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FRAMEWORK FOR GCC-EU FREE TRADE PACT DISCUSSED: GCC SECRETARY GENERAL



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'AL MINOR' TAKES OMAN TO KENYA INTERNATIONAL SPORTS FILM FESTIVAL



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AFGHANISTAN DEFEAT ENGLAND IN SEISMIC WORLD CUP SHOCK



2,670 Palestinians killed, 9,600 hurt in Israeli attacks



People carry children as they flee, following an Israeli strike on Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP

SAYYID BADR DISCUSSES GAZA WITH SYRIAN AND EGYPTIAN MINISTERS

MUSCAT/GAZA: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and the minister of foreign affairs and expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic reviewed the ongoing events in the Palestinian territories (Gaza Strip) over a phone call on Sunday. They discussed the regional and international efforts to contain escalation, stressing the importance of ending the Israeli atrocities and restoring to peace based on international justice and legitimacy. Sayyid Badr also received a phone call from Samih Shukri, Foreign Minister of the Arab

Republic of Egypt, on Sunday. During the phone call, the two sides discussed the ongoing escalation in Gaza and the rest of the Palestinian territories as well as the efforts being made to contain the situation, strongly stressing the importance of immediately ending the Israeli military operations in Gaza and opening humanitarian corridors to ensure the delivery of relief and aid materials to the inhabitants and the injured by the Israeli bombardment. Meanwhile, the health ministry in Gaza said at least 2,670 Palestinians have been killed and 9,600 wounded since Israel

launched its attack on the Gaza Strip on the ninth day of conflict. More than one million people have been displaced in the Gaza Strip in the last week, the UN said on Sunday, after sustained Israeli bombardment and warnings about a ground attack. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has in recent days toured Middle Eastern capitals in a frantic round of diplomacy to try to avert a wider crisis in the volatile region. He is due back in Israel on Monday for further talks with Israeli leaders, the State Department said as he arrived in Cairo.

SEE ALSO P6&7

Duqm forum begins today

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will preside over the opening of the first Duqm Economic Forum on Monday at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD). The forum aims to highlight the economic environment in the Sultanate of Oman in general and available investment opportunities in SEZAD in particular. The two-day event reviews new trends in the green industries and renewable energy sector, as well as the most key projects attracted by SEZAD, as it is an industrial and investment centre and a gateway to international trade. The event also highlights the pivotal role of the economic zone in supporting the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040 and achieving the goals of zero carbon neutrality in the Sultanate of Oman by 2050. The first edition of the forum will focus on the role of the economic zone in the transition to the uses of renewable energy and technology for production and export.

Oman investing \$30 bn in hydrogen economy

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is investing more than \$30 billion in the hydrogen economy, with the prime aim to be one of the largest producers in the world by 2030. Oman is also at the forefront of countries in using clean energy to produce electricity as it has solar and wind power plants. Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auqi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, said that the Sultanate of Oman is exerting unremitting efforts to achieve zero neutrality by 2050 through a national plan. This plan, said the minister, is based on the importance of accelerated growth of clean energy and pushing green projects and green hydrogen. He added that the energy sector plays a pivotal role in reducing carbon emissions and cutting down the risks of climate change by increasing the use of renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind energy, which will significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions and improve energy efficiency.



He further noted that improving buildings and vehicles efficiency will decrease the need for energy consumption, thus reducing fuel consumption and associated emissions. This, the minister said, will help in the gradual transition to green mobility by promoting the use of green transportation, such as electric cars. Eng Al Auqi added that investing in green hydrogen production projects is one of the important pillars towards achieving zero-carbon neutrality. — ONA

Low pressure brewing in Arabian Sea

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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The latest weather maps and numerical forecasts from the Oman Met Office indicate the formation of a low-pressure system in the southeastern region of the Arabian Sea during the later part of this week. Specialists at the National Centre for Early Warning of Multiple Hazards are monitoring the chances of a tropical condition forming in the Arabian Sea at the end of this week. They have requested the citizens and residents to follow the weather bulletins. The maximum temperatures recorded at various stations in Oman have come down to mid-thirties (in Celsius). Meanwhile, on Monday, the weather

will continue to be hazy along the coasts of the Sea of Oman. At the same time, mainly clear skies are expected over most of the governorates with chances of cloud formation and isolated rain, occasionally thundershowers over the Al Hajar Mountains towards the afternoon. It could be associated with downdraft. There are also chances of low clouds or fog patches at late night to early morning along parts of the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea. Along the Sea of Oman coasts, winds are reported to be easterly to northeasterly, light to moderate at day time, becoming variable light at night. At the same time, over the rest of the governorates, it will be southerly to southeasterly light to moderate, occasionally fresh along Al Sharqiyah South coasts.



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Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman, State Council, took part in the 9th G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit in New Delhi.

State Council takes part in G20 parliamentary summit in India

NEW DELHI: Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council and his accompanying delegation on Sunday concluded the Sultanate of Oman's participation in the 9th G20 Parliamentary Speakers' Summit (P20) held in the Indian capital New Delhi.

During his participation at the summit, the Chairman of the State Council and his accompanying delegation met with the vice-president and

chairman of the Council of States of India, the speaker of the Federal National Council (FNC) of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the speaker of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation.

The Chairman of the State Council delivered a speech during which he thanked the friendly Republic of India for inviting the Sultanate of Oman to participate in the G20 meetings. — ONA



OMAN OBSERVES WORLD FOOD DAY

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

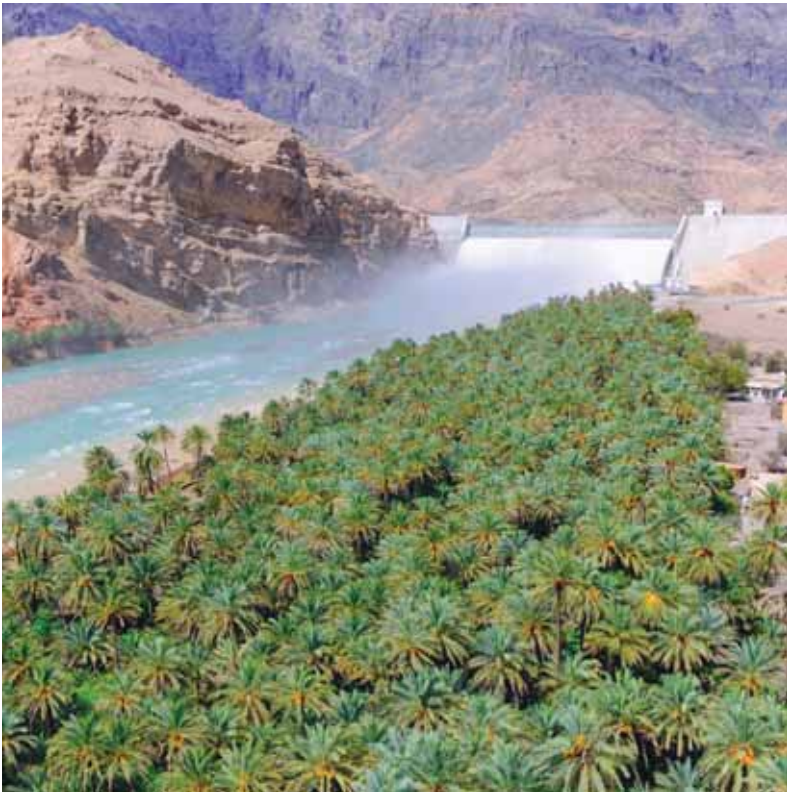
On World Food Day, the Sultanate of Oman joined the global community. It recognised the day as a reminder to highlight the critical importance of food and agriculture. World Food Day, observed on October 16, acknowledges global interconnectedness with the planet's resources.

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR), is observing the day under this year's theme of 'Water is Life, Water is Food.'

The theme resonates with the pressing challenges of rapid population growth, urbanisation, economic development, and the looming spectre of climate change. Precious water resources are facing increasing stress, with a per-person decline in freshwater availability by 20 per cent worldwide over recent decades.

In response to these challenges, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is engaged in a multifaceted approach to enhance water availability within Oman's borders. This includes the construction of various types of dams, a groundbreaking artificial rain-seeding project, and the rehabilitation and maintenance of Aflaj, the traditional Omani irrigation system. A comprehensive water resource monitoring system and modern irrigation techniques are also being employed, all following an integrated water resources management methodology.

Oman holds a remarkable legacy of over two millennia, marked by the ingenuity of its people in irrigation engineering.



This year, the Sultanate of Oman is observing World Food Day under the theme 'Water is Life, Water is Food.'

The country is the proud inventor of the Aflaj system, a unique irrigation method with a few parallels around the world. Aflaj plays a central role in preserving the social fabric of Omani villages and is interwoven with the nation's history.

In Oman, there are 4,112 Aflaj, collectively supplying approximately 409 million cubic metres of water annually, irrigating around 4,164 hectares of agricultural land. Among these, the primary types of Aflaj include Al Fayliyya aflaj, Al-Miniya aflaj, and Dawoodiyya aflaj (Mediya).

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has achieved remarkable milestones in water resource monitoring. Staying abreast of scientific progress and harnessing modern technologies, the ministry uses the global telephone network (GPRS) for efficient data transmission and

information dissemination.

It is alarming that today, 2.4 billion people reside in water-stressed countries, with smallholder farmers struggling to meet their daily needs. Approximately 600 million individuals partially rely on aquatic diets for their livelihoods, emphasising the urgent need to address issues like pollution, ecosystem degradation, unsustainable practices, and the far-reaching impacts of climate change.

World Food Day and the World Food Forum in 2023 share a common goal: To catalyse global action towards water conservation, climate resilience, sustainable agriculture, and food systems. World Food Day, an annual event commemorating the founding of the Food and Agriculture Organisation, serves as a global rallying point for transforming agricultural and food systems.

Oman participates in annual Arab Finance Ministers meeting in Morocco

MARRAKESH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, participated on Sunday in the annual meeting of the Arab Ministers of Finance, on the sidelines of the joint meetings of the World Bank group and the International Monetary Fund, being held in Marrakesh, the Kingdom of Morocco.

The meeting discussed the most important financial and economic issues of concern to the Arab countries and the applicable financial reform efforts, the development prospects in the Arab world, experiences and expertise at the level of public financial policies in member states, in addition to ways to coordinate and unify legislation and financial systems among Arab countries.

Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance and head of Oman's delegation in the meeting, lauded the efforts made by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to end poverty, promote



The meeting discussed the most important financial and economic issues of concern to the Arab countries and the applicable financial reform efforts. — ONA

shared prosperity and achieve sustainable growth by backing economic policies that enhance financial stability. Al Jashmi stressed the importance of transition to renewable energy in order to ensure energy security and address climate change. This meeting comes within the framework of coordinating Arab efforts to address international financial issues to serve their common interests.

Meanwhile, the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance met on the sidelines of the meeting with Fahd al Jarallah, Kuwaiti Minister of Finance.

The two sides discussed a set of topics, including issues and economic and financial developments raised during the meetings of the two international financial institutions. — ONA

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MOH NO: 207/2023

FORUM LOOKS AT WOMEN’S ENDOWMENT EDUCATION

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs on Sunday organised the first women’s endowment forum under the slogan “Women’s Endowment for Education and Guidance”.

The forum, held at Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, coincides with the Sultanate of Oman’s celebration of Omani Women’s Day, the 17th of October.

The event aimed to spread awareness about a community budget titled “Women’s Endowment for Education and Guidance”.

The opening of the forum was held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim



Women’s forum aimed to spread awareness about endowment education and guidance. – ONA

al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The forum included a visual presentation on women’s endowments and a speech about women’s endowments for education and guidance.

It highlighted the importance of donating, past and present contributions of donation portfolios and a call on members of society to take the initiative and donate.

The forum also included a seminar on women’s donations and a review of endowment experiences, community partnerships and ways to develop women’s endowments.

— ONA

Omani women: Remarkable achievements

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will mark this Tuesday the Omani Women’s Day, which falls on the 17th of October every year.

The event comes in recognition for women’s contributions to the march of renaissance and comprehensive development in the Sultanate of Oman, as well as her roles in various social, cultural, economic and sports fields.

The marking of Omani Women’s Day embodies the emphasis of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the importance of women’s participation in shaping the country’s present and future, as they are an essential partner in sustainable development and nation-building. His Majesty the Sultan accorded attention to empowering them in various fields, as His Majesty assigned a number of senior government positions to some distinguished women of Oman.

The data of the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicates that the number of Omani women (aged 15 years and above) working in the government sector reached 95,652 and in the private sector 114,674.

The number of Omani female teachers in the public and private schools for the academic year (2021/2022) reached 43,335. The figures of 2022 show that the number of Omani female doctors in the government sector reached 1,605 and the percentage of Omani female working in craft industries reached 90 per cent. As for the number of retired women registered in retirement funds for the same year reached 26,980 and the number of Omani women’s associations till 2022 reached (65).

As for the participation of Omani women in parliamentary work, they constitute 17.6 per cent of the members of the State Council and 2.3 per cent of the Majlis Ash’shura during the ninth term (2019-2023).

In this context, Sayyidah Sanaa bint Hamad al Busaidiyah, Head of Women’s Club for Sports and Cultural Creativity, said, “This day symbolises national expression of gratitude for the role of Omani women in achieving progress and advancement”. She added that Omani women’s sports sector is undergoing remarkable growth based on the outcome of women’s participation in various games.

For her part, Lujaina bint Mohsin Haider Darwish al Za’abiyah, Member of the State Council, said, “Women



Omani Women’s Day promotes the themes of culture and literature. – ONA

are accorded great attention in Oman, with the 17th of October designated as Women’s Day, in recognition of their achievements and roles in consolidating the country’s comprehensive development and renaissance ---socially, culturally, economically and sports-wise”.

Dr Arwa bint Zakaria al Riyamiyah, Senior Consultant, Haematology, at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, said, “Omani Women’s Day celebrates women’s contribution towards building the nation economically, socially and culturally”. The anniversary also reflects strive to upgrade the standard of services across various sectors, including education and health sectors, she added.

Dr Arwa pointed out that women comprise more than 50 per cent of the workforce in the health sector, according to official statistics. This is in addition to women’s participation in developing national strategies and sustainable plans to secure the future of health services in Oman, she said.

Khawla bint Rashid al Rawahi, Director of the Women’s Sports Department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, said, “Omani Women’s Day is a tribute



to women’s accomplishments and an acknowledgment of their role in promoting process in Oman.

She spoke about women’s role,

through the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in providing an appropriate environment for women’s engagement in all types of sports events in Oman, with

an eye on global games.

Zainab Mohammed Al Makki, Instructor in the field of personal and human resources development, said that the celebration of Omani Women’s Day represents a culmination of women’s contribution and accomplishments. The event demonstrates women’s creativity and skills in various sectors, said Zainab.

Rawabi bint Ali al Salmiyah, head of operations management at the Youth Centre, said that Omani women have received great attention since the outset of the blessed Omani Renaissance and this interest continued to grow in the Renewed Renaissance. She added that the centre empowers young Omani women in various fields through training programmes and workshops aimed at promoting them in terms of leadership and supervisory positions.

Shaima bint Ali al Balushi, a student at the College of Engineering, Sultan Qaboos University, said, “Omani women have been able to innovate and bring about accomplishments in various fields, including health, educational and engineering, to name a few. This stems from women’s keenness to promote Oman in various events, regionally and globally, she added.

Meanwhile, Shifa bint Saif al Akhzamiyah, a pianist, said that Omani women have contributed to representing the nation in international forums, in addition to their participation in opening ceremonies at various national and cultural events, locally and abroad.

Razan bint Hamad al Kalbaniyah, who won the grand prize at Korea International Women’s Innovation Competition and Exhibition, said, “Omani Women’s Day is an important occasion that reflects the keenness of Oman’s government to promote women, and that the outcome was an ability to strongly contribute to Oman’s renaissance. This, she affirmed, was evidenced by the fact that women assumed leadership positions and important roles across various sectors.

Women are taking steady steps towards a brighter future in Oman, notably by occupying important positions at regional and international levels, in all fields and sectors, and this reflects positively on the Omani society. Omani women’s international achievements received wide acclaim from specialists around the world.

— ONA



BIRTH SPACING IS CRUCIAL FOR WOMEN’S HEALTH



THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION RECOMMENDS AN IDEAL BIRTH SPACING PERIOD

24
MONTHS
AFTER A
NATURAL BIRTH

6
MONTHS
FOLLOWING A
MISCARRIAGE

1-3
YEARS
AFTER A CAESAREAN
SECTION

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

October is observed as an awareness month for birth spacing with an emphasis on the importance of allowing a woman’s body to recover between pregnancies. Birth spacing not only grants mothers a chance to catch their breath, but also offers numerous social, economic and health benefits for individuals, families and society as a whole.

The core objective of birth spacing awareness is to enhance maternal and child health outcomes, bolster the economic sustainability of the healthcare sector, and foster social advantages while upholding international commitments. This awareness campaign aims to educate individuals about the distinction between birth spacing and birth control.

Birth spacing entails the use of a suitable method to space pregnancies at least three years apart, without stipulating a specific number of children.

Since 1994, the Sultanate of Oman’s birth spacing programme, championed by the Ministry of Health, has been a pivotal initiative. International interest in women’s health underscores the significance of this service, with 60 per cent of primary healthcare services dedicated to women’s and children’s well-being. This comprehensive approach has become a cornerstone of the healthcare system.

The benefits of birth spacing are multifaceted. They include reducing maternal mortality rates, safeguarding maternal physical and mental health, expediting postpartum recovery, and enabling mothers to allocate adequate attention to their families. Moreover, it nurtures a child’s

sense of parental care and attention.

Local health institutions are readily available for women seeking birth spacing services to provide guidance on suitable methods tailored to their psychological and social circumstances. Physicians play a crucial role in assessing age and health conditions to determine the most appropriate method. They also educate patients about their chosen method’s advantages, disadvantages, side effects and correct usage.

Spacing pregnancies mitigates the risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Studies published in scientific journals have established that closely spaced pregnancies elevate the likelihood of stillbirths, neonatal deaths, premature births and low-birth-weight infants. Repeated pregnancies expose mothers to additional risks such as placental separation, low birth

weight and complications due to malnutrition.

Birth spacing ensures that newborns benefit from a mother’s period of rest, allowing her to regain physical health, immunity and calcium levels. This, in turn, promotes healthier growth and reduces complications in infants.

Beyond the immediate family, birth spacing eases financial and social burdens, fortifies marital and family relationships, and contributes to the creation of a healthier, more productive society. By all measures — psychological and physical — it aids in forming a robust and vibrant community.

The World Health Organization recommends an ideal birth spacing period of approximately 24 months after a natural birth, six months following a miscarriage, and one to three years after a caesarean section. Additionally, recent research has raised concerns

about extended pregnancy intervals, including a higher risk of preeclampsia in women without a history of the condition.

While the exact cause of health issues stemming from extended pregnancy intervals remains unclear, it is apparent that pregnancy positively impacts the uterus’s ability to promote and support fetal growth. However, these beneficial changes wane over time, underscoring the importance of informed birth spacing decisions.

Birth spacing awareness in October serves as a reminder of the multitude of advantages associated with thoughtful family planning. It empowers individuals, strengthens families and contributes to society’s overall well-being. By understanding and embracing birth spacing, we can foster healthier and happier communities for generations to come.



GAZA: An estimated one million people have been displaced in the first seven days of the conflict in Gaza, the United Nations agency supporting Palestinian refugees said on Sunday.

“An estimated one million people have been displaced in the first seven days” of the war in Gaza, UNRWA Director of Communications Juliette Touma said.

“The number is likely to be higher as people continue to leave their homes.”

Israel has been pounding Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip after the group carried out a deadly attack on southern Israel on October 7 that killed more than 1,300 people.

More than 2,300 people have also been killed in Gaza in Israeli air strikes.

As Israel intensified air strikes on Gaza Strip and told residents to move south towards the border with Egypt, some thought that would be a safe option and gathered up their belongings.

Palestinians are desperate to find a safe hiding place as the Israeli army continues offensive in Gaza accompanied by relentless air strikes.

The journey to the south is also fraught with risks as Israel hits back at Hamas after the group launched a surprise attack on Israel.

Israel has already unleashed the fiercest bombing ever on the impoverished narrow Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas in the world.

Palestinians were dispossessed and displaced, many spilling into neighbouring Arab states where they or many of their descendants remain. Many still live in refugee camps.

Israel said it kept two roads open to let people escape, but displaced Palestinians fleeing on that road said Israeli bombings of the eastern areas around that road never stopped.

Two days ago 70 Palestinians were killed and 200 were wounded when Israeli planes bombed several vehicles carrying displaced Gazans, according to health ministry and official media.

The United Nations says so many people cannot be safely moved within Gaza without causing a humanitarian disaster.

An Israeli bombardment of Gaza faces both the Palestinians that stayed home and others who made the treacherous trip to the south.

A witness said he saw mangled cars and a completely torched truck on the road to the south. Some people who had hoped the south would provide some relief have changed their minds and are heading north. — **Agencies**

ESTIMATED 1 MILLION PEOPLE DISPLACED IN A WEEK OF WAR

TWO DAYS AGO
**70 PALESTINIANS WERE
KILLED AND
200 WERE WOUNDED**
WHEN ISRAELI PLANES
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CARRYING DISPLACED
GAZANS



▲ A man reacts as he watches rescuers and civilians remove the rubble of a home destroyed following an Israeli attack on the town of Deir Al-Balah, in the central Gaza Strip. — **AFP**



Gaza residents lose entire families in airstrike

GAZA: As Israel prepared on Sunday for a ground assault on the Gaza Strip, Palestinians who have lost family members in air strikes were bracing for more destruction.

Um Mohammad Al-Laham’s 4-year-old granddaughter Fulla Al-Laham lay in a Gaza hospital, which like others is operating on low supplies of medicine and fuel. She said an Israeli air strike hit the family home, killing 14 people including Fulla’s parents, siblings

and members of her extended family.

“All of a sudden and without warning, they bombed the house on top of the residents inside. No-one survived except my grandchild Fulla,” said the grandmother, who has witnessed many wars between One other 4-year-old child in the family had also been left with almost no relatives, the grandmother said.

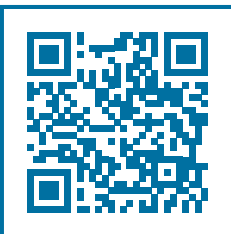
Israel has unleashed the heaviest air strikes ever on Gaza.



Palestinian girl Fulla Al-Laham, 4, who was wounded in an Israeli strike that killed 14 family members lies on a bed as her grandmother sits next to her, at a hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. — **Reuters**



A picture shows smoke billowing after Israeli bombardment of an area in the north of the Palestinian enclave. — **AFP**



Palestinian women and children react following Israeli strikes in Gaza City. – Reuters



A bulldozer shifts the rubble of a building destroyed following an Israeli attack on the town of Deir Al-Balah, in the central Gaza Strip. – AFP



A Palestinian civil defence operator sprays water to douse the area as he squats atop of the rubble of a building destroyed following an Israeli attack on the town of Deir Al-Balah, in the central Gaza Strip. – AFP

rikes, fear more destruction

Without warning, they bombed the house on top of the residents inside. No-one survived except my grandchild

UM MOHAMMAD AL-LAHAM
Grandmother

It has vowed to annihilate the Palestinian group Hamas in retaliation for a rampage by its fighters in Israeli towns eight days ago.

Israel has put Gaza, home to 2.3 million Palestinians, under siege and told people to leave their homes in the north of the enclave and move south.

The United Nations says so many people cannot be safely moved within Gaza without causing a humanitarian disaster.

Some residents said they would not leave, remembering the “Nakba,” or “catastrophe,” of 1948 when many Palestinians were forced from their homes during the war that accompanied Israel’s creation.

Rescue workers searched for survivors of night-time air raids.

The expected Israeli ground offensive and the air strikes have raised fears of unprecedented suffering in the narrow, impoverished enclave, one of the

most crowded places in the world.

At Gaza’s Kamal Edwan Hospital, where some children were attached to ventilators, Dr Hussam Abu Safiya, said: “If you want to kill us, kill us while we continue working here, we will not leave. We need days and weeks to secure another place.”

“The situation is really dangerous,” he said. “Transferring these children from this place means handing them a death sentence. — Reuters

POPE CALLS FOR HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS FOR GAZA RESIDENTS

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis called on Sunday for humanitarian corridors to allow the delivery of essentials to the Gaza Strip, which is under heavy Israeli bombardment.

Alarm has grown about a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where Israel has cut off water, food and power, vowing to maintain the complete siege.

In the eight days since Hamas gunmen killed more than 1,300 Israelis in their attack, Israel has responded with a devastating bombing campaign that has claimed over 2,300 lives in Gaza.

“Humanitarian law must be respected, especially in Gaza, where it is urgent and necessary to guarantee humanitarian corridors and help the population,” said the Pope after his traditional Angelus prayer in Rome’s Saint Peter’s Square.

“I strongly urge that children, the sick, the elderly, women and all civilians should not fall victim to the conflict,” he added.

“There have already been so many deaths, please let’s not shed any more innocent blood, not in the Holy Land, not in Ukraine, not anywhere else. Enough is enough. War is always a defeat,” he said, castigating “the diabolical force of hatred, terrorism and war”.

Pope Francis invited “all believers to unite in prayer with the Church in the Holy Land” on Tuesday. – AFP



Palestinian families flee their homes following an Israeli attack on the Rafah refugee camp, in the southern of Gaza Strip. – AFP

EGYPT PUSHING TO BREAK IMPASSE OVER GAZA AID

CAIRO: Egypt has stepped up diplomatic efforts to enable aid deliveries into Gaza and to de-escalate fighting, the Egyptian presidency said on Sunday, as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stopped off in Cairo as part of a regional tour.

Aid from several countries has been building up in Egypt’s Sinai peninsula due to a failure to reach a deal enabling its safe delivery to Gaza along with evacuations of some foreign passport holders through the Rafah crossing into Egypt.

Israeli bombardments on the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing into Egypt, the main crossing out of Gaza not controlled by Israel, have disrupted operations there.

There is alarm in Egypt over the prospect that residents in Gaza could be displaced by Israel’s siege and bombardment.

It has said that Palestinians should stay on their lands as the war escalates, and that it is working to secure delivery of aid.

A statement from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s office, issued after a meeting of the national security council, said Egypt rejected any plan to displace Palestinians “to the detriment of other countries” and that Egypt’s own security was a red line.

Sisi also proposed a summit to discuss the crisis, according to the statement.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said on Saturday that the Rafah crossing was open but the roads leading to it in Gaza were “inoperable” due to Israeli bombardment. He said that if foreign nationals were able to cross the border Egypt would facilitate their departure to their home countries.

The United States has been part of the diplomatic push to facilitate aid and evacuations through Rafah, and told its citizens in Gaza on Saturday they could move closer to the crossing in case it opened. – Reuters

CHINA SAYS ISRAEL ACTING ‘BEYOND SCOPE OF SELF-DEFENCE’

BEIJING: Israel’s actions in Gaza have gone “beyond the scope of self-defence” and the Israeli government must “cease its collective punishment of the people of Gaza”, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in remarks published on Sunday.

Wang’s remarks, made on a call to his Saudi Arabian counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan on Saturday, came as Israel appeared poised for a ground offensive against Hamas in Gaza.

“Israel’s actions have gone beyond the scope of self-defence,” Wang said according to a foreign ministry readout.

“Israel should listen earnestly to the calls of the international community and the UN secretary general, and cease its collective punishment of the people of Gaza,” Wang added in what is the strongest stance China has expressed so far on the conflict.

More than one million people in the northern part of the crowded enclave of Gaza have been ordered to flee ahead of the expected assault, an exodus that aid groups said would set off a humanitarian disaster.

Gaza, where 2.3 million residents live on top of each other, has been under a land, air and sea blockade since 2006.

After Hamas fighters broke through the heavily fortified border between the Gaza Strip and Israel to gun down, Israel launched a massive retaliatory bombing campaign targeting the Islamist group that has killed over 2,200 in Gaza.

Wang told Prince Faisal that “all parties should not take any action to escalate the situation and should return to the negotiating table as soon as possible”.

On Saturday, Wang held a call with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who had called on China to use its influence in the Middle East to push for calm in the region. – AFP

Women are defining entrepreneurship



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

Women play a role at every level of Omani society today. From traditional professions like medicine and teaching to the oil and gas industry and Information Technology, women have taken advantage of every opportunity to explore diverse areas and interests, including creative arts and industry. As commonly known, women occupy high governmental and ministerial positions in Oman, as well as being in the diplomatic service and other international organisations.

However, one of the most notable visible trends today is the engagement of Omani women as entrepreneurs in a range of fields.

In 2022, four Omanis were among Forbes Middle East's 50 most powerful women entrepreneurs, being involved with a range of industries like banking, retail, and a range of associated conglomerates.

However, more significantly, the individual entrepreneurs involved in different areas like cottage industries, service, and creative arts are redefining how businesses can be operated.

One of the most important reasons for the

popularity of micro-enterprises and SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) among women in Oman is the possibility to combine family life with business and connect to different parts of the country and the world from the comfort of the house.

This has been especially true after the pandemic when many people began to appreciate the value of online shopping. This also added another feature in that products could be shared with a network of family and friends.

Whether it is abayas, frankincense, baked goods, or personalised party favours, there are women who are sourcing, producing, and offering a range of such products, delivered to a home address within hours or days.

This is mainly possible because of social media, especially Instagram, the largest and most popular platform for women entrepreneurs in Oman.

In fact, Yasmeen al Alawi became the first winner of the She's Next Grant programme for Oman for her proposal to establish a health food business, Sprout. Such competitions and opportunities provide platforms for women to incubate and highlight their ideas and get funding.

WITH RISING INCENTIVES AND INFORMATION, WOMEN IN OMAN ARE BECOMING MORE ENTREPRENEURIAL, CONTRIBUTING TO THE NATIONAL ECONOMY

Various studies show that the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, in addition to social attitudes, include financial support, access to technology, opportunities for collaboration, and training in the latest models of marketing and research.

Although there are a number of forums available in Oman for aspiring women entrepreneurs, access to such forums and information on them is not always available, particularly to those outside the capital of Muscat.

SMEs are an integral part of the economy of a country and women play an important part in this development. With rising incentives and information, women in Oman are becoming more entrepreneurial, contributing to the national economy. In doing so, they are also redefining themselves by exploring their strengths and interests and ways of turning them into profitable businesses.

With wider social and institutional support, Omani women who are already heading towards creative entrepreneurship, will succeed in reinventing the business environment, grow further, and sustainably contribute to the economy while pursuing their own passions and interests.

CEO-turned politician to lead NZ to the right

LUCY CRAYMER

Just three years after entering politics, former businessman Christopher Luxon is set to lead New Zealand to the right as prime minister-elect, ending six years of Labour-led centre-left government.

The former Air New Zealand chief executive, Luxon became leader of the centre-right National Party at the end of 2021, boosting its popularity until winning Saturday's general election.

National won 50 seats and its preferred coalition partner, ACT New Zealand, won 11, securing a majority of one seat in the 121-seat parliament, according to provisional results from the Electoral Commission. Final results are due November 3.

Luxon, who held senior roles at global consumer goods firm Unilever and delivered consistent profits running Air New Zealand from 2012 to 2019, has said he would use the skills he bought to managing businesses to improve New Zealand.

The 53-year-old has promised to curb historically high inflation and reduce government debt by cutting spending and narrowing the central bank's mandate to targeting inflation, in order to help financially stretched middle-income families.

"I want to bring the country together, I want to actually make sure that we are focused on delivering outcomes for New Zealanders," Luxon told a press conference, dressed in an All Blacks jersey after watching the national rugby team win a dramatic World Cup quarterfinal.

"I'm a person who likes to bring teams together and make sure that I get the best out of that team and use all the skills in that team, so that's my mode."

In a country where almost half the people say they have no religion, Luxon has faced scrutiny for saying he was Christian and has had to defend stances such as personally opposing abortion. He has committed to maintaining legal abortion and supported same-sex marriage.

"Faith is deeply personal, but I am not there to act in the interests of one faith, one group, one person or one belief system. I'm there to represent all New Zealanders," Luxon said earlier this year.

A millionaire father of two with several homes across the country, Luxon is learning the Maori language and is a Taylor Swift fan, quoting her in televised debates and interviews.

Although well-travelled, he is largely untried on foreign policy. Luxon has strongly supported Ukraine in its invasion by Russia, in line with New Zealand's traditional allies.

He has said there will be little change in New Zealand's foreign policy. — Reuters

Gender differences in the labour market



Dr Zahran Al Salti

The writer is Dean, College of Banking and Financial Studies



Dr Mohammad Dulal Miah

The writer works at the College of Banking and Financial Studies

IT IS BEYOND DOUBT THAT THE WORKS OF PROF GOLDIN WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE ON RELEVANT POLICIES, MAINLY LAWS AND REGULATIONS PERTAINING TO THE LABOUR MARKET WILL UNQUESTIONABLY BENEFIT FROM HER WORK

The Noble Prize in Economics 2023 was awarded to Professor Claudia Goldin for her breakthrough work about the women's labour market.

She is the third female economist to be awarded this prestigious award following Elinor Ostrom (2009) and Esther Duflo (2019) jointly with Abhijit Banerjee and Michael Kremer (2019).

As an economic historian, Prof Goldin explores the existing participation and income gap between male and female workers and their causes. In particular, she analyses data spanning two centuries to understand the changes in the gender gap in labour force participation and wage gap throughout the centuries.

About half of the working-age female workers and 80 per cent of the male workers are active in the paid-job market globally.

Low participation of the female labour force results in a sub-optimal use of valuable human resources. Not only the participation rate but also the pay discrimination between male and female workers is also significant.

Prof Goldin shows that before the rise of industrialisation in the 19th century, the participation of the female labour in the national labour force was noteworthy, which declined during the phase of industrialisation.

However, the female labour force participation rate increased subsequently when the service sector dominated the economy.

It implies that the female labour force participation rate increased during the agrarian phase of the economy, declined during the dawn of industrialisation, and increased again in the post-industrial phase.

This reflects a U-shaped curve of women's participation in the labour force. From this perspective, the Nobel laureate economist explains that since economic growth followed a steady upward trend over the last two centuries, the previously thought positive association between women's participation in the labour market and economic growth suffers from empirical validity.

Not only the gap between male and female participation but also the difference between married and unmarried women taking part in the



Claudia Goldin, a Harvard professor, won the 2023 Nobel economics prize. — Reuters

job market was also significant at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Prof Goldin estimates that 20 per cent of unmarried women accepted paid work compared to only 5 per cent of married women.

The high employment rate during the agrarian phase of society can be attributed to the opportunity of working from home in such sectors as family-owned small farms, cottage industries, home-based production such as textiles and dairy farms, boardinghouse keepers, etc. Such works were not officially recorded by the census.

As a result, women's representation in the labour force was substantially deflated. Analysis based on the deflated data has failed to provide a true picture of the female workforce in the early modern history of the US.

The reasons for the subsequent decline, as identified by the Nobel laureate, underlie the laws and social norms.

She showed that in the early twentieth century, women were expected to work for a short span of time before marriage and quit their jobs after marriage.

Another important factor is the choice of education. For instance, those young kids who made their choice of education in the mid-19th century entered the labour market much later.

Notably, their choice of education was shaped by the prevailing economic environment which was dominated by agriculture and small farming.

They also saw a short career of female workers caused by marriage and childbirth. This has discouraged households from investing in female

education sufficiently. When these kids grew up and entered the job market, they experienced a rapid change in the work environment.

A structural transformation of the economy, from agrarian to industrialisation, took place. This has made the female workforce unsuitable to work efficiently in the industry.

Prof Goldin identifies some factors that can be attributed to the subsequent rise of the female labour force, especially when the service sector dominates the economy.

First, the changes in societal norms meant that those who were off work owing to childbirth and taking care of family could return to work once their children were grown up. Secondly, technological innovation played a pivotal role in increasing female participation.

Prof Goldin showed that pay discrimination, the difference in pay between male and female workers after accounting for observable differences such as age, productivity, and education, rose commensurably with the growth of the service sector in the twentieth century.

It goes beyond saying that the works of Prof Goldin would influence relevant policies. In particular, laws and regulations pertaining to the labour market would definitely benefit from her work.

At the same time, investment in education and information would receive increased attention from policymakers and practitioners. The enormous influence of her work in policymaking earned her the prestigious Nobel Prize in Economics.

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Experiencing a day in Jerusalem

Peace is a fragile commodity as nations and individuals find it tough to keep it from falling into pieces.

New fights, conflicts and misunderstandings keep cropping up at homes, offices, communities and on the international front. Peace is always under attack as people and nations never cease chasing political and material interests instead of common welfare and stability. As Ronald Reagan, the 40th president of the United States, said, “Peace is not the absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means”.

Though the world has benefitted from stability and peace, it often slides into disorder and conflict for flimsy reasons. Perhaps, people don’t believe in what Mother Teresa said: “If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.” They ignore the fact that human beings have been created to complement and serve one another. Despite their origins, languages, beliefs, colours, people need each other. In fact, this is the reason why people have different interests, thoughts and capabilities.

Mother Teresa said: “Peace begins with a smile”. Possibly, people undervalue the importance of a smile, which they could share anytime. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated, “Your smile for your brother is charity”. Stressing on ways of spreading love and peace among people, the Prophet said, “You will not enter paradise until you believe, and you will not believe until you love one another. Shall I not tell you about something, which if you do it, you will love one another? Spread salaam (greetings) among yourselves”.

This is just a simple way of ensuring peace among humans as a smile speaks all languages. With a smile on the face, one can break the ice, greet and talk with others. Thus, a smile marks a way of showing understanding as Albert Einstein advised that peace cannot be kept by force, it can only be achieved by understanding.



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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

AL AQSA HAS A VERY SPECIAL PLACE IN THE HEARTS OF THE ENTIRE MUSLIM COMMUNITY WORLDWIDE

Speaking in this context, I’m referring to a personal experience of being among an official Omani media delegation to Palestine a decade ago. We witnessed fluctuating days in the life of the Palestinian community with moments of conflicts, fights and peace on different days and in cities in Palestine. Further, we had the privilege to visit Jerusalem and pray at the Holy Mosque, Al Aqsa.

Al Aqsa has a very special place in the hearts of the entire Muslim community worldwide due to its unique and rich history as a place of worship that is so closely linked with the lives of many Prophets. It stands at the heart of Jerusalem’s old city, being the third holiest mosques in Islam, after the holy mosques in Mecca and Madina in Saudi Arabia. When built in the 8th century AD, it was representing the first qibla (Praying direction) in Islam. It is home to two holy places, the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa Mosque.

Another rewarding experience was visiting the Nativity Church in Bethlehem, where the Prophet Jesus was born. It was such a remarkable religious landmark attracting Muslims and Christians together. Hence, it brings a sort of peace among them to an extent that people from both religions are queuing up to see different attractions and corners of the church. The delegation had one more memorable visit to Al Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron (Al Khalil City). It is believed to be home of the remains of Prophet Abraham, his wife Sarah, their son Isaac and grandson Jacob, and their wives Rebecca and Leah.

Being in Palestine for around 10 days allowed us to have firsthand experience to observe peaceful coexistence between peoples of different beliefs. Though such unstable peace brings frequent tensions, constant fights and social violence due to the fight for Jerusalem, which marks the history of Earth and Heaven as attributed by Benjamin Disraeli, a British novelist a prime minister.

GRATITUDE TO GOD



A dancer performs during an earth alms ceremony in Surabaya, East Java province, on Sunday. The earth alms tradition is held to show gratitude for the abundant sustenance of God and it serves as tourist attraction. – AFP

The Global North must follow the Global South’s lead

With her ambitious Bridgetown Agenda to reform the international financial architecture, Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley has become a powerful advocate for climate justice. But she is not the only world leader rising to meet the profound challenges we face today. A new generation of leaders from the Global South are making their voices heard.

Kenyan President William Ruto, for example, is forging a new path towards climate-positive growth in Africa: by taking advantage of its abundant natural resources and realising its green-manufacturing potential, the continent could supply the developed world with goods and services to accelerate the clean-energy transition. In Latin America, Colombian President Gustavo Petro has called for a new Marshall Plan to finance global climate action. And Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, now in his third non-consecutive term as Brazil’s president, aims to tackle hunger, poverty, and inequality, promote sustainable development, and reform outdated global governance arrangements during his country’s G20 presidency in 2024.

After a decade of protectionism and fragmentation, these initiatives seek to build a global consensus around enacting sorely needed reforms.



Gordon Brown

The writer is a former prime minister of the United Kingdom, is UN Special Envoy for Global Education

A NEW GENERATION OF DEVELOPING-COUNTRY LEADERS IS SEEKING TO BUILD A GLOBAL CONSENSUS AROUND REFORMS THAT PUT CLIMATE ACTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FRONT AND CENTRE

The post-Covid-19 world is currently experiencing what the G20 has called “cascading crises,” including a dramatic surge in energy and food prices, unmanageable debt burdens in the world’s poorest countries, and a record number of climate disasters. Developing countries need at least \$1 trillion annually to make significant progress on the climate transition and to achieve their development goals. But the costs of inaction are even greater.

Our collective future hinges on a dramatic increase in funding, and the place to start is a levy on windfall revenues from fossil fuels. The global oil and gas industry’s revenues were around \$4 trillion in 2022, according to Fatih Birol, the Executive Director of the International Energy Agency – an astonishing \$2.5 trillion more than the average in recent years.

Where has this money come from? The short answer is consumers. Some of the world’s richest companies are raking in bumper profits from a cost-of-living crisis – largely fuelled by high energy prices – that has disproportionately affected the poor and vulnerable. The largest beneficiaries of this effective tax on the global economy have been petrostates, whose total export

revenues, when complemented by the export earnings of countries like Canada, Australia, Iraq, and Iran, totalled almost \$1 trillion in 2022.

The biggest of these countries, whose per capita incomes are among the highest in the world, are well able to pay a voluntary levy on their exceptionally high hydrocarbon-export revenues into a global fund for sustainable development.

It is fortuitous that this year’s United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) will be held in the UAE. Outlining his plan of action in July, COP28 president-designate Sultan al Jaber named “fixing climate finance” as one of

its four pillars, arguing that “all forms of finance must be more available, more accessible, and more affordable.” Similarly, he has called on donor countries with overdue pledges to “show me the money.”

More than half of the contributions could go to the Loss and Damage Fund, which was agreed at COP27 but still has gained little initial funding, with the rest used as capital and grant funding for new facilities for climate mitigation and adaptation.

And the international community must use this levy to kickstart a wider financing programme for the developing

world, based on the principle that rich, historically large polluters with the capacity to pay should contribute more to help poorer countries adapt to global warming. Not only should aid budgets be raised, but the International Development Association, the World Bank’s financing facility for the poorest countries, must also receive a generous replenishment next year.

Providing \$90 billion in concessional finance for low-income countries is at the heart of the proposals from the economist N K Singh and former US Treasury Secretary Lawrence H Summers in their two volumes of reports to the G20, the first proposed ahead of the recent G20 summit in New Delhi. As they argue, the system of multilateral development banks (MDBs) must increase its overall capacity, which means tripling its annual commitments to \$300 billion in non-concessional finance for middle-income countries.

As part of their proposals, which include recapitalisation of the World Bank itself, they favour the wider use of guarantees. High-income countries could and should provide such guarantees that will enable MDBs to borrow from capital markets on attractive terms.



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CALDERANO CLINCHES MEN’S CROWN



Adriana DIAZ in action at Women's Singles - Final

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 15

World No 5 Brazilian paddler Hugo Calderano registered a perfect comeback as he defeated Liam Pitchford from England 4-3 (6-11, 1-11, 11-8, 11-0, 11-4, 10-12, 11-7) in the final clash of men's singles event to clinch the title of WTT Contender Muscat 2023 and his third WTT Series title of the year on Saturday.

At the indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, it was not the first match for the Brazilian to be trailing by 2-0 as it happened couple of times this week in Muscat against Jules Rolland in the round of 16 and Simon Gauzy in the semifinal, and was ready to mastermind another escape act in the final. Calderano managed to bounce back strongly in the third and fourth sets before he captured a thrilling triumph that confirmed the trophy for him.

Commenting post the triumph, the Brazilian champion said that he is very happy to take part in WTT Contender Muscat 2023 and end the tournament on a winning note with a new title. "It was a very

tough final game and there were many variations during the match. I was able to disturb him after two sets despite his leading and could manage to find proper solutions to overcome Pitchford and register a crucial victory that confirmed the title for me," Calderano said.

"The tournament was well organised and the playing conditions were very good. All the facilities provided in the venue were great. I enjoyed playing in Muscat. All the WTT contender events are tough as many strong players take part in it and the same happened in Muscat," he added.

HAYATA SIZZLES

Japan's Hina Hayata eased past Adriana Diaz from Puerto Rico 4-0 (11-7, 11-5, 11-5, 11-6) in the final to earn the women's singles title.

The silver medallist at the Hang Zhou Asian Games in China managed to dominate the game and showed an excellent performance. The Puerto Rican player could not get a single set due to the full focus of the Japanese star.

Meanwhile, German pair comprising World No 9 Dimitrij Ovtcharov and Patrick Franziska



Hina HAYATA in action at Women's Singles - Final



Women's Mixed Doubles winners at the Sultan Qaboos Sport Complex podium

stole the limelight in the men's doubles final after they presented an outstanding show against Swedish duo of Kristian Karlsson and Anton Kallberg winning it 3-0 (13-11, 11-4, 11-9).

Ng Wing Lam and Zhu Chengzhu from Hong Kong prevailed over Andrea Todorovic (Serbia) and Sibel Altinkaya (Turkey) 3-0 (5-11, 6-11, 4-11) to win the women's doubles title.

It happened for the first time in WTT series as champions were crowned in the women's and men's doubles events with both finals being decided by emphatic 3-0 scorelines.

Earlier on Friday, Chen Szu-Yu and Lin Yun-Ju from Chinese Taipei upset Japan's Miwa Harimoto and Sora Matsushima by 3-1 (7-11, 18-16, 8-11, 4-11) to clinch the mixed double's title.

The medal and trophy ceremony for each category were presided over by different chief guests as Abdulsamad bin Taj Mohammed al Balushi, Head of Procurement and contracts in Oman Fiber Optic Company, presented the trophies in women's doubles. Mohammed bin Othman al Balushi, Group HR and Administration Chief, awarded the medals and trophies of the men's doubles event. Yarab

bin Abdullah al Saiari, Co-founder of Yarab al Saiari and Saud al Maawali Advocates and legal Consultants, gave away the prizes in women's singles while Eng Aladdin bin Abdullah Bait Fadhil, Chief Commercial Officer at Omantel, delivered the medals and trophies to the winners of men's singles accompanied by Abdullah bin Mohammed Bamakhalif, OTTA Chairman.

Oman gears up to host World Amateur Chess

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 15

The organising committee of the World Amateur Chess Championship Muscat 2023 continues to prepare for hosting this anticipated sports championship, which is the first of its kind in the Middle East region. The championship would be hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Oman Chess Committee (OCC), from November 1 to 11 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The number of registered participants for the championship has reached 430 players, including 357 male players and 73 female players, representing 64 countries. They will compete in three rating categories: '1700' with 270 participants (210 male, 60 female), '2000' with 74 participants (48 male, 26 female), and '2300' with 74 participants (69 male, 5 female).

The wide participation emphasises Oman's status and good reputation in hosting tournaments, reflecting the enthusiasm of players to participate in this significant global championship, which holds widespread attention.

In preparation for the championship,



Chess hall at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher

the OCC organised the first international preparatory tournament at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex from September 21 to 23. The aim was to test and evaluate all the preparations for hosting and improve them in preparation for the World Championship.

As an extension of these preparations, the committee will also organise the second preparatory tournament for the participants in the World Amateur Chess

Championship from October 19 to 21. It is expected to have the participation of several national and international amateur players residing in the Sultanate of Oman. The OCC aims to elevate the rating level of Omani players through this event.

The OCC is exerting every effort to provide a unique experience for the participants and the audience, enhancing its position as a leading international sports destination in the world of chess. Hosting the championship in Oman is a testament to the efforts made and reflects the confidence of the International Chess Federation in the capabilities of the Oman Chess Committee to organise and succeed in this global championship. This success is reaffirmed by Oman's successful hosting of several championships in the past, further solidifying its position as a significant international sports destination.

The Omani Chess Committee aims, through this tournament, to enhance the chess base in the country by attracting more players and umpires and encouraging the establishment of new chess teams in the clubs. They also aim to elevate the international ranking of several of their players, contributing to the development and growth of the game in Oman.



Sultanate of Oman
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH
TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects:-

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Grade in Tender Board Registration	Last Day to Purchase Tender Documents	Last Date of Tender Submission
Re-tender 21/2023	Information Technology Service	SUPPORT LIBRARIES WITH THE BASIC EQUIPMENT OF THE OPERATING SYSTEM RFID TECHNOLOGY	Third, Fourth Grade	21/10/2023	30/10/2023
22/2023	Consulting Offices	REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL FOR THE LEAD ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN CONSULTANT	First Grade	21/10/2023	30/10/2023
23/2023	Supply	SUPPLY AND INSTALLATION OF FLOODLIGHT TO MAIN FOOTBALL PITCH AT FANJA SPORTS CLUB AD-DAKHILIYA GOVERNORATE	Excellent & First Grade	28/10/2023	27/11/2023
24/2023	Supply	SUPPLY AND INSTALLATION OF ELECTRONIC SCOREBOARD TO FOOTBALL STADIUM AT SEEB AND SAADAH SPORTS COMPLEX	Excellent Grade	21/10/2023	30/10/2023

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Oman Cricket, Dhofar Insurance in three-year deal

MUSCAT: Sports injuries to international cricketers in today's highly competitive game is often considered part and parcel of their lives. Oman Cricket (OC), the national cricket governing body of the Sultanate of Oman, has been mindful of the fact and faced many situations when the national team cricketers suffered injuries on international tours while performing national duties.

In an effort to mitigate the concerns of the national team cricketers and ensure their well being, OC has teamed up with Dhofar Insurance Company to offer its cricketers a first-of-its-kind sports-centric health insurance policy for a period of three years.

The sports-centric insurance policy was one of the major highlights of the partnership agreement inked between Oman Cricket and Dhofar Insurance Company recently at the OC headquarters in Al Amerat recently.

The agreement has wider benefits for the national cricket body, its staff and its assets and Duleep Mendis, chief development officer of Oman

Cricket, said: "We welcome Dhofar Insurance Company into our family and we hope this agreement will help us on all fronts."

Paul Sheridan, OC vice-president, said: "This is a mutually beneficial agreement and we hope that we could continue the relationship for a long time."

Sunil Kohli, CEO of Dhofar Insurance, said: "Cricket is a very popular game and we are proud of Oman national team's successes including winning the inaugural Gulf T20 Cup recently. We are honoured to be associated with the national team and this is our contribution to the national team. We will be there to support the team, be it in a small or big way and promise full support to them. Oman Cricket will be safe with us."

Alkesh Joshi, OC treasurer, said: "Among the major highlights of the partnership agreement is the one-of-its-kind health insurance policy for its national team players. This is a first for any national sports associations in the country and we are proud to have taken the pioneering step", he ended.



OC and Dhofar Insurance Company officials at the signing ceremony

PEGULA WINS IN SEOUL FOR SECOND TITLE OF SEASON



USA's Jessica Pegula celebrates with her winner's trophy. – AFP

Seoul: US top seed Jessica Pegula won the WTA Korean Open in Seoul on Sunday with a straight-sets win over China's Yuan Yue.

The 29-year-old, whose mother was born in Seoul, eased through 6-2, 6-3 for the fourth title of her career and second this season after Montreal in August.

World number four Pegula also

reached the finals in Doha and Tokyo this year.

"My mom is Korean and she was adopted from here so it's really special to be able to win here," Pegula said.

"In the last few years, as my ranking has gone up, I've definitely felt so much more support from the fans, a lot more than I expected

coming back here from five years ago. So it's really special."

Pegula, who reached a career-high world number three last year, has never managed to get past the quarterfinals in the four Grand Slams.

It was the first WTA final for 128th-ranked Yuan, 25, who has never reached a quarterfinal

before this week.

"Last time we played was a battle and this one was as well," Pegula said of their second meeting.

"You're really talented and I told you your ranking is going to go up. You told me it's your first final but I'm sure there will be many more." — AFP

Hurkacz wins thriller with Rublev to take Shanghai title

SHANGHAI: Hubert Hurkacz held his nerve in a dramatic tiebreak to defeat Andrey Rublev 6-3 3-6 7-6(8) in a thrilling final to win the Shanghai Masters on Sunday, his second ATP Masters 1000 title.

Hurkacz served up 21 aces to Rublev's 13, but Rublev responded with some powerful shots and the final could have gone either way before the Pole came out on top in an enthralling final set tiebreak.

"It was such a battle," Hurkacz said. "Especially emotionally. I had a match point and Andrey hit an amazing serve and then he had a match point and then I had some match points."

Fifth seed Rublev came into the final without having dropped a set, but that quickly changed when Hurkacz broke the Russian's serve to go 4-2 up and finished off the opening set with an ace.

Hurkacz has hit more aces than anyone on the ATP tour this season, and began in the same form in the first set, hitting seven aces to Rublev's two, but the Russian roared back.

Rublev broke Hurkacz's serve early in the second set but it was in the final set where the match really came to life. With Rublev serving at 5-4 down, and the game at deuce, the Russian lost his temper.

A movement from a photographer when Rublev lost a point and Hurkacz now with advantage, saw the umpire reprimand the Russian for lashing



Poland's Hubert Hurkacz (L) celebrates with the winner's trophy next to runner-up Russia's Andrey Rublev. – AFP

out angrily.

Rublev steadied himself to save match point and hold serve, and in the tiebreak he snatched early control to take a 3-0 lead.

Two aces from the Polish player kept him in touch and at 5-6 down he served another ace to save match point.

"It was back and forth and

such a tricky match. Andrey was playing some great shots. I was trying to respond," Hurkacz said.

Both players broke serve again in quick succession to level the tiebreak at 8-8, but it was Hurkacz who had the last word and broke Rublev's serve again to win the title.

"It was one of those matches

and I kept believing and I am super happy with how I managed at the end," Hurkacz said.

"It is such a big tournament and so much tradition. It is a huge event and I am really happy now."

Hurkacz, who won the Miami Open in 2021, will now move up to 11th in the ATP world rankings.

— Reuters

Bagnaia wins Indonesia Grand Prix

MANDALIKA, Indonesia: Ducati's Francesco Bagnaia battled heroically from 13th on the grid to win a thrilling Indonesia Grand Prix in Mandalika on Sunday, as he reclaimed the lead in the riders' championship after Jorge Martin crashed out.

Bagnaia crossed the line 0.306 seconds ahead of Aprilia's Maverick Vinales in second, while Yamaha's Fabio Quartararo, the 2021 world champion, finished third.

"I think we deserved a race like this. I just tried to do the maximum I could in the first few laps," said Bagnaia, who started in 13th after failing to qualify from Q1 in Saturday's qualifying session.

"I tried to take care of the tyres, then in the last laps I was a little out of pace, so I was controlling a lot."

Champion Bagnaia is back on top of the riders' standings with 346 points, with Martin (328) in second and VR46 Racing's Marco Bezzecchi (283)

in third.

Pramac Racing's Martin, who took the championship lead on Saturday after winning the sprint, started from the second row in sixth place but did not stay there long, rocketing off the line in hot conditions to take the lead after the very first turn.

But with the Spaniard cruising with a comfortable lead of over two seconds, his bike went from under him and he was dumped in the gravel, leaving him holding his head in his hands in disbelief at spurning the gilt-edged opportunity.

Pramac Racing had a day to forget, with Johann Zarco also crashing out to compound their misery.

After Martin crashed, Vinales was briefly in the lead but Bagnaia kept up his aggressive riding, slowly and steadily gaining ground on the Aprilia rider before blowing past him in the 20th lap.

— Reuters



Francesco Bagnaia celebrates with the winner's trophy. – AFP



Afghanistan's Mujeeb Ur Rahman celebrates after taking the wicket of Harry Brook. —Reuters



Afghanistan's Rashid Khan celebrates with Ikram Alikhil. —Reuters

Afghanistan defeat England in seismic World Cup shock

NEW DELHI: Afghanistan pulled off one of the greatest World Cup shocks on Sunday when they defeated defending champions England by 69 runs in New Delhi.

Chasing 285 to win, after opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz had hit a blistering 80, England were bowled out for 215 despite Harry Brook's 66 with spinners Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Rashid Khan claiming three wickets each.

The stunning upset gave Afghanistan just their second World Cup win to add to a lone victory over Scotland at the 2015 tournament.

They came into Sunday's clash having lost their opening two games in India and on a 14-match losing World Cup streak.

After Gurbaz and the recalled Ikram Alikhil, with 58, had given them a decent target to defend, Afghanistan's bowlers went to work, striking at regular intervals.

Jonny Bairstow (two) was lbw to Fazalhaq Farooqi in the second over before Joe Root was clean bowled by 22-year-old man of the match Mujeeb for 11. Mohammad Nabi got rid of Dawid Malan, who made 140 against Bangladesh, for 32 to precipitate a slide which saw England slump to 138-6.

Skipper Jos Buttler was clean bowled by seamer Naveen-ul-Haq for nine, Rashid Khan had Liam Livingstone lbw on 10 before Nabi also dismissed Sam Curran (10).

England were tied down, at one stage going more than eight overs without hitting a boundary until Brook managed the team's lone six of the innings in the 31st over.

Mujeeb sent back Chris Woakes before effectively sealing the game in his next over, having Brook caught behind by Alikhil with England at 169-8. Brook's 66 came off 61 balls with seven fours and a six. Late fireworks from Adil Rashid (20), Reece Topley (15) and Mark



Afghanistan's Rashid Khan celebrates with Mujeeb Ur Rahman and teammates after taking the wicket of England's.—Reuters

Wood (18) only served to take England past the 200-mark. Earlier, Gurbaz, 21, piled up his runs off 57 balls with eight fours and four sixes to register his eighth score in excess of fifty in his ODI career.

However, he was furious that he was unable to go on to make a sixth century when he was involved in a disastrous run-out mix-up with captain Hashmatullah Shahidi in the 19th over.

Gurbaz failed to make his ground and Buttler whipped off the bails from a throw by substitute fielder David Willey.

GURBAZ RUN-OUT ANGER
An angry Gurbaz smashed his bat into a chair

as he departed with his team on 122-3.

Gurbaz had needed just 33 balls to get to his half-century as Afghanistan, put into bat, stormed to 100 without loss from 77 deliveries.

Once Gurbaz was dismissed, England's spinners dragged the champions back into the contest in the middle overs.

The impressive Adil Rashid finished with 3-42 from his 10 overs having initially broken Afghanistan's 114-run opening stand when he had Ibrahim Zadran (28) caught.

But Alikhil chimed in with a 66-ball 58 after surviving being hit on the shoulder by a 147 km/h delivery from fast bowler Mark Wood. — AFP

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Framework for GCC-EU free trade pact discussed, says GCC Secretary General

The GCC-EU Ministerial Council meeting in Muscat placed a strong emphasis on trade relations between the European Union and the GCC.

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, OCT 15

A framework for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the European Union (EU) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has been discussed, according to GCC Secretary-General Jassim al Budawi.

Speaking to the press following the GCC-EU Ministerial Council meeting held in Muscat recently, Al Budawi explained that the previous free trade agreement negotiations between the two unions came to a halt in 2008.

“The Free Trade Agreement with the European Union has been in a state of suspension for some time now.

We have engaged in ongoing discussions with our European



The free trade agreement negotiations between between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council came to a halt in 2008.

counterparts, covering various topics, including the potential revival of these negotiations.

It has been over a decade since the suspension of the Free

Trade Agreement, and in order to resume talks, a fresh agreement is necessary.

During this period, significant economic and political changes,

as well as new challenges, have emerged. Hence, restarting negotiations with the European party will require several steps.”

Al Budawi also shared that the

GCC is in the process of finalising agreements with several countries at the moment. “We are delighted to announce that we recently took the initial steps towards a landmark trade agreement with Pakistan, marking the first of its kind in a long while,” he said.

“Furthermore, we are currently in the final stages of negotiations to establish several agreements with different countries in the near future.

The Gulf Cooperation Council nations have, by the grace of God, achieved both regional and international economic recognition.

This is an achievement that all Gulf residents can take pride in.”

The ministerial meeting, which took place in Muscat last week, placed a strong emphasis on trade relations between the European Union and the GCC. In a statement, the Co-Chairs of the EU and the GCC underlined the importance of further strengthening ongoing discussions on trade and investment, especially in areas that contribute to economic

integration, modernisation, renewable energy, digital trade, and the development of sustainable global supply chains.

The ministers of the EU and the GCC called for the improvement of the international trading system in collaboration with the World Trade Organization (WTO), and welcomed the discussion to establish the India-Middle East – Europe Economic Corridor.

Future dialogues will focus on regulatory cooperation, improving the implementation and effectiveness of provisions on sustainable development, and further strengthening cooperation on intellectual property rights protection, customs, and anti-fraud, counterfeiting, and smuggling measures.

According to data from the European Commission, trade volume between the GCC and the EU amounted to €97.1 billion in 2020, making the EU the second-largest trade partner for the GCC, accounting for 12.3 per cent of the GCC’s overall global trade that year.

Commercial banks post 44 pc profit surge in first 9 months of 2023

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, OCT 15

Oman’s commercial banks have posted a remarkable surge in profits for the first three quarters of 2023, driven by rising interest rates, accelerated economic growth, and enhanced operational efficiency.

The cumulative profit of RO 177.3 million for Oman’s commercial banks in the first nine months of 2023 represents a significant 44.2% increase from the corresponding period in 2022.

Oman Arab Bank leads the pack with profits of RO 17.9 million, a notable 68.9% increase from its 2022 performance.

Ahli Bank follows suit with profits of RO 29.29 million, marking a 17% gain compared to 2022. Sohar International Bank reports a robust profit of RO 45.69 million, signalling an impressive 62.7% growth compared to 2022. BankDhofar showcases profits of RO 31.022 million, depicting an 18.87% increase from 2022.

Bank Nizwa registers profits of RO 11.68 million, marking a steady 9% growth compared to 2022. National Bank of Oman posted profits of RO 43.33 million, representing a 22% increase from the prior year.

The upturn in profits can be attributed to several key factors: Rising Interest Rates: The Central Bank of Oman’s decision to increase interest rates has notably amplified loan yields. Accelerated Economic Growth: Oman’s economy has experienced significant growth in 2023, resulting in a heightened demand for credit.

Enhanced Operational Efficiency: Omani commercial banks have refined their operational



Picture for illustration

procedures, ultimately reducing costs.

The substantial profits reported by Omani commercial banks bode well for economic expansion.

These financial institutions plan to reinvest their profits, which will, in turn, catalyse increased investment and overall growth in the Omani economy. Recently, Fitch Ratings upgraded the Long-Term Issuer Default Ratings (IDRs) for five prominent Omani banks: Bank Muscat, Bank Dhofar, Sohar International Bank, Ahli Bank, and National Bank of Oman.

This positive shift aligns with Oman’s sovereign rating upgrade on September 25, 2023. It reflects Fitch’s belief in an improved likelihood of support from Omani authorities and improved business conditions that will enhance the intrinsic credit profiles of these banks.

These upgrades also hold promise for the Omani economy, as they will bolster investment and foster growth.

CMA guidelines for marketing of bancassurance products

MUSCAT: The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has introduced new regulations governing the marketing of insurance products through banks.

These regulations establish a robust framework to manage the relationship between insurance companies and financial institutions, while also safeguarding the interests of policyholders.

The new rules outline clear and effective channels for marketing insurance products, with the aim of enhancing transparency and ensuring that policyholders have a comprehensive understanding of the terms and conditions of their insurance coverage.

This initiative is seen as a pivotal and positive step in curbing unscrupulous practices associated with the sale of insurance products through banks, and ultimately reducing potential disputes between policyholders and the banking sector when filing insurance claims.

The CMA’s decision empowers relevant authorities to commence implementation of these regulations 90 days from their publication date.



This move underscores the Authority’s commitment to enhancing the marketing and distribution of insurance products through banks, recognising the critical role that these channels play in expanding the accessibility of insurance products across various governorates in Oman.

This wider reach is expected to foster greater awareness of insurance as an integral component of the financial inclusion landscape.

The regulations were formulated after extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including the Central Bank of Oman, the Oman Insurance Association, and the Omani Banks Association.

Additionally, international

best practices were leveraged to shape the regulations, ensuring alignment with global standards.

The regulations stipulate that insurance companies must obtain the CMA’s approval before marketing any insurance products through banks.

Furthermore, it is prohibited for multiple insurance companies to market the same insurance product with the same bank for specific insurance activities, such as life insurance, general insurance, or those related to small and medium enterprises.

Additionally, insurance companies are required to retain a minimum percentage of net premiums for insurance products marketed through banks, with a higher threshold for certain types of insurance products. — ONA

National Finance and Dar Al Atta’a collaborate for Tamkeen initiative



National Finance and Dar Al Atta’a signed an agreement to support its ‘Tamkeen’ programme.

MUSCAT: Committed to enriching lives and boosting communities across the Sultanate of Oman, National Finance recently signed an agreement with Dar Al Atta’a to support its ‘Tamkeen’ programme.

As part of this initiative, the organisations will extend relief to families hailing from Sanaa Bani Ghafir in Al Khabourah who were adversely affected by Cyclone Shaheen.

The agreement was signed by Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, and Maryam bint Issa al Zadjalayah, Chairperson of Dar Al Atta’a, in the presence of key personnel from both organisations.

This partnership marks a significant milestone in the leading financial institution’s active participation in social welfare initiatives, under its ‘Imtidad’ corporate social responsibility wing, that contribute to the community’s well-being and economic progress.

“National Finance is deeply committed to supporting the communities we serve,” Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi commented on the occasion.

He added, “As part of ‘Imtidad’, we are pleased to join hands with Dar Al Atta’a to help improve the living conditions and quality of life of cyclone-affected families in Sanaa Bani Ghafir.

Together, we will work tirelessly to support the community on its path to recovery.

This collaboration reflects our deep understanding of our social responsibility and our aim to provide a helping hand

to uplift communities across the nation.” Cyclone Shaheen wreaked havoc in several regions across the country in 2021, leaving remote towns devastated in its wake.

As part of the ‘Tamkeen’ programme, supported by National Finance, Dar Al Atta’a aims to assist families of Sanaa Bani Ghafir in Al Khabourah by providing financial aid to improve their economic standing, offering essential services and reestablishing a safe residential area for the community to thrive in.

The value of this partnership is enriched by the longstanding relationship between National Finance and Dar Al Atta’a.

Having collaborated on several charitable and welfare initiatives over the years, they have been instrumental in empowering communities and providing aid for the flourishing of different segments in the society.

Their combined efforts have spanned across community welfare, education, women’s empowerment campaigns and green sustainability initiatives, and have achieved exceptional results in the past.

National Finance’s support for the ‘Tamkeen’ initiative demonstrates its unwavering commitment to social responsibility and its dedication to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals and families facing adversity.

Through its participation in a diverse range of social welfare initiatives under ‘Imtidad’, the company strives to play an integral role in the country’s progress.

Rediscover power and performance with GMC Yukon and Sierra

MUSCAT: In an effort to make luxury and performance accessible to all, Moosa Abdul Rahman Hassan & Co is pleased to offer the GMC Yukon and Sierra at remarkable starting prices. With these incredible deals, now is the perfect time to bring home the vehicle you’ve always desired...

The GMC Yukon and Sierra have long been celebrated for their bold design, cutting-edge technology, and unparalleled performance. These vehicles are engineered to elevate your driving experience with every mile.

From the striking exterior to the meticulously designed interiors, both models offer an impressive blend of style and functionality.

“We’re excited to bring these outstanding starting prices to our valued customers. The GMC Yukon and Sierra are renowned for their capability and sophistication. With these offers, we aim to make these incredible vehicles more accessible to our community.

It’s all about delivering exceptional value and enhancing the driving experience,” said Mohammed Faisal Nawaz, Marketing Manager at Moosa Abdul Rahman Hassan & Co.

2023 GMC Yukon, GMC Yukon AT4 provides premium off-road inspired design cues to match its strong capability.

It features a unique front fascia that both visually carries the rugged all-terrain look and supports off-road capability. Coupled with the available four-corner Air Ride Adaptive Suspension, the AT4 can raise



and offer an additional 2 inches (50 mm) of ground clearance.

When at this maximum height, the Yukon AT4 offers a nearly 32-degree approach angle for added off-road capability.

AT4 provides a contrast to Denali’s chrome-oriented look around the exterior, with trim characterised by body colour or dark accents throughout, as well as a pair of red recovery hooks, similar to the Sierra AT4.

Key Features of the 2023 GMC Yukon: Unmatched Power: The Yukon offers a range of powerful engine options, ensuring you have the right amount of muscle under the hood for any adventure.

Luxurious Interior: Experience the epitome of comfort with a spacious and meticulously designed interior that boasts premium materials and the latest in-car technology.

Advanced Technology: Stay connected on the go with a cutting-edge infotainment system, wireless charging, and a large touchscreen display.

Safety Beyond Compare: The 2023 Yukon comes equipped with a comprehensive suite of advanced safety features, providing peace of mind for you and your loved ones.

Exceptional Value: With its new starting price, the 2023 Yukon offers unbeatable value for a luxury SUV of its caliber.

Sierra Crew Cab: Sierra Crew Cab, the ultimate blend of spacious passenger comfort and rugged versatility.

Designed to meet the diverse needs of today’s drivers, the Sierra Crew Cab combines ample interior space with the power and capability that GMC is renowned for: **Unparalleled Passenger Comfort:** The Sierra Crew Cab boasts an interior that redefines passenger comfort. With its spacious rear seating area, passengers can enjoy a generous

amount of legroom, ensuring a comfortable ride even on long journeys. The four full-size doors provide easy access to both the front and rear seating areas, making it effortless for everyone to get in and out of the vehicle.

Varied Trim Levels: GMC understands that every driver is unique. That’s why the Sierra Crew Cab is available in a range of trim levels, each offering a distinct set of features and options.

Whether you prioritise luxury, capability, or technology, there’s a Sierra Crew Cab trim that suits your preferences.

Advanced Technology: Stay connected and informed with the Sierra Crew Cab’s advanced technology features.

The touchscreen infotainment system provides easy access to entertainment and navigation, while smartphone integration ensures you’re always connected on the go.

Chery International summit creates a green future

MUSCAT: In the context of “dual carbon”, protecting the environment, green travel, the development of energy-efficient and new energy vehicles have become a global consensus.

Chery is committed to empowering green travel through technological innovation, will hold the “2023 Chery International User Summit” from October 15 to 20. Green and environmental protection will also be a crucial agenda for this international grand event.

During the Shanghai Auto Show in April this year, Chery International Company unveiled the “8023” Plan and the Green Public Welfare Fund.

At this 2023 Chery International User Summit, Chery will implement this charitable initiative and plan to

sign agreements with the UNICEF (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund) and the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature).

They will work together to provide assistance in food, clean water, health, and education for children in impoverished countries and regions.

Simultaneously, they will offer nature-based solutions for the protection of global forests, oceans, wetlands, and wildlife, embodying the “Public Welfare Chery” initiative and fulfilling the responsibility and commitment to global green sustainable development.

Over the course of 26 years of development, Chery has deeply implemented the green concept.

Emphasis has been placed on pollution prevention, energy

conservation, and clean production, with green manufacturing leading the way.

This has allowed Chery to progress from being Chery in Wuhu to being Chery in the world.

During the “2023 Chery International User Summit”, Chery will launch a global public welfare initiative in Wuhu, joining hands with various stakeholders in the city to promote environmental protection.

With the aid of globally advanced green technology, Chery aims to assist in the steady economic development of the city and the continued improvement of the ecological environment, co-building a green and ecological city.

In this autumn, mid-October, Chery’s overseas users, influential bloggers, and global mainstream

media will gather in Wuhu, China, to participate in the “2023 Chery International User Summit”.

Mass Ride Event
Through a public service ride event that captures the world’s attention, we aim to depict a new trend of green living, working together to co-operate a more beautiful and healthier global environment.

At the Mass Ride Event, Chery’s Eco-Products Fair will vividly embody its brand concept of “Green, Technology, Family, Companionship”.

A diverse range of intelligent lifestyle companions, Chery’s green and environmentally friendly new energy vehicle models will come together, offering a vibrant expression of a green, healthy, and beautiful lifestyle.

Ominvest Group celebrates Arab Environment Day

MUSCAT: Ominvest, Oman’s distinguished investment holding company, in collaboration with the Environment Society of Oman (ESO), recently organised a beach cleaning campaign in celebration of Arab Environment Day, an occasion that occurs annually on October 14.

The beach cleaning endeavour, conducted at Al Hail Beach, opposite Al Sayyida Fatima bint Ali Al Said Mosque, aligns with the group’s purpose of “Transforming Businesses to Enrich Societies”. The initiative’s

primary objective is to contribute to the preservation of Oman’s pristine coastal environments.

The event saw the participation of volunteers from Ominvest group companies, including U-Capital, Jabreen Capital, Oris, Alizz Islamic Bank, Liva, National Finance, National Security Services Group (NSSG), Thawani, and Takaful Oman Insurance, reflecting the Group’s commitment to fostering environmental stewardship.

This year’s campaign also witnessed the participation of over 20 students from Seeb



Arab Environment Day

International School.

The volunteers managed to clean up approximately 638 kgs of litter from the coastline.

Sanjay Kawatra, the Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer of Ominvest, expressed his thoughts on the initiative.

“We are delighted to see more than 100 of our employees, the younger generation, and the broader community come together to protect Oman’s pristine coastal environments.

This beach cleaning initiative is a testament to Ominvest’s unwavering commitment to ESG and more specifically, environmental stewardship and social responsibility.”

Eradicating debris detrimental to marine life, such as discarded fishing gear, and plastic aligns with Ominvest’s focus on

environmental stewardship.

Eliminating waste that poses a threat to the coastal waters also makes beaches safer for activities like swimming and fishing, thus promoting tourism and local economic growth.

Ominvest has consistently championed environmental and social support as integral components of its ESG community support initiatives.

The company is unwavering in its dedication to environmental preservation and the cultivation of a sustainable future for the planet.



Bank Muscat 9 months net profit climbs to RO 158.88 million

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, OCT 15

Bank Muscat posted a net profit of RO 158.88 million for the nine months ended September 30, 2023, compared to RO 148.29 million reported during the same period in 2022, an increase of 7.1 per cent.

Announcing its preliminary unaudited results for first nine months of the year, the lender reported that Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net Income from Islamic Financing stood at RO 280.98 million this year, up from RO 254.93 million for the same period in 2022, an increase of 10.2 per cent.

Non-interest income was RO 100.23 million, as compared to RO 100.69 million for the same period in 2022. Non-interest income for the previous comparative period included a one-time gain from the sale of investments of around RO 8 million. Excluding this, non-interest income has witnessed an increase of 8.1 per cent.

Operating expenses for the nine months period ended September 30, 2023 was RO 146.48 million as



Bank Muscat HO

compared to RO 139.85 million for the same period in 2022, an increase of 4.7 per cent. Net Impairment for credit and other losses were RO 46.91 million, as against RO 41.58 million for the same period in 2022.

Net Loans and advances including Islamic financing

receivables increased by 6.9 per cent to RO 9,869 million as against RO 9,229 million as at September 30, 2022.

Customer deposits including Islamic Customer deposits increased by 8.9 per cent to RO 9,485 million as against RO 8,709 million as at September 30, 2022.

The full results for the nine months period ended September 30, 2023 along with the complete set of unaudited financial statements will be released following the approval of the Board of Directors of the Bank at its meeting scheduled later during October 2023.

Symposium on bariatric surgery held

MUSCAT: Oman International Hospital has announced that the first international symposium on revisional metabolic and bariatric surgery is underway at the hospital. The groundbreaking 3-day event brings together leading experts in the fields of metabolic and bariatric surgery.

A distinguished panel of surgeons from Spain, Prof. Torres, Dr. Sanchez Pernaute, and Dr. Muguerza, will address the symposium in addition to the experts from Oman and they have earned international recognition for their extensive experience and contributions to the field.

The symposium is being attended by both online and offline attendees as well as experts from around the globe.

The event will provide attendees with the opportunity to gain an understanding of the latest developments in metabolic revisions as well as bariatric surgery, as well as hearing from professionals in these fields.



The key objective of this symposium is to provide an opportunity for healthcare professionals, surgeons, researchers, and industry experts to share ideas, discuss challenges, and explore innovative approaches in the field of revisional metabolism and bariatric surgery.

The event will feature keynote lectures, panel discussions, two operations with their unique techniques being broadcast

worldwide, and networking sessions, all of which aim to stimulate collaboration and enhance knowledge exchange.

"We are delighted to be hosting the 1st International Symposium on Revisional Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery at Oman International Hospital," said Dr Roberto Cayon (Medical Director and Head of Surgery)."

The symposium will serve to provide professionals in the

field with an opportunity to interact, learn from each other, and ultimately improve patient outcomes through the application of the most modern methods in the field of bariatric surgery."

Marcelo Pereira, CEO of Oman International Hospital, stated, "We are honoured to host global experts at the International Symposium on Revisional Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery.

We are committed to advancing patient-centric care through international collaboration and innovation in revisional metabolic and bariatric surgery, aiming to make a meaningful impact on the lives of patients worldwide."

Oman International Hospital is a leading healthcare institution dedicated to providing exceptional medical care to the community.

With state-of-the-art facilities, a skilled team of healthcare professionals, and a commitment to patient well-being, we strive to deliver top-notch medical services.



GCET holds graduation ceremony for 350 graduates

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, OCT 15

Under the auspices of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, the Global College of Engineering and Technology (GCET) celebrated the graduation of the 6th batch of its students on, October 11 at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Muscat.

The prestigious event was attended by Professor Sir Steve West CBE the Vice-Chancellor, President and CEO of the University of West of England (UWE), UK for awards' conferment. A total number of 350 graduated this year from 14 different academic programmes in the Engineering and Technology fields that are offered by GCET in collaboration with UWE.

In his speech, Prof Geoffrey Elliot Dean of GCET congratulated the graduates on reaching their graduation day. He said: "You have overcome many challenges and tests in recent years. You have been strong and committed to achieving success for you and your family.

I commend you for your commitment, passion, and drive, to achieve your rightful reward".

He added: "I know that learning does not end by graduation. It is a continuous life-long process.

We at GCET hope you have also developed as a person".

From his side, Prof Sir Steve West Vice-Chancellor of UWE stressed on the importance of the partnership between GCET and UWE and the development both institutions have undergone over the years.

He said: "At UWE we believe in the power of partnerships, that success is best achieved together.

Our partnership with the Global College of Engineering and Technology is continues to grow year-on-year with new programmes and increased student numbers.

UWE is committed to GCET in developing and delivering an educational system that is internationally recognised for high quality; GCET offers degree programmes that are unique in the Sultanate of Oman, including Computer Security, Artificial Intelligence, Robotics and Environmental Management".

Taif bin Nasser al Alawi one of GCET's 6th batch graduates expressed his happiness and pride feelings to reach this glorious day, saying: "This is for sure a day to be remembered! There are no enough words to express how we feel in this day as there are mixture of feelings.

We are happy and proud to become graduates, but at the same time we feel responsible as we are now in the points where we have to contribute to the development of our beloved Oman. Over the years of our study at GCET, we have gained lots of values and attributes which make us ready to join the developmental journey in all sectors and do the role we are supposed to.

I am sure that we are all ready and up for the challenge!" It is worth mentioning that GCET had celebrated the graduation of around 1200 students over the past years since it started its journey in the higher education sector in the Sultanate of Oman in 2014.

Furthermore, the college will be celebrating its 10th anniversary of prosperous and success in the Sultanate of Oman, showcasing its contributions towards developing the educational system in Oman and moving it to a global level.

Case against Raysut Cement referred to court

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, OCT 15

As part of the regulatory role of the Capital Market Authority (CMA) towards public joint stock companies and referring to the report filed previously by the CMA to the Public Prosecution regarding suspected financial and administrative violations committed in Raysut Cement Company SAOG, the Public Prosecution, after completion of investigation, decided to refer the public case to the competent court.

The authority said in a post on Sunday that the Public Prosecution referred the case for trial after concluding its investigations. The

authority's report cited "suspected financial and administration violations" committed within publicly-traded Raysut Cement, the largest cement manufacturer in the Sultanate of Oman.

Last December, invoking its powers under the Commercial Companies Law and the Securities Law, the market regulator intervened when Raysut Cement failed to suitably address concerns over "material misrepresentations" uncovered by the authority in the group's financial reporting for Q2 2022.

The authority stepped in to dissolve the existing Board of Directors — powers it has exercised only for the second time in its history —

and instituted a new 'temporary board' with a mandate to restore the company's organisational and operational stability and thereafter to also address all the shortcomings that led to its recent upheaval.

Raysut Cement posted a consolidated loss of RO 97.634 million in 2022 versus a loss of RO 13.585 a year earlier. The parent company racked up a loss of RO 93.761 million in 2022, up from RO 12.924 million in 2021. Losses for the nine months of 2023 were slashed to RO 3.35 million.

The interim Board of Directors continues to oversee governance issues at Raysut Cement following the discovery of financial anomalies that threatened to destabilise the group.



Exploring business models for scalability

In the rapidly changing world of startups, scalability remains at the core of long-term success. It's not just about growing a business; it's about expanding it efficiently, without a proportional rise in costs. For a startup to thrive, a scalable business model is a prerequisite.

But what does it mean to have a "scalable" model, and how can entrepreneurs identify and implement it?

1. What is scalability?
Simply put, scalability denotes the ability of a business to grow and manage increased demand efficiently. A scalable business can increase its operations and sales while maintaining or even improving its performance levels.

2. Key components of scalable business models:

■ **Recurring revenue:**
Businesses with subscription models, like software-as-a-service



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(SaaS) companies, often have an easier path to scalability. They can predict their income with reasonable accuracy and can adjust their resources accordingly.

■ **High gross margins:**
Companies that maintain high gross margins can reinvest more funds into their operations, enabling faster growth.

■ **Operational efficiency:**
As businesses grow, they should seek ways to reduce costs without compromising on the quality or delivery of services/products. Automation and technology can play pivotal roles here.

■ **Flexible infrastructure:**
The ability to quickly scale up or down in response to market demands without incurring significant costs is crucial.

This often relates to having a flexible operational infrastructure, which could mean anything from cloud-based servers to contract-based employment.

3. Popular scalable business models:

■ **Franchise model:**
Companies like McDonald's have shown how effective franchising can be.

By allowing others to operate under your brand name, you can grow without directly managing every outlet.

■ **Freemium model:** Used often by online platforms and apps, this model offers basic services for free while charging for premium features.

■ **Dropshipping:**
E-commerce businesses can scale without holding inventory by having products shipped directly from the manufacturer to the customer.

■ **Affiliate marketing:** By promoting other people's products and earning a commission for every sale made through your referral, businesses can scale without creating their own

products.

4. Challenges to scalability:
Even with a scalable model, businesses may face challenges. Hiring at a pace that matches growth, maintaining company culture, ensuring consistent quality, and managing cash flows can all become more complex as a company expands.

5. The role of innovation:
Scalability isn't a one-time thing. As markets evolve, so should business models. Continuous innovation can lead to the development of new revenue streams and can open doors to untapped markets.

6. Seeking expertise:
To navigate the complexities of scaling, seeking expertise, whether in the form of mentors, advisers, or strategic hires, can be invaluable. These experts can provide insights into market trends, operational efficiencies, and potential pitfalls. In

conclusion, while every startup aspires to grow, not all growth is created equal. The right business model can make the difference between unsustainable expansion and steady, efficient scalability. As the saying goes, "It's not about working harder; it's about working smarter." In the context of startups, this means identifying and executing a business model that allows for scalable growth.

As we transition from understanding the intricacies of business models, it's essential to remember that businesses aren't built in isolation.

The relationships we forge can significantly impact our entrepreneurial journey. Curious about how? Stay tuned for our next article, "The Role of Networking in Entrepreneurship," where we delve into the power of connections and how they can elevate your startup to new heights.

IMF closes Morocco meetings without consensus on funding terms, conflict language

International Monetary Fund countries on Saturday failed to agree on a US-backed plan to boost IMF funding without giving more shares to China and other big emerging markets, but pledged a "meaningful increase" in lending resources by year-end.

As IMF and World Bank annual meetings in Morocco closed, a statement from IMF's steering committee chair called for new quota contributions that would "at least maintain the Fund's current resource envelope" as \$185 billion worth of bilateral borrowing arrangements expire.

Quotas, contributed by member countries in proportion to their shareholding, make up only about 40 per cent of the IMF's roughly \$1 trillion in lending firepower, and the Fund says a larger proportion of quotas would provide more lending certainty as economic shocks grow.

NEW QUOTA

The US Treasury plan for countries to contribute new quota funds in proportion to their current shareholdings — unchanged since 2010 — had won support from G7 countries, India and a number of other emerging markets.

China, whose economy is now three times the size it was in 2010, continued to push for more IMF shares.

People's Bank of China Governor Pan Gongsheng said in a statement to the IMFC meeting that Beijing wanted both a quota increase and a realignment of shares "to reflect members' relative weights in the global economy, and strengthen the voice and representation of emerging markets and developing countries."

IMFC members agreed to add a third IMF Executive Board chair to represent African countries, a key sweetener for the US "equi-proportional quota plan. Pan said China supported this move but it was a separate issue from the shareholding



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World Bank President Ajay Banga and IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva attend a signing ceremony with Thailand to host the 2026 IMF and the World Bank annual meetings on the last day of this year's meeting in Marrakech. — Reuters

formula.
The IMFC chair's statement left the door open to a possible adoption of the US money now-shares later plan, noting that "transitional arrangements" may be needed. It also called for the IMF's Executive Board to propose options for changes to the shareholding formula by June 2025. This would accelerate the next five-year review of quotas and meet IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva's call for a deadline on adjusting its shareholding to preserve its credibility.

A US Treasury official told reporters that despite no firm agreement, there was good

progress on the quota issue, with countries talking through their positions and a deal "increasingly likely" by October.

WAR CLOUDS

Forging a deal to boost the IMF's \$1 trillion in lending firepower to enable it to respond to another large scale economic crisis was one of the biggest tasks for Georgieva at the meetings in the desert tourist hub of Marrakech overshadowed somewhat.

The IMFC's chair, Spanish Economy Minister Nadia Calvino, said members were again unable to reach consensus on a joint communique amid

disagreements over conflict language, despite many member countries condemning both Russia's war on Ukraine and the killing of civilians in both Israel and Gaza.

But the week was overshadowed by the growing conflict between Israel and Gaza, and Georgieva closed the event with an ominous warning that it was adding to global economic uncertainty.

"I can say the shock people have felt, it came in our meetings," Georgieva said.

"What we see, of course, is a recognition that this is yet another source of uncertainty," she said, adding that much

would depend on its scope and duration.

The World Bank's governing body also was unable to issue a joint communique, though it noted in a statement Development Committee Chair the United Arab Emirates that "most members" supported G20 leaders' language on the war in Ukraine.

The Development Committee formally endorsed the World Bank's new vision "to create a world free of poverty on a livable planet," aimed at expanding its mission to climate change, pandemics, fragile states and other global challenges.

— Reuters

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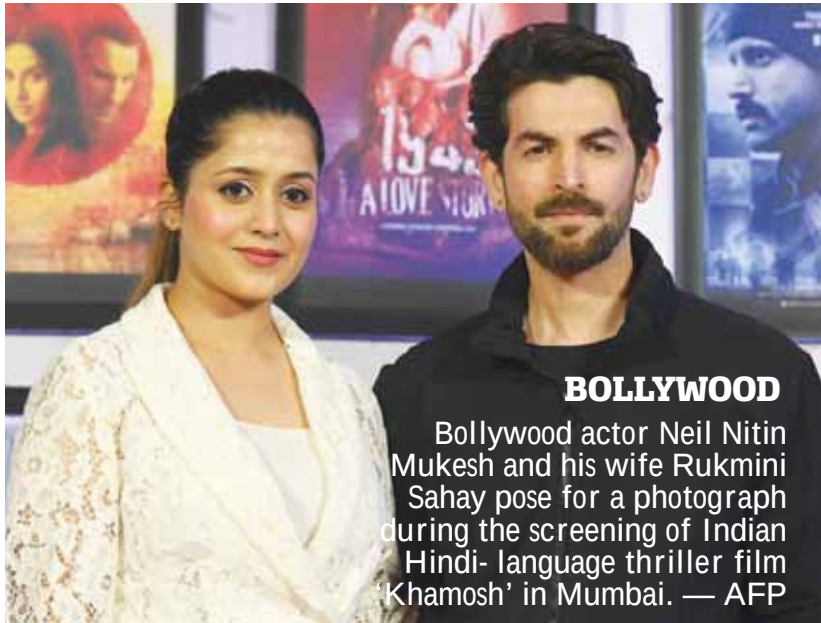
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‘Al Manjur’ takes Oman to Kenya International Sports Film Festival

BY BALQEES ALORAIMI

The film ‘Al-Manjur’, directed by Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi is a film from the Sultanate of Oman taking part in the fifth edition of the Kenya International Sports Film Festival. The festival, from October 26 to 29, carries the theme ‘Sports unites society, and sports films inspire society.’ This prestigious event received an overwhelming 1,422 film submissions from 110 countries, with a panel of experts meticulously selecting the best entries. ‘Al-Manjur’ delves into the world of Omani Zamat, providing a captivating look into how these teams prepare for competition. The film explores the meticulous preparations, the suitable venues, and the unique judging criteria used in these competitions. It also highlights the

enchanting melodies of ‘Al-Manjur’ distinctive voice, which resonate deep within the hearts of the audience, all while maintaining the suspenseful and engaging style of a documentary. The film has made a significant impact on the international film circuit. It has participated in over 15 film festivals worldwide, earning numerous accolades. Domestically, it secured the prestigious Best Omani Film Award at the Al Sharqiyah Film Festival and claimed second place in the documentary category at the Al Dakhiliyah Film Festival. Internationally, the film received the Audience Award at the Tire Film Festival in Lebanon. This film also made appearances at the Fourth Casablanca International Film Festival, the Eleventh India Film Festival in India,



the Hurghada Youth Film Festival in Egypt, and the Love, Peace, and Freedom Film Festival in the United States of America. ‘Al-Manjur’ was crafted under the direction of Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi with a screenplay by Saeed bin Sulaiman al Wahaibi. The talented crew included the director of photography Mohammed al Ruqaishi, with support from Younis al Raisi, Khaled al Jaradi, and

Ibrahim al Shabibi. Adnan al Mujaini was responsible for the montage and mixing, with assistant director Adnan al Mujaini. Abeer al Qutaiti handled the translation, and Hamad al Mujaini coordinated the efforts. The film was a collaborative effort between Anwar al Ruzaiqi, Fatima al Hina, Amira al Balushi, and Qaiser al Hina. The Al Batinah Film Festival and the Omani Film Society produced the film.





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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Skygazers watch 'Ring of Fire' eclipse over Western Hemisphere

SKYGAZERS ACROSS the Americas turned their faces upwards on Saturday for a rare celestial event: an annular solar eclipse. A crowd of people wearing protective eyewear gathered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, one of many across the western United States watching as the Moon passed between the Sun and Earth at its furthest point from our planet.

Since it is so distant, it did not cover the Sun completely, creating a "ring of fire" effect that brought cheers from the crowd in Albuquerque.

"It's majestic. We're in awe," said one viewer in Albuquerque, Shannon Cozad.

In the course of just a few hours the most striking "path of the annularity" was crossing a handful of major cities, including Eugene, Oregon and San Antonio, Texas, with partial eclipse phases lasting an hour or two before and after.

"It's kind of like a black hole," said Mubaraq Sokunbi, an excited eight-year-old who was at a hot air balloon festival in Albuquerque with his family. "The moon covers the sun and then there's a ring around it."

At any given location, the eclipse will be visible from between 30 seconds and five minutes — but people were urged to take safety precautions and use solar viewing

glasses, and never regular sunglasses, to preserve their vision.

"Do NOT look at the Sun through a camera lens, telescope, binoculars, or any other optical device while wearing eclipse glasses or using a handheld solar viewer — the concentrated solar rays will burn through the filter and cause serious eye injury," NASA said.

The eclipse was crossing into Mexico and Central America, then into South America through Colombia and northern Brazil before ending at sunset in the Atlantic Ocean.

- SOUNDING ROCKETS -
The event also serves as a dress



rehearsal before a total eclipse set for April 2024.

Both eclipses are going to be "absolutely breathtaking for science," said Madhulika Guhathakurta, a heliophysics programme scientist.

Solar eclipses have a noticeable effect on the upper atmosphere, such as the ionosphere, which is full of charged particles and responsible for reflecting and refracting radio waves.

"Although the atmospheric effects of solar eclipses have been studied for over 50

years, many unanswered questions remain," said Guhathakurta.

To study these effects, NASA was launching three rockets on Saturday from the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico to gather data on the electric and magnetic fields, electron density and temperature.

A total eclipse took place in 2017 in the United States. After next April's total eclipse, there will not be another until 2044, while the next annular eclipse will be in 2046. — **AFP**



FILM

Team behind 'Chicken Run' sequel hail stop-motion film-making

THE DIRECTOR OF a long-awaited sequel to stop-motion classic "Chicken Run" believes the "unique" film-making technique has enduring cinematic appeal, as the new film premiered in Britain on Saturday.

"Chicken Run: Dawn of the Nugget", from Aardman Studios — the British animation studio behind "Wallace and Gromit" — had a big-screen debut at the London Film Festival ahead of its release on Netflix on December 15.

The beloved original in 2000 — a spoof on wartime prison escape dramas, about a flock of chickens fleeing the clutches of a sadistic farmer



— remains the highest-grossing stop-motion animation of all time.

The painstaking film-making method involves physically manipulating objects — in this case puppets of chickens, other animals and human characters — frame-by-frame to create the illusion of movement.

Sam Fell, the director behind the follow-up, expects it to prove similarly popular on the streaming platform because people still crave "the handmade" even as soci-

ety becomes ever more technological.

"Stop motion is truly handmade, it's a very tactile thing, and a piece of stop-motion animation is a one-off event that's been captured on camera — it's lightning in a bottle," he told AFP ahead of its red carpet unveiling. For the film's production designer Darren Dubicki, the use of physical materials in the process helps forge a special relationship with audiences.

"When you see characters made from materials that

you're kind of used to... there's a warmth and charm to it that really appeals," he said.

- 'LIKE A HEIST FILM' -

"Dawn of the Nugget" sees returning lead characters Ginger and Rocky safe on an island bird sanctuary, but with a daughter, Molly, who is itching to see the world but gets trapped on a factory farm.

Fell and Aardman Studios have been labouring over the much-anticipated sequel for six years, carefully plotting how to bring their cherished creations back to the screen for another action-packed adventure.

"In the end, the thing that cracked it was a simple line... 'this time they're breaking in'," the director explained.

"It just conjured up a new kind of movie for Aardman, like a break-in movie, like a heist film, and all of the promise of that premise."

Finishing the film took so long in part because of the Covid pandemic, which required some special measures for the crew — some of whom worked on the original — as well as the puppets.

"Once a chicken had been

animated, it had to go into quarantine. So there was a chicken quarantine area with UV lights, where the chicken would be out of action for three weeks!" recalled Fell.

Dubicki, one of those to work on the original, as a graphic artist, was left amazed by the elaborate sophistication of the puppets used in stop-motion today.

"You see the character in its entirety — it's a lovely, simple, cartoonish silhouette — but under the hood, it's like The Terminator. It's amazing," he said.

- 'MAGICAL WORLD' -

The veteran film-maker praised the animation team in particular for their ability to "visualise how characters can move and be portrayed".

"It still blows my mind 'cos I'm not an animator... you have a voice to a character from actors, but the actual performance is coming from the animator and it's just (a) magical world," Dubicki added.

Among those lending their voices to the sequel are Thandiwe Newton as Ginger, Zachary Levi as Rocky, Bella Ramsey as Molly and veteran

British star Imelda Staunton returning as Bunty.

The original movie, which featured Mel Gibson voicing Rocky, was commended for its feminist messaging as well as action sequences, with the sequel team hoping another "female-centric film" will be equally well-received.

It could also prove a boon to vegetarianism.

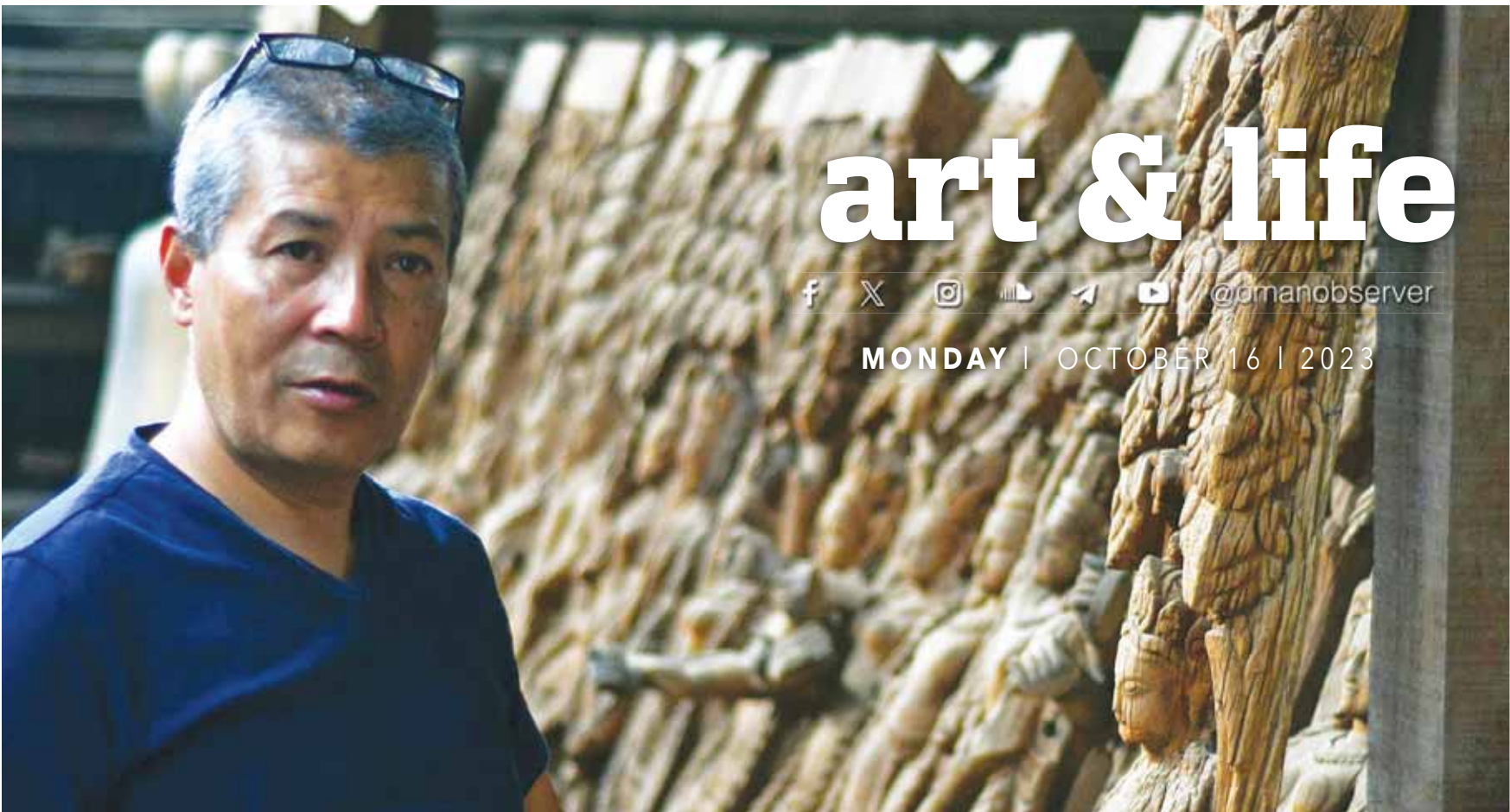
Fell revealed that dedicating so many years of his life to telling a chicken-led story had prompted him to stop eating the birds.

"I've spent a long time living as a chicken basically, so I've kind of seen the world from that point of view," he said.

But the director noted he was not imploring others to follow suit, and he remains realistic about the film's likely impact amid widespread factory farming worldwide.

"The 'Dawn of the Nugget' really is just this gigantic, terrifying jeopardy for all of chickenkind now," he said of the plot.

"We wanted the challenge to be bigger and badder than the first film," Fell added, before noting: "I don't think people will stop eating nuggets after this film". — **AFP**



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LIFESTYLE

Nepal quake sparks revival of traditional craft skills

NEPAL'S DEADLY earthquake eight years ago reduced swathes of centuries-old monuments to rubble, but the vast task of restoration has sparked a revival of once-fading architectural craft skills.

Carpenter Dinesh Tamang is one of hundreds of craftspeople who learned a new trade in the quake's aftermath.

"I got a chance to work in reconstruction projects, to rebuild damaged temples and houses," said Tamang, who was unemployed before the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that killed nearly 9,000 people.

"It is very rewarding work," he said while carefully carving an intricate pattern on a wooden panel with a chisel and mallet.

The 2015 quake also destroyed hundreds of monuments and royal palaces — including the Kathmandu



Valley's Unesco World Heritage sites — that had drawn visitors from around the world.

In deeply religious Nepal, temples and heritage sites are not just tourist attractions, but an integral part of cultural and spiritual life.

The public demand for their rebuilding fueled a need for workers adept at traditional architectural techniques including stone masonry and intricate wood and metal work.

"Nepal is rich in cultural heritage," Tamang said. "You see temples everywhere and I was always fascinated by the designs on the wood".

Nepal Vocational Academy, where Tamang enrolled, said it had trained hundreds in traditional skills since the quake.

"Even though the quake was a tragic event, it has created opportunities in different sectors," said Rabindra Puri, a heritage conservationist and the academy's founder.

"The demand for skilled manpower drastically increased".

Puri said that the academy expanded its facility after the quake to meet the surge in

demand for training.

"As far as I know, none of our graduates are unemployed," he said.

- 'LIVE ON AFTER US' -

Many initially feared Nepal lacked the skills needed for the huge task of rebuilding.

The palaces and temples damaged date back to the period between the 12th and 18th centuries when the Kathmandu Valley was divided into the three kingdoms of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur.

The wood carvers, stone sculptors and metal workers who created the spectacular temples and palaces were once feted from far away and paid handsomely from the royal purse.

These crafts were historically carried out exclusively by families belonging to the Newa ethnic group and passed on through generations. But over time many opted for other professions.

"The fathers didn't want to teach the sons, and sons didn't want to learn, so it was close to disappearing," Puri said.

The funding for reconstruction has made these professions

more economically sustainable.

The government has poured in over \$45 billion to restore its heritage sites, with additional projects funded from countries including neighbouring China and India — as well as Japan, Sri Lanka, Switzerland and the United States.

About 80 per cent of the 920 heritage structures that were flattened or damaged have been reconstructed.

Heritage conservationist Rohit Ranjitkar, director of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, said that while the renewed interest in learning traditional crafts is encouraging, the focus should be on quality.

"The quality must match the monuments we have... These skills that have been passed on



from generation to generation cannot be learnt with a few months' training," he said.

"Practice is important... We need to see how to encourage them, so that they can carry on the skills."

Stonework expert Kancha Ranjitkar, 82, who began working with his father as a teenager, said he felt happy alongside younger craftspeople.

"Many of the skills are vanishing," he said. "But the quake gave a chance to pass on our knowledge to the next generation... for it to live on after us." —AFP



Young slave, once painted out, is back in a work at New York's Met



FOR YEARS, THE three children from a well-to-do New Orleans family seemed to be the only figures in a nearly forgotten painting attributed to French artist Jacques Amans.

The family's slave, Belizaire, had simply been painted over, erased from both history and the picture, which this week went on display — with his image restored — at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

For the prestigious Manhattan museum, the artwork represents "the first naturalistic representation of a named enslaved individual pictured in a Southern setting," said Sylvia Yount, the curator in charge of the museum's American wing.

"We have no other work like this in the collection, and it allows us to tell a lot of different, interesting and complicated stories," she said, standing before the 1837 oil painting, on display since Thursday.

And yet despite its significance, the young enslaved man — standing erect, arms crossed and with a grave expression — had nearly disappeared forever from the painting, commissioned by the children's father, Frederick Frey, a successful New Orleans banker originally from Germany.

PAINTED OVER

While no one knows the exact reason, the mixed-race lad was painted over, probably early in the 20th century. Frey and his wife were both dead by then, and the painting had been passed on to an heir.

"The family may not have been proud, or they may have been ashamed" to have an enslaved worker in the painting "because it really implicates them, you know, as a slaveholding family," said Yount.

"The other side of that could be that they just didn't want a black figure shown with their white ancestors."

In 1972, the New Orleans Museum of Art acquired the painting but kept it in storage until reselling it in 2004. In 2005 the work's new owner had it restored — and the young slave reappeared.

Still, it was only through the involvement of Louisiana collector Jeremy K. Simien, a man passionate about representations of Creoles in local art, that the work's importance came to public attention.

Simien first discovered the painting on an auction website and then, while doing further research, was stunned to see how it had changed from the time the New Orleans museum sold it.

"I could see it ghosting through, I could see the outline," he said. "That really blew my mind."

SOLD AT SIX

In 2021, Simien acquired the painting, and he hired Katy Shannon, an expert in such historical research, to delve into the Louisiana archives. There she discovered that the young man in the painting was named Belizaire — and that when he was six, in 1828, he and his mother had been sold to the Freys.

It was an ill-fated time. Two of the three Frey children died the very year the painting was made, possibly of yellow fever, and the third child died a few years later.

Shannon discovered that Belizaire was later sold to a sugarcane plantation.

"We know he did live past the Civil War and become free," Simien said.

He added that he finds the story told by the painting "fascinating, because it's almost as if Belizaire, the boy that we didn't know his name, refused to be erased."

"He serves kind of as a representation of a lot of history that was erased or covered over."

Simien said he was "very excited" that the Met had decided to purchase the work — for undisclosed terms — and was treating it with due "dignity and reverence."

The painting is being displayed along with an explanation of its unusual history, and a photo of the version that excluded Belizaire.

Today, as museums work to diversify their collections, "we need to tell these more complicated stories," said Yount.

—AFP