expert local partners to ensure proper recycling."

We are open to establishing new partnerships within the country, both with the government and local recycling companies. Our plan involves installing thousands of Sparklomats across Oman to collect all plastic bottles and cans in the country," Kaplevich added.

Oil edges lower on strong US dollar

LONDON: Oil prices dipped on Tuesday, after falling to a three-week low in the previous session, on a stronger US dollar, a darkening global macroeconomic outlook and mixed supply signals.

Brent futures crept 56 cents lower to \$90.29 a barrel by 1212 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude (WTI), fell 42 cents to \$88.48 per barrel. Earlier in the session, prices fell by more than 1 per cent.

"(Brent) crude oil prices slid to (around) \$90 a barrel as rising US yields and a stronger



An attendant pumps fuel into a customer's car at a gas station in Shanghai, China. – Reuters

US dollar dominated market sentiment," said ANZ analysts.

"While supply remains tight, higher interest rates means expensive storage of inventories. This could lead

to further destocking of oil inventories while increasing spot availability."

The US dollar on Monday rose to a 10-month high against a basket of major peers after the US government avoided a partial shutdown and economic data fuelled expectations the Federal Reserve will keep rates higher for longer, or even hike them again.

Higher interest rates and a stronger dollar make oil more expensive for holders of other currencies, which could dampen oil demand. — Reuters

Oman crude benchmark surges to 11-month high

FROM PAGE 13

The reliability of these oil sources and their proximity to major consumers in Asia continue to make them a preferred choice for buyers.

Abu Dhabi's Murban, Platts Dubai and Oman crude oil benchmarks are primary pricing references for crude oil delivered from the Middle East Gulf, Russia, Mexico and other parts of the world to refiners.

On the other hand, the spread between Brent and Dubai surged to \$3.10 a barrel, a stark increase from the September average of \$1.7 a barrel.

This significant expansion in the Brent-Dubai spread indicates

that crude cargoes from more distant regions are becoming less economical for Asian buyers.

This situation favours Middle East crude, specifically Oman, which is geographically closer to the Asian markets and thus offers lower transportation costs.

A significant factor contributing to the optimism in the Middle East oil market is the expectation that Opec+ is unlikely to make significant changes to its oil output policy during an upcoming panel meeting. Opec+ is a coalition of oil-producing countries that includes the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and

non-Opec members like Russia.

Together, they have played a crucial role in stabilising global oil prices through production adjustments. The anticipation that Opec+ will maintain its current output levels reflects a consensus among member nations that stability in oil prices benefits both producers and consumers.

With the global economy still in the process of recovering from the pandemic-induced downturn, many nations are wary of sudden fluctuations in energy prices.

Therefore, any decision by Opec+ to keep production steady is seen as a positive signal for market stability.

GCC smart investor award offers over RO 100,000 in prizes

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, OCT 3

The much awaited 2nd edition of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Smart Investor Award, presented by the GCC Investment Awareness Programme, Mulim, is back in action.

Notably, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) takes a prominent place in the list of financial institutions authorised to conduct securities activities within GCC countries. This comprehensive list is designed to enhance transparency and

accessibility to crucial information regarding entities operating in the capital and insurance sectors.

This year, the stakes are higher than ever, with prize amounts exceeding RO 100,000—more than four times the previous edition's rewards. What's more, the award has expanded to include four distinct categories: videography, drawing, photography, and writing.

Writing joins the previously approved three categories. This competition is open to individuals, higher education students, and school students.



Notably, the number of winners has surged to 36 in this edition, a significant increase compared to the previous nine winners. The primary goal of this award

is to ignite the creative spark among citizens and residents of GCC countries, encouraging them to generate content that promotes awareness and presents

innovative ideas related to saving and investment.

By doing so, it aims to boost financial literacy, empower individuals to plan for their financial futures, and facilitate informed financial decision-making for long-term stability.

The award's oversight will be handled by a committee comprising experienced GCC members who will evaluate the submissions. In its inaugural edition launched in March 2022, the award featured three categories: videography, drawing, and photography, leading to

nine winners from across the GCC, with total prizes exceeding RO 28,000. The Investment Awareness Programme (Mulim) was initiated under the auspices of the Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council in collaboration with GCC capital market regulators.

This programme is committed to enhancing awareness of financial transactions and investments in capital markets through a range of educational initiatives and campaigns. For further details, check out www. MulimGCC.org.

Banks plan graduate cuts with huge rise in applicants

Major investment banks are set to cut entry-level recruitment next year as high-profile job cuts have hit the sector, yet dealmaking roles at top institutions attracted more than 600,000 graduate applications.

Top investment banks plan to reduce graduate recruitment numbers by 10 per cent in 2024, according to research firm High Fliers, despite many firms increasing entry-level hiring in 2023 amid a deal drought that has seen thousands of job cuts.

Investment banking graduate jobs are notoriously hard-fought for, with top European and Wall Street firms hiring a small fraction among the huge numbers that vie for roles offering starting salaries of £70,000 in London.



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The author is our correspondent based in the UK

JP Morgan received 198,584 applications for its graduate programme globally this year, which is an increase of 30 per cent. This was for 5,469 positions, or a success rate of less than 3 per cent. Within its investment bank, it had 11,871 graduates competing for 298 full-time positions.

The top US investment bank hired 98 graduates for its investment banking team in Europe, Middle East and Africa (Emea) last year, which was an increase of 4 per cent on the previous year, and received 7,013 applications — up by 32 per cent. It also filled entry-level roles through summer internship conversions.

Morgan Stanley’s summer internship applications in Emea edged up 3 per cent to 42,412 this year for 900 roles, which was an increase from 816 in 2022. However, it hired 309 full-time graduates in the region in 2023, down from 326 a year earlier. The US bank took on 333 summer analysts and associates this year.

Citigroup got more than 60,000 applications for around 950 intern and full-time recruits across its businesses in Emea, while Bank of America saw 300,000 graduates compete for 2,600 roles globally this year. At Goldman, 2,900 interns joined globally, 360 of which were in Emea.

Deutsche Bank hired 1,137 graduates this year, up from about 900 last year, while HSBC took on 230 students in its global banking and market units.

Investment banks have rolled out their deepest job cuts since the 2008 financial crisis after a deal drought forced fees down 26 per cent this year following a difficult 2022.

Goldman Sachs cut 3,200 jobs in January and followed

them with another 125 managing director redundancies in June. Morgan Stanley and Citigroup have also made deep cuts that have hit their dealmaking teams.

Meanwhile, junior jobs in particular have come under more scrutiny.

Analysts and associates at investment banks work long hours often in relative mundane tasks such as updating power point presentations for clients and pulling numbers for deals.

A leaked document by a group of Goldman Sachs analysts in 2021 outlining brutal 100-hour weeks amid an unprecedented deal boom had a snowball effect.

Analysts rebelled against working conditions, quit in droves and banks hiked salaries by 30-40 per cent in the space of a year to stem the exodus. However, this year juniors have been included in some round of job cuts.

Logun Naidu, Chief executive of recruiters Dartmouth Partners which works on graduate roles, said that investment banking applications have “declined modestly” in recent years as top students pursue roles in technology and private equity.

“It is still hugely competitive and my feeling is that this year it will get more competitive as technology and private equity firms have also pulled back hiring,” he said.

“Any industry paying such high salaries inevitably attracts a lot of top graduates.”

While entry-level roles remain intensely competitive, Naidu said that students often do not view investment banking as a long-term career. “Some go in with a view to a steep two-to three-year learning curve before moving on,” he said. “No doubt long-term banking has lost some of its lustre.”

Why unions are good for America

As the United Automobile Workers strike continues, we’re likely to hear grumbling about labour unions.

“They killed the auto industry once, and now they’re trying to do it again,” some will say. Or “They’re corrupt.” Or “They’re Luddites resisting modernisation.”

Sure, there’s something to criticisms of unions. Yet the critiques miss a fundamental point: Labour unions are also a powerful force for equality, elevating underpaid workers who otherwise are often treated as doormats.

The central reality is that as unions declined over the past half-century, workers were stifled. They were paid poorly, they lost health care and retirement benefits, and they lost control over their schedules.

They were robbed of dignity and sometimes of wages as well. Deaths of despair from drugs, alcohol and suicide surged among blue-collar workers.



NICHOLAS KRISTOF

The author, a New York Times Opinion columnist, writes about human rights, women’s rights, health and global affairs.



A demonstrator holds up a sign at a rally in support of a union for Amazon workers in Bessemer, Alabama. – AFP

Anne Case and Angus Deaton, the Princeton University economists who pioneered the study of deaths of despair, said that one factor in the rise of such deaths has been the decline of unions and the related loss of good working-class jobs.

Like many educated professionals, I used to regard labour unions warily. They insisted on rigid work rules, impeded technological modernisation, suffered corruption scandals (which have dogged the UAW) and sometimes engaged in racial and gender discrimination.

They periodically manipulated overtime hours and leveraged the threat of disruption to rake in staggering sums.

In 2019, two Oakland, California, police officers “earned” more than \$600,000 in pay and benefits, through absurd amounts of overtime; meanwhile, full-time dockworkers on the West Coast reportedly earn more, on average, than many lawyers or dentists in America, and dock foremen average more pay than physicians.

Yet executive pay seems even more scandalous, and I shed my

A MAJOR STUDY BY ACADEMIC ECONOMISTS FOUND THAT UNION HOUSEHOLDS EARN 10% TO 20% MORE THAN NONUNION HOUSEHOLDS, CONTROLLING FOR OTHER FACTORS, AND RESEARCHERS HAVE FOUND THAT HIGHER WAGES FOR UNION MEMBERS SPILL OVER AND LIFT EARNINGS FOR NONUNION MEMBERS.

disdain for unions as I reported on the crisis in America’s working class over the past 15 years.

Having lost too many working-class friends to substance use and related pathologies and having witnessed the consequent crumbling of families and communities, I’ve come to believe that unions are good not only for individual workers but also for America itself.

Some of the UAW’s non-wage-related demands seem to me unrealistic, and the overall package might double labour costs for companies that already pay significantly more than their competitors; then again, it’s not obvious to me why the Big Three’s CEOs merit pay packages of more than \$20 million each, while some of their autoworkers earn just \$16 or \$17 an hour, although in fairness, Ford says that, including benefits, the average compensation for union-represented workers is \$112,000 a year.

(Anyone who thinks that executive pay is invariably calculated through an arm’s-length negotiation doesn’t understand board behaviour. As economist John Kenneth Galbraith observed, the paycheck “is frequently in the nature of a warm personal gesture by the individual to himself.”)

The golden age for unions in America was the period from 1945 to 1970, and there were indeed abuses and disruptive strikes then.

But that was also a magical period in American economic history, in which the economic pie grew rapidly and was also divided more fairly.

Shareholders benefited, but so did workers, including African Americans at the bottom of the economic ladder.

In 1970, unions still represented 29% of private-sector workers. Now they represent just 6%. Over the decades, blue-collar workers lost a path to the middle class, and pay gaps for Black men yawned as great as ever.

So I’ve come to think of it this way: Unions are as imperfect as capitalism itself, and just as essential.

A major study by academic economists found that union households earn 10% to 20% more than nonunion households, controlling for other factors, and researchers have found that higher wages for union members spill over and lift earnings for nonunion members.

Those scholars found that about 10% of the increase in American inequality since 1968 was a result of falling union membership.

Another study found that lifetime membership in a union resulted in an additional \$1.3 million in income over the decades compared with the income of someone in the same industry who was not a union member.

While unions unchecked sometimes behave badly, consider what corporations do unchecked.

Millions of Americans are addicted to opioids in this country because pharmaceutical companies found it profitable to get people hooked.

We need checks and balances to rein in overreach by both sides — and unions are part of that system of watchdogs.

Yet in recent decades, laws have impeded unions, and a lame National Labour Relations Board essentially allowed union busting because penalties were so pathetic. (That appears to be changing under President Joe Biden.)

Unions have also been powerful advocates of policies like early childhood education, child care, a higher minimum wage and a refundable child tax credit to take on the scandal of child poverty in the US

So it’s reasonable to worry about the autoworker strike and the impact it might have on today’s economy. It’s fair to wonder if the UAW is overreaching, particularly in its non-wage demands.

Then again, it’s also reasonable to worry about what happens when non-unionised blue-collar workers are squeezed and crushed, year after year, decade after decade, and what that does to their children, to their country, to our future.

— The New York Times

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FOOD

This photograph taken shows a hand holding a shrimp on an aquaculture farm, in Idrac-Respailles, southwestern France. — AFP



FILM

US filmmaker Darren Aronofsky arrives for the opening night of Sphere ahead of Irish rock band U2's show at The Venetian Resort in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP



FASHION

Crown Princess Mary of Denmark arrives at the opening of the Danish Parliament at Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen. — AFP



MUSIC

US singer-songwriter Ethel Cain performs onstage during the All Things Go music festival at Merriweather Post Pavilion in Columbia, Maryland. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

Fishermen are seen in the Lago do Piranha Sustainable Development Reserve in Manacapuru, Amazonas State, northern Brazil. — AFP

art & life

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A cyclist who is on a four-year world journey



BY MOHAMMED ALSHABIBI

Meet Mateuz Syrik, an adventurous cyclist on an extraordinary four-year journey worldwide. Like many avid travellers, Mateuz is driven by an insatiable curiosity and a thirst for exploration, undeterred by the inevitable challenges that globetrotters encounter. His unique quest involves traversing four continents—Asia, Africa, North America, and South America in four years. Mateuz's inspiring journey came into the spotlight when he crossed paths with an intriguing signboard in Salalah in the Sultanate of Oman that read "4 years on a bike."

Before embarking on this epic adventure, Mateuz spent five years working as a graphic designer for Thomas Cook, the world's foremost travel company, in the bustling city of London. During his time there, he created captivating advertisements for their magazines and videos for their chain of stores. However, his true aspiration was to create images of far-off destinations and experience them firsthand.

He chose to leave behind the security of a steady income and the consumer-driven lifestyle, questioning the need to accumulate possessions endlessly. He reflects on the societal pressure to believe that happiness is contingent on material wealth and possessions, asserting that he did not want to spend his life pursuing this elusive mirage.

Mateuz, 46, has already completed an impressive leg of his journey, spanning countries like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Iran, Pakistan, India, Myanmar, Thailand, and many more. He covers approximately 100 kilometres daily, immersing himself in an exhilarating mix of experiences, challenges, and risks that bring him closer to understanding the world's intricate tapestry.

His motivation, like that of many travellers, is rooted in a deep desire to embrace new traditions, languages, and customs and savour the cultural diversity that our world offers. Oman, with its welcoming atmosphere and reputation as the third safest country globally, according to rankings, has become a cherished destination



on his journey. Here, he delights in observing locals adorned in pristine white attire, often extending invitations for dates and coffee. Oman's multi-

cultural fabric, with people from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, fosters a sense of unity and cooperation, reinforcing Mateuz's belief in the

possibility of peaceful coexistence.

Travelling by bicycle provides the unique opportunity to stay intimately connected with the natural world, allowing cyclists to revel in the beauty of landscapes, feel the gentle caress of the wind, basking in the warmth of the sun, and tune in to the symphony of nature's sounds. It also keeps him in excellent physical shape, thanks to daily exercise. The limitation on personal belongings encourages a minimalist lifestyle, reflecting the simplicity that comes with this mode of travel.

Mateuz emphasises the liberating aspect of cycling, where he can set his own pace, follow his chosen route, and free himself from the constraints of timetables and public transportation. This independence allows him to explore places that would be challenging to reach by other means, including remote villages, hidden paths, and secluded locales.

While many cyclists embark on journeys of varying lengths, Mateuz's commitment to the road extends beyond Oman. His ambitious itinerary includes Saudi Arabia, Egypt,

Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, and a host of other countries, culminating in a remarkable tour of the Americas from Chile to Canada.

Of course, such a long-distance cycling adventure is not without its challenges, especially after sunset. As a budget traveller, Mateuz often opts not to spend money on accommodations, leading him to exercise creativity in finding places to rest. From police stations to the occasional police prison cell, he adapts to his surroundings to ensure safety and comfort. Temples, churches, and mosques are among his preferred spots to set up his tent, as these sacred places typically command respect from the local community. More often than not, he is welcomed into private homes, a testament to the hospitality that extends across borders.

Mateuz's journey is a testament to the human spirit's boundless capacity for exploration and adventure. His quest to see the world and experience its diversity firsthand serves as an inspiration to all who dream of embarking on a life-changing journey of their own.



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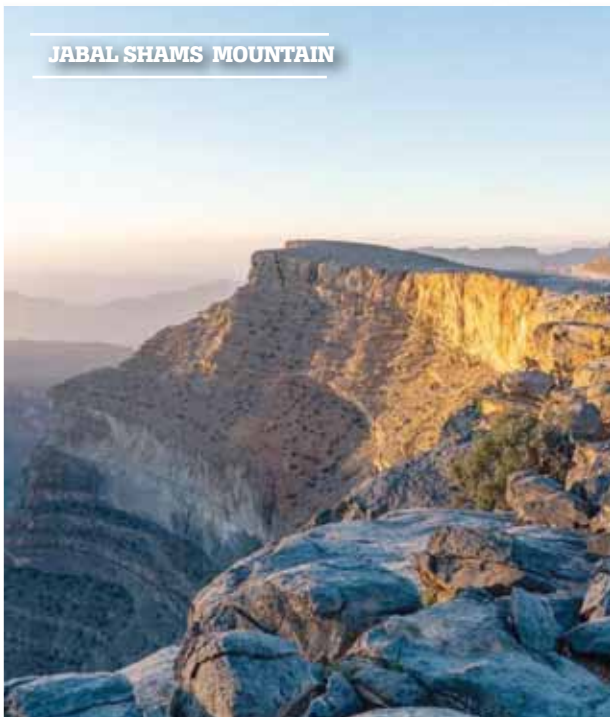


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A spectacular show of automotive heritage

KABEER YUSUF

PREPARE TO STEP back in time as the Geneva International Motor Show (GIMS) Qatar, commencing on October 5 and running through to October 14, invites spectators to relive the glory days of classic cars from around the world. Oman plays an active role in this thrilling showcase of history on wheels, with an impressive lineup of vintage automobiles set to grace the event.

From opulent Amiri cars to the iconic Popemobile, the Classics Gallery at the upcoming Geneva International Motor Show in Qatar promises an expertly curated exhibition of historically significant heritage cars. This captivating exhibit, housed within the expansive halls of the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center (DECC), is a must-see for discerning classic car buyers, collectors, and automotive enthusiasts alike.

Visitors can expect a glimpse of some of the most exotic and exceptional historic automobiles, including Best of Show winners from prestigious concours d'elegance events both regionally and globally. Moreover, the exhibition will shine a spotlight on automobiles boasting Qatari provenance and pedigree, welcoming visitors from across the globe starting from October 7.

"The GIMS Qatar aims to cater to every automobile lover with an impressive display of iconic classic cars that will captivate their senses," remarked Sheikha Hessa al Thani, Head of Marketing and Planning at Qatar Tourism. "The Classics Gallery, in particular, is set to be a highlight of this year's Geneva International Motor Show Qatar, paying tribute to the pioneering spirit embodied by this inaugural event in Qatar. We extend a warm invitation to residents and visitors to explore the extensive displays and

groundbreaking reveals that will unfold during this influential motor show."

Sandro Mesquita, CEO of Geneva International Motor Show, echoed the sentiment, inviting all to explore the 10-day 'Ultimate Festival of Automotive Excellence.' The event promis-



es global debuts, new model launches by renowned manufacturers, circuit driving experiences, thrilling off-roading adven-

tures in the desert, engaging talks, and much more. "At GIMS Qatar 2023, you will get a glimpse of the future of the automotive industry while exploring its present and reflecting on its past as you traverse through the different halls of the DECC. The Classics Gallery is a spectacle in its own right, showcasing outstanding historic cars of global repute."

Speaking to the media, Mohammed Luqman Ali Khan, Curatorial Director and Author of the official event book, revealed what visitors can expect at the Classics Gallery. "On display will be automotive treasures from world-renowned car collec-

tions, spanning an eclectic mix of extraordinary prewar and post-war vehicles, including Best of Show award winners, fabled maharaja cars, official state motorcars, iconic roadsters, a grand prix winner, and even a Popemobile. The 'star car of the show' is Qatar's very own Rolls-Royce Phantom V, delivered new to the then Emir of Qatar Sheikh Ahmad bin Ali al Thani, after being showcased at the 1962 Geneva International Motor Show. Phantom Chassis 5LCG25 stands as a testament to the connoisseurship of Qataris, representing the enduring relations between Qatar and the Geneva Motor Show. This spectacular exhibition of vintage and classic cars is a precursor to the 'GIMS Qatar Concours d'Elegance' planned for the future."

Spanning over 10,000 square meters at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center (DECC),

the exhibition will host 30 renowned automotive brands, including Toyota, Lexus, Porsche, Volkswagen, Lamborghini, KIA, Audi, McLaren, Mercedes-Benz, Vinfast, Chery, and many more. GIMS Qatar is set to showcase the latest innovations from the industry, with over 10 world premieres and 20 regional premieres.

Beyond the main exhibition, GIMS Qatar 2023 will create the ultimate automotive festival of excellence in Qatar, offering four immersive experiences at some of the country's most prominent tourism destinations. These experiences include the "Future Design Forum" at the National Museum of Qatar, thrilling off-road adventures at Sealine, exhilarating ride-and-drive experiences at the Lusail International Circuit, and a grand parade of automotive excellence along the iconic Lusail Boulevard.

NATURE

Countries pledge to raise \$12 billion to help coral

A COALITION OF 45 COUNTRIES pledged on Tuesday to raise \$12 billion for conservation and restoration of coral reefs, which are threatened worldwide by the effects of climate change.

The "Coral Reef Breakthrough" was announced by a network of nations that account for three-quarters of the world's coral reefs. It includes a pledge to double

the area of coral reefs under protection from the current estimate of around 60,000 square kilometres, and restore some 10,500 sq km.

The plan, announced by the International Coral Reef Initiative, includes a headline pledge to secure \$12 billion in investments from public and private sources by 2030.

"This investment will enable more effective coral



A pledge to double the area of coral reefs under protection.

reef management including water quality management, coastal management,

and local and regional regulations," the group announced.

Still, that figure compares with the estimated \$174.5 billion a year that a 2020 study estimated was needed to plug the gap in funding for ocean conservation more broadly.

The pledge comes with coral reefs around the world under particularly acute stress because of record warm seas this year. Marine heatwaves — episodes of abnormally high water temperatures — have become more frequent and intense. Oceans have absorbed 90 per cent of the excess heat produced by human activity since the dawn of the industrial age, according to scientists.

This excess heat continues to accumulate as

greenhouse gases build up in the Earth's atmosphere, mainly from burning oil, gas and coal. Warmer water can cause stressed corals to expel the algae that lives in symbiosis with them, providing them with nutrients and giving them colour.

This bleaching process can result in coral death if temperatures remain too high for the algae to return, devastating the ecosystems that rely on reefs.

Mass bleaching has already been reported this year in Florida, with concern that the worst may be ahead as the El Nino seasonal weather pattern is often associated with bleaching events. — AFP



VIDEO GAMES

Ubisoft banks on a reset with latest ‘Assassin’s Creed’



AFTER YEARS OF turbulence that saw several top executives out the door, Ubisoft is betting aggressively on “Assassin’s Creed Mirage” to level up profits for the French publisher, with a steadier line-up of new releases.

The latest entry in the wildly popular “Assassin” franchise is released on Thursday, to be followed in December by a game based on the hit “Avatar” films — which was originally scheduled to hit shelves a year ago.

Attesting to its optimism, Ubisoft expects strong revenue growth this year after a string of lacklustre results.

“For the past four or five years, the company has disappointed enormously because it has postponed a lot of its new games,” said Charles-Louis Planade, an industry analyst at Midcap Partners.

But he now expects regular releases from a catalogue that includes top sellers like “Rabbids” and “Just Dance”.

These new games “are clearly going to improve the company’s financial health,

and get back to being the Ubisoft we knew a few years ago”, Planade said.

Taking no chances, the group is launching “Mirage”, set in ninth-century Baghdad, at 50 euros (\$53) instead of the 70 euros often set for new titles.

HIGH HOPES

A successful launch would be a welcome end to a year that began with a rare strike in the video game sector, with two Ubisoft unions protesting management practices, leading to the firing or exits of executives including its creative director.

CEO Yves Guillemot filled in temporarily until insider Igor Monceau was tapped for the job in September 2021, but recovering from the disruptions would take months, including a revamp of its human resources department.

Development of the long-awaited “Skull and Bones” is a case in point: originally expected for 2018, it has yet to see the light of day.

But 2023 has seen a series of developments in Ubisoft’s favour.

In August it signed a deal

with Activision Blizzard, the target of a takeover bid by Microsoft, that would give it the cloud gaming rights for Activision games for the next 15 years.

With cloud gaming, players can stream a title from platforms like Netflix, without having to buy a traditional console and game cartridge.

The deal is expected to get approval from UK competition authorities soon, and would give Ubisoft cloud rights to a catalogue including the wildly successful “Call of Duty” and “Candy Crush” games.

“We strongly believe in the next five to 10 years, many games will be streamed and will also be produced in the cloud,” Guillemot told The Financial Times in September. “That’s what pushed us to go forward with the deal.”

The cloud market is still embryonic but could be valued at over \$8 billion in 2025, industry consultancy Newzoo predicts — compared with a global video game market worth around \$300 billion, according to Accenture.

“If cloud streaming is a success, our initial simulations highlight significant potential for a contribution to the group’s earnings,” said Emmanuel Matot, an analyst at Oddo in Paris.

Ubisoft is also betting heavily on virtual reality ahead of next year’s expected release of Apple’s Vision Pro headset.

“Apple’s commitment and investment will take that industry to a new level,” Guillemot said in June, and Ubisoft “for sure” envisions developing games for the Vision Pro.

The cleared horizon has helped Ubisoft stock climb around 13 per cent since the start of the year, despite a profit warning in January that sent shares tumbling to levels not seen since 2016.

Despite a market value of nearly four billion euros, it remains one of the smaller publishers as mergers and takeovers swirl, but for the moment the Guillemot family appears well in control, after sealing an alliance with Chinese giant Tencent that gives it a 10 per cent Ubisoft stake. — **AFP**



C-3PO’s head, ‘Titanic’ costumes for sale at Propstore film auction

FROM “STAR WARS” droid C-3PO’s head to Leonardo DiCaprio’s “Titanic” costume, a trove of costumes and props are headed to auction next month in a sale of film and television memorabilia worth around \$14.6 million.

More than 1,800 items are being sold by entertainment memorabilia auctioneer Propstore at its annual live auction, which this year runs from Nov. 9-12.

Leading the sale, which Propstore estimates will fetch more than 12 million pounds (£4.6 million), is the light-up head actor Anthony Daniels wore to play C-3PO in “Star Wars: A New Hope”, with an estimate of 500,000 - 1 million pounds (\$600,000- \$1.2 million).

Daniels is also selling other “Star Wars” memorabilia.

“We have his complete archive from his time of working on the ‘Star Wars’ films so that includes some of the props and body components and parts, his head, his hands, his feet,” Propstore founder and Chief Executive Stephen Lane said.

“We have his original scripts with the annotations in there as well.”

Costumes for sale include a shirt, waistcoat and trousers DiCaprio wore in “Titanic” (100,000-200,000 pounds), Honey Ryder’s bathrobe as worn by Ursula Andress in “Dr. No” (70,000-140,000 pounds) and Johnny Depp’s stunt costume from “Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides” (50,000-100,000 pounds).

Props include Harrison Ford’s bull whip from “Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom” (100,000-200,000 pounds), “Nightmare on Elm Street” character Freddy Krueger’s hero



metal glove armature and hand-drawn schematic (200,000-400,000 pounds) and Tom Hanks’ sneakers from “Forrest Gump” (15,000-30,000 pounds).

Other lots include Stanley Kubrick’s hand-annotated shooting script for “The Shining” (30,000-60,000 pounds) and a coat worn by Marlon Brando in “The Godfather” (25,000-50,000 pounds).

Lane said the lots came from collectors, curators, archives, film studios and production companies.

“The demand is growing and we’re seeing things travel all over the world...and they’re bought by passionate fans and lovers of the movies, collectors,” he said. “But some of these items also end up in museums and studio archives as well.” — **Reuters**

