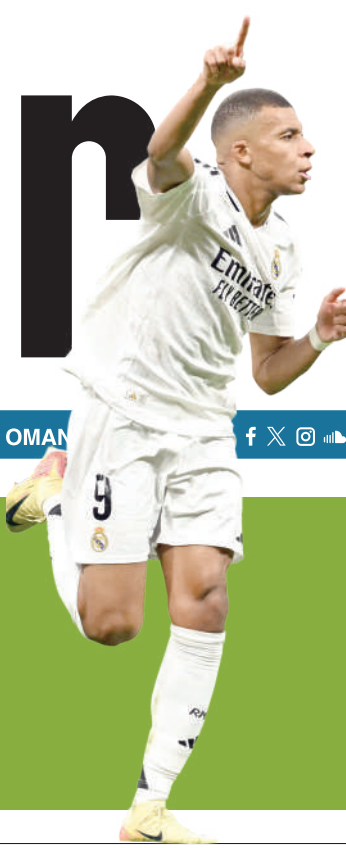


OMAN
Oman Observer
DAILY

Observer



HM greets Sri Lankan President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Anura Kumara Dissanayake of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka on winning the presidential elections and taking the oath of office. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of success to President Anura in leading the people of Sri Lanka towards further progress and prosperity. His Majesty also wished the bilateral relations further development.

SUNRISE - 05:57 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:42 AM
DHUHR - 12:03 PM
ASR - 03:28 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:04 PM
ISHA - 07:15 PM

Established 1981. Editor-in-chief: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

OMAN

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www.omanobserver.om editor@omanobserver.om



P13

PACT SIGNED TO POSITION OMAN AS GLOBAL LOW-CARBON FUEL BUNKERING HUB



P12

MBAPPE STRIKES AGAIN AS MADRID HOLD OFF ALAVES



P20

THREADING THE ROCKS AND HIDDEN DEPTHS OF LUNULE CANYON



HM issues Royal Decree

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday issued Royal Decree No 38/2024, granting an official the rank of “Ambassador” and appointing her as the Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco). Article (1) grants Amna bint Salim bin Rashid al Balushiyyah the rank of “Ambassador” and appoints her as Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco). Article (2) states that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — **ONA**

HM’s greetings conveyed to Bulgarian president

Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, received Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on the sidelines of the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Wednesday. During the meeting, Sayyid Badr conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and his best wishes to the President, further growth and prosperity for the friendly Bulgarian people, hoping for more developed relations between the two countries. For his part, the Bulgarian President asked the Foreign Minister to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan, wishing more progress and prosperity for the Omani people and hoping that the relations between the two friendly countries see more progress and development. — **ONA**



HM GREETINGS TO BRUNEI

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, along with the Sultanate of Oman’s greetings to Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah and the people of Brunei Darussalam on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Brunei joining the United Nations. This took place during a ceremony held under the auspices of Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam, within the context of the 79th General Assembly of the United Nations. Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah asked Sayyid Badr to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the people of Oman. SEE ALSO P3

Egyptian official lauds Oman’s balanced policy

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Wednesday received Karam Gabr, Head of the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR) of the Arab Republic of Egypt. At the outset of the meeting, the Head of the SCMR conveyed the Egyptian leadership’s greetings to the Omani leadership. He also conveyed his country’s best wishes for further progress and prosperity to the Omani people. HH Sayyid Fahd underscored the government’s support for the Omani media in pursuance of the media’s constructive role in the march of sustainable development. He also lauded Omani media persons and the efforts they exert in media coverage that is based on integrity. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and explored means of enhancing media cooperation in various fields, particularly in exchanging expertise and visits of media persons. They also highlighted current issues in the region and the efforts exerted to put an end to violations in a bid to have security and stability prevail. On his part, the Egyptian official lauded the wise and balanced policy espoused by the Sultanate of Oman and its role in backing efforts of understanding and constructive dialogue among nations. — **ONA**



HH Sayyid Fahd receives Karam Gabr in Muscat on Wednesday. PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

US leads new effort to end hostilities in Lebanon, Gaza

BEIRUT: The United States is spearheading a new diplomatic effort to end hostilities in both Gaza and Lebanon, linking the two conflicts as part of a single initiative, six sources familiar with the initiative said. Details are being hammered out at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, according to two Lebanese officials, two Western diplomats, a source familiar with the thinking of the Lebanese group Hezbollah and a source briefed on the talks. The White House National Security Council did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Three Israeli officials said that the United States and France were working on ceasefire proposals but that no significant progress had been made so far. It would be the first time the two fronts are linked as part of a US diplomatic push, the sources said. The deal may eventually lead to the release of captives seized by Hamas in the attack on Israel on October 7 last year that sparked hostilities across the Middle East, according to a senior Lebanese official, the source familiar with Hezbollah’s thinking and the source briefed on the talks. Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah has repeatedly said his group will not stop firing at Israel until Israel halts its offensive on Gaza. Israel has in recent days significantly stepped up its military campaign against Hezbollah in Lebanon, killing several commanders in a strike on Friday and carrying out attacks on Monday that killed more than 550 people, including 50 children, Lebanese health authorities said. That intensification triggered a diplomatic effort to halt both fronts, the sources said. The senior Lebanese official and the source familiar with Hezbollah’s thinking said that Hezbollah was “open to any settlement that would include both Gaza and Lebanon.” In a sign of the accelerating diplomacy, Lebanon’s caretaker prime minister, Najib Mikati, said late on Monday that he would travel to New York for meetings on recent developments. SEE ALSO P6



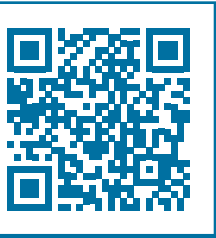
Mourners gather during the funeral of Hezbollah commanders Ibrahim Qubaisi and Hussein Ezzedine, who were killed in Tuesday’s Israeli strike on Beirut’s southern suburbs, Lebanon, on Wednesday. – Reuters

Nuking a huge asteroid could save Earth, suggests lab experiment

PARIS: Humanity could use a nuclear bomb to deflect a massive, life-threatening asteroid hurtling towards Earth in the future, according to scientists who tested the theory in the laboratory by blasting X-rays at a marble-sized “mock asteroid.” The biggest real-life test of our planetary defences was carried out in 2022 when Na-sa’s fridge-sized DART spacecraft smashed into a 160-metre-wide asteroid, successfully knocking it well off course. But for bigger asteroids, merely crashing spaceships into them will probably not do the trick. When the roughly 10-km-wide Chicxulub asteroid struck the Yucatan Peninsula around 66 million years ago, it is believed to have plunged Earth into darkness, sent kilometres-high tsunamis rippling around the globe and killed three-quarters of all life — including wiping out the dinosaurs. We humans are hoping to avoid a similar fate. There is no current threat looming, but scientists have been working on how to stave off any big asteroids that could come our way in the future. A leading theory has been to blow them up with a nuclear bomb — a last-ditch plan famously depicted in the 1998 sci-fi action movie Armageddon. In the movie, Bruce Willis and a plucky team of drillers save Earth from an asteroid 1,000 km wide — roughly the size of Texas. For a proof-of-concept study published in the journal Nature Physics this week, a team of US scientists worked on a much smaller scale, taking aim at a mock asteroid just 12 millimetres (half an inch) wide. To test whether the theory would work, they used what was billed as the world’s largest X-ray machine at Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The machine is capable of generating “the brightest flash of X-rays in the world using 80 trillion watts of electricity,” Sandia’s Nathan Moore, the lead study author, said. Much of the energy created by a nuclear explosion is in the form of X-rays. Since there is no air in space, there would be no shockwave or fireball. But the X-rays still pack a powerful punch. — **AFP**



A big asteroid could threaten life on Earth.



UNDER-SECRETARY FOR DIPLOMATIC
AFFAIRS MEETS IRANIAN OFFICIAL

MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, on Wednesday received Mohammad Ali Bek, the Islamic Republic of Iran's Aide to the Foreign Minister and Director-General of the ministry's Gulf department. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed regional relations and situations. They also explored means of enhancing bilateral cooperation in all fields. — ONA

Al Batinah North social investment forum
highlights sustainable development



SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, SEPT 25

The Al Batinah North Social Investment Forum sought collaboration between private businesses and social institutions, with a focus on promoting sustainable development and enhancing corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts across Oman.

Organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Al Batinah North Branch, the event was held in the Wilayat of Suhar with over 350 participants from various sectors.

The forum was supported by the Al Batinah North Governor's office and Jusoor, the social investment arm of OQ, Sohar Aluminium and Vale in Oman.

The event was inaugurated by Her Highness Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at Squ, and Chairperson of the Social Investment Centre at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

A key highlight of the forum was the Social Investment Award, where 29 projects competed in four main categories: Social, environmental, educational, and sports and health.

In 'Social Sector' category, Takaful Sohar Charity Team's "A Home for Them" project, which provides housing support for those in need, bagged the award.

The winners under the 'Environmental Projects' category were 'Sustainable Project 4th Edition' (supported by BP Oman) and the 'Local Dams Project in Al Batinah North' (by the Omani Water Society).

Under Educational projects, two projects took top honours — Sohar Aluminium's Technical Education Support Project, covering the governorates of Al Batinah North, Al Buraimi, and Musandam, and OQ Petroleum Industries' sponsorship of the Liwa Science and Innovation Centre. The 'Future Engineer' programme, supported by BP Oman, also stood out.

In Sports and Health, Bank Muscat's "Green Fields" project and Vale Sohar's sponsorship of the "Liwa Health Walkway" got awards.

Said al Abri, Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Al Batinah North Branch, underscored the forum's importance, stating, "This forum reflects our collective vision to position social investment as a vital tool for sustainable development. It serves as a platform for balancing financial returns with positive social impact, and we are committed to making it an annual event to strengthen the private sector's role in community well-being and environmental sustainability." The forum featured two key panel discussions. The first focused on Social Business Investment and Priorities in Oman, with contributions from both public and private sector figures. The second addressed Legislation Supporting Social Investment, highlighting the need for policies that encourage private sector participation in social investments.

Several significant agreements were signed during the event, including a notable RO 1.4 million partnership for the Majees Bridge Project. The forum concluded with recommendations to establish a social investment committee.

HEAD OF EGYPT’S SCMR
VISITS MEDIA INSTITUTIONS

MUSCAT: Karam Gabr, Head of the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR) of the Arab Republic of Egypt, on Wednesday visited Oman News Agency (ONA), the News Centre, Digital Studios Complex and Oman newspaper building.

During the visit, the guest listened to a briefing about Omani media and news content provided by the Ministry of Information, represented by the institutions he toured. He also took note of their advanced technical equipment and programmes aimed to keep pace with the need for prompt media action.

In a statement to ONA, the official commended the advanced level of Oman-Egypt bilateral relations. He stressed that the two countries possess rich civilisational, intellectual and technical components that inspire them to cooperate and exchange expertise in all fields.

Karam Gabr pointed out that the media plays a significant role in establishing closer relations between countries and peoples. He explained that the media can bridge gaps, furnish common areas among nations and encourage them to better communicate with each other. In this context, he underscored the media's role in spreading awareness about means of affirming the national identity of different peoples, notably youth, by instilling a sense of belonging, love of the homeland and a keenness to safeguard its gains.

The Egyptian official also spoke about the role of the media in handling the technology revolution that stems from communication, noting that "media content should be compatible with our societies' values, ethical, religious and legal aspects".

The Egyptian official laid emphasis on maximising the positive aspect of social media platforms and avoiding negative phenomena (including violence and extremism), which, he said, often emerge through inadvertent broadcasting of "media content that conflicts with our societies' religious values, customs and traditions".

He also cautioned that many issues and challenges are currently posed to print media, including an observable decline in reading rates and a shrinkage in the volume of advertisements and resources in general. He added that this challenge is after all global rather than being associated with specific countries. Yet, he affirmed that the print press would continue to be part of the soft power of societies. — ONA

Information Minister receives
Head of Egypt’s SCMR



The two sides discussed a number of media issues, including the exchange of expertise in the fields of electronic content, training and technical updates supporting modern media.

MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, received in his office on Wednesday Karam Gabr, Head of the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR) of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

The meeting dealt with the strong bonds between the Sultanate of Oman and Egypt and ways to enhance bilateral cooperation.

The two sides discussed a number of media issues, including the exchange of expertise in the fields of electronic content, training and technical updates supporting modern media modes.

They also elaborated on the role of media in consolidating the Arab cultural identity, bringing up generations in accordance with authentic human values and enhancing mutual understanding among cultures.

The meeting was attended by Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information, Khalid Mohammed Abdul Halim Radi, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Sultanate of Oman, and officials from the Ministry of Information. — ONA



The guest listened to a briefing about Omani media and news content. — Photos by Shamsa al Harthy



TENDER

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR THE PROVISION OF
CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR PLEXOS SUPPORT

The Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (PWP), a member of Nama Group, is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatization of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the PWP license.

Tender Description	PWP seeks proposals from interested Bidders to provide support services for the utilization of the energy system simulation software (PLEXOS). The objective of the support services is to enhance and verify PWP's PLEXOS database for the Sultanate of Oman energy system.
Tender Number	OPWP/2024/26
Tender Purchase Period	14 days
Tender Fee	80 OMR / Free of charges for (SME) with a valid Riyada card
Submission date	27 October 2024 at 12:00 PM (Oman time zone)
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents will be provided in electronic format upon evidence of payment. The payment can be submitted through the Company's website: (https://www.omanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx). For any queries please contact: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om
Bank Guarantee	A Tender Bond (in the form set out in the tender) or a bank certified cheque of not less than 1% of the tender value, to be valid for a period of 120 days from the submission deadline date referred to above. The tender bond or certified cheque shall be enclosed as part of the bid.



السلطنة العمانية العامة للمياه والكهرباء
Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC PO Box 1380, Ruq'at PC 113, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman | Tel: +968 26080600 | CR No: 1/1720146 | Tax Number: 3063511

Frankincense Garden in Mudam
to store rich flora of Dhofar

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The Frankincense Garden, located in the Mudam area of the Wilayat of Salalah, is part of a larger initiative to establish environmental gardens that showcase the rich flora of Dhofar Governorate.

Spanning 181,000 square metres, the garden will eventually house over 11,000 trees, making it a vital green space in the region.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Nature Conservation Society (under establishment), and the local community, the garden's first phase saw the planting of 500 frankincense trees. This aligns with broader efforts to cultivate and protect Dhofar's natural vegetation.

The General-Directorate of Environment in Dhofar has also launched a campaign to plant an



Garden's first phase saw planting of 500 frankincense trees

additional 2,650 frankincense trees, bringing them closer to the 2024 goal of planting 5,000 trees. The campaign is supported by the "Awareness" initiative and other local stakeholders.

This project is part of the Environment Authority's national strategy, which aims to plant 10 million trees across Oman. Specific to Dhofar, the focus is on preserving and enhancing the region's unique biodiversity, which includes approximately 750 species of wild plants.

The garden's development began in 2023, with a protective fence built around the area. By mid-2024, 2,350 trees had been successfully planted, thriving in the region's favourable soil and climate conditions.

The initiative reflects broader efforts to protect and propagate the Dhofar Governorate's native species, with methods ranging from establishing tree nurseries to scattering seeds and protecting mature trees in the wild.



SAYYID BADR MEETS OFFICIALS IN NEW YORK



Sayyid Badr held a meeting with Gabrielius Landsbergis, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Lithuania.



Sayyid Badr also held a meeting with Luminita Odobescu, Foreign Minister of Romania.



Sayyid Badr held a meeting with Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the UNRWA for Palestine Refugees. — ONA

NEW YORK: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, conveyed sentiments of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, along with the Sultanate of Oman's greetings to Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah and the people of Brunei Darussalam on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Brunei joining the United Nations.

This came during a ceremony held under the auspices of Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam, within the context of the 79th General Assembly of the United Nations.

Meanwhile, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah asked Sayyid Badr to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the people of Oman. He also wished relations between Oman and Brunei Darussalam further progress and prosperity.

On other side, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held several meetings with a number of officials, on the sidelines of the 79th General Assembly of the United Nations.

Sayyid Badr held a meeting with Gabrielius Landsbergis,

Foreign Minister of the Republic of Lithuania.

The two ministers reviewed relations of friendship and joint projects, as well as the efforts exerted to expand areas of partnership in the economic, cultural, scientific and technological fields. They also exchanged views on a set of current regional and international issues.

Sayyid Badr also held a meeting with Luminita Odobescu, Foreign Minister of Romania. They discussed means of enhancing relations between Oman and Romania. They also explored areas of cooperation in the fields of economy, culture and education.

The two ministers touched on the regional and international issues of mutual interests. They expressed their joint support for the efforts exerted to maintain regional and international peace and stability. They also laid emphasis on the importance of dialogue and peaceful means in addressing security challenges.

Sayyid Badr also held a meeting with Philippe Lazzarini,

Oman chairs meeting to discuss infection prevention

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday chaired a meeting to discuss infection prevention and control (IPC) and antimicrobial stewardship in the health sector (AMS).

The meeting took part on the sidelines of the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, who chaired the meeting, stressed the importance of consolidating international cooperation and partnerships among countries and global health institutions. He reaffirmed the Sultanate of Oman's commitment to support global efforts, as a means to secure a healthy and safe future for world generations.

The meeting included a forum that outlined the experiences of Oman, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Germany, Nigeria and the US-based Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

The meeting was attended by Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Organisation, and attended by ministers, heads of delegations and representatives of member states and technical experts in the field.

Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

The two sides discussed the humanitarian challenges facing the Palestinian refugees. Sayyid Badr expressed the

Sultanate of Oman's continued support for efforts aimed at improving the conditions of refugees. He underlined the importance of collective action and demanding the implementation of UN resolutions calling for the entry of urgent

humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip without any obstacles. Sayyid Badr valued the UNRWA's efforts in providing vital assistance and basic services to Palestinian refugees.

On his turn, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA lauded the active role of the Sultanate of Oman in supporting humanitarian issues and relief efforts, stressing the importance of continuing these efforts and backing the UN agency in carrying out its responsibilities.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, also held a meeting with Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba.

The meeting touched on relations between the two countries and means of enhancing them. The two ministers expressed the joint keenness to push these relations towards wider horizons. They also expressed the joint desire to explore various areas of cooperation.

The two ministers exchanged views on various issues at the

regional and international arenas.

Sayyid Badr held a meeting with Caspar Veldkamp, Minister of the Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. The two sides discussed areas of cooperation and stressed the importance of the economic partnership between Oman and the Netherlands.

Sayyid Badr held a meeting with Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye.

The meeting reviewed relations between the two countries and means of promoting them in various areas.

During his meeting with Abdulaziz Ibrahim al Mulla, Executive Director of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Sayyid Badr discussed cooperation and partnership relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the World Bank and ways to develop a number of financial and technical cooperation programmes, including capacity building programmes that support development and sustainability. — ONA

Oman participates in ASOSAI meeting

NEW DELHI: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State Audit Institution (SAI), takes part in the 16th Assembly of the Asian Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ASOSAI), held in New Delhi, the Republic of India. The assembly is held during the period from 24-27 September 2024, with the participation of heads of member SAIs.

Oman's delegation is headed by Shaikh Ghusan bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution (SAI).

During the meeting, many key topics listed in the agenda were discussed, primarily, review of the report of the Secretariat's activities for the years (2021-2023), approval of the ASOSAI financial statements for the financial years (2021-2023) and review of the results of external audit of the ASOSAI financial statements for the financial years (2021-2023). The meeting also reviewed a number of reports of the ASOSAI Working Group on Environmental Audit, ASOSAI Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and the ASOSAI Working Group on Crisis Management Audit.

Furthermore, the meeting reviews the report on the



Oman's delegation is headed by Shaikh Ghusan bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of State Audit Institution (SAI). — ONA

ASOSAI Strategic Plan and the report of the ASOSAI Capacity Building Activities.

The meeting will be concluded by approving the ASOSAI budget for the years (2025-2027), and discussing proposals on the establishment of new working groups, namely, the ASOSAI Working Group on State Owned Enterprise, the ASOSAI Working Group on IT Audit and Data Analysis and the ASOSAI Working Group on Regional and Municipal Audit, in addition to selecting members of the ASOSAI Governing Board and Audit Committee for the period (2024-2027).

15 films to be shown at EUFF in Muscat

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

As many as 15 films and documentaries from 9 countries are being showcased at the first European Union Film Festival (EUFF) in Muscat from September 23 to 30 at the Vox Cinema in Mall of Oman.

Organised by the French Embassy in Oman and the European Union Delegation, in collaboration with Vox Cinemas and the Arabwood Team at the International Film Foundation of Oman (IFFO), the festival aims to foster cultural exchange and audience engagement with European movies.

This unique cultural event celebrating European cinema features films from France, Italy, Cyprus, Spain, Romania, Netherlands, Germany, Austria and Hungary. The festival kicked off with an insightful documentary from the Netherlands followed by the opening ceremony on September 23.

The film's Director, Verheggen, and Producer, Svebor Kranjc, interacted with the audience after the screening, shedding light on the importance of cultural exchange through cinema.

Movies are screened from 6 pm to 10 pm on screens 4 and 5 during weekdays, with special kids' movie screenings starting at 4 pm on weekends, followed by regular movies from 6 pm to 10 pm. Additionally, there are two workshops at the Gold Cinema, Vox Cinema at



Mall of Oman, and interactive online sessions led by international co-production experts Reema al Abbas, Valerie Fouques and Lucas Taillefer.

A session on cinematic acting is led by Jijoy Pulikal, an Associate Professor in Screen Acting from the National Film Institute of India (FTII, Pune), and Director of the KR Narayanan National Institute of Visual Science and Arts.

The festival concludes on September 30 with a closing ceremony featuring the final movie screening, announcements of future collaborations, and the concept release of the "R Factor" project — an anthology film initiative inviting film-makers from Oman to submit their movie synopses.

"The EUFF is a celebration of European cinema in Oman, and we hope to contribute to its success by hosting the event seamlessly. Moviegoers are invited to register and obtain passes through the QR code," organisers said.

Environmental sanitation initiative to enhance cleanliness

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The Environment Department of Al Sharqiyah South Governorate has organised the 'Environmental Sanitation' initiative, aimed at enhancing cleanliness across various locations.

This large-scale effort includes extensive cleaning campaign, focusing on valleys and residential areas. With the involvement of several government bodies, private entities and a diverse range of volunteers from different age groups, the initiative is steadily making strides in improving

public hygiene.

Eng Said bin Nasser al Abdali, Director of the Environment Department, stated that the initiative aligns with the governorate's vision to establish a healthier environment that complies with sustainable development goals.

He highlighted the importance of these campaigns in not only enhancing the visual appeal of neighbourhoods, but also in mitigating the harmful effects of pollution on both wildlife and water resources.

Al Abdali further emphasised the pressing issue of plastic waste, referring to it as a "silent disaster".



This large-scale effort includes extensive cleaning campaign, focusing on valleys and residential areas

He underscored the importance of finding alternatives to plastic and fostering an ecosystem that promotes recycling. This

initiative also seeks to inspire partnerships across various sectors — nationally, regionally and internationally — reinforcing

the belief that collaborative efforts are essential for long-term success in addressing environmental challenges.

Al Abdali praised the ongoing collaboration between institutions, recognising it as a key factor in achieving the initiative's objectives.

The project's ultimate goal is to foster a clean and sustainable environment by reducing waste and minimising environmental pollutants that could impact the health of local communities.

Additionally, it aims to raise public awareness of the significance of environmental stewardship and natural resource

preservation.

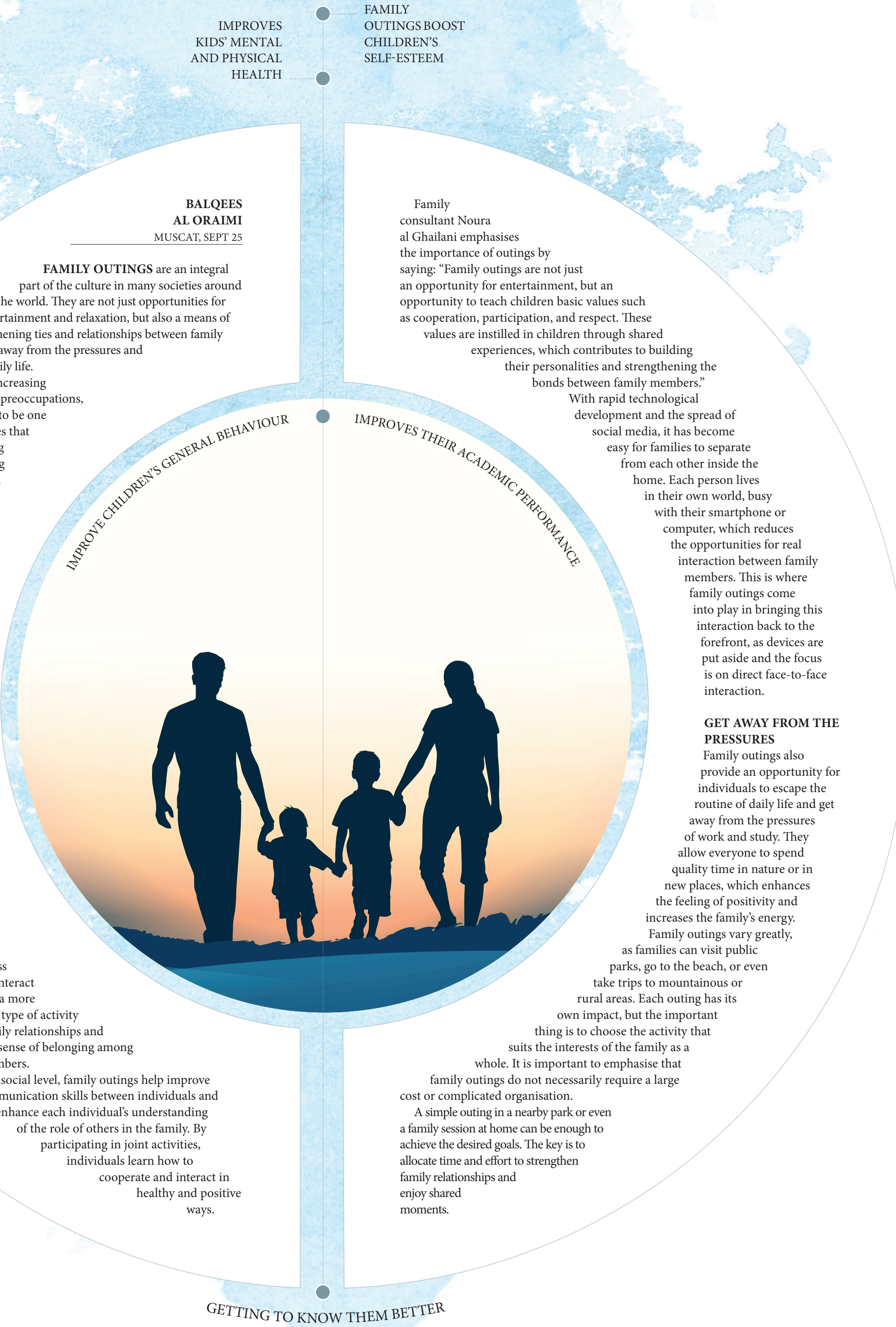
Volunteers like Abdullah al Muqimi expressed pride in contributing to such a vital cause.

"This initiative responds to the urgent need to improve the ecological situation in the region," he said, further stressing the importance of community engagement in environmental conservation.

Khalid al Balushi, another participant, also emphasised his commitment to preserving Oman's clean and healthy environment, and to elevating environmental awareness within the local community.



FAMILY TIME ISN'T JUST FUN, IT ALSO HAS BENEFITS!





‘Akhnatout’ — a seasonal tradition for herders in Dhofar

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

Residents eagerly anticipate the spring season ‘Sarḅ’, which marks the abundance of herbs and plants that lure their livestock to lush pastures after the khareef season.

As the khareef mist dissipates, the landscapes of Dhofar Governorate transform into a picturesque scene, with vibrant greenery covering most areas.

Shepherds and livestock breeders from the mountains await the commencement of pastoral and agricultural activities, steeped in traditional arts and customs.

One such custom is “Akhnatout,” observed by herders residing outside the rain-affected regions. They relocate their livestock to areas where grass flourishes in the cotton and plains of ‘Jarbib’.

During their initial stay, residents would gather under moonlit skies at designated spots to unwind after the strenuous move, engaging in poetry, arts and traditional games.

Mohammed bin Ahmed al Mashikhi, a herder, describes the modern grazing migration in rural areas as relatively straightforward due to modern transportation availability. He said that sheep herders now transport livestock via trucks, while camel herders still opt for foot travel due to logistical and cost constraints.

Said bin Mohammed Zaabnoot, a Hadbin area resident, recounts ancient livestock migration intricacies. Shepherds utilised various passages and outlets across the Samhan Mountain range, including the challenging ‘Kharsh Afidhuq’ passage for camels and sheep, and the ‘Sherar, Ansoud and Aghbir’ passage for sheep. Camel herders followed the ‘Urm Inshit’ path from the far east ‘Hadbin’ to the west ‘Shaaboun’, with multiple outlets leading to the countryside.

‘Akhnatout’ remains a testament to authentic traditions and the profound connection between humans and their environment in the Dhofar countryside. It showcases the rich heritage diversity of the Sultanate of Oman, fostering cooperation and solidarity between shepherds and livestock breeders while reviving artistic and cultural legacies.



Shepherds and livestock breeders from the mountains await the commencement of pastoral and agricultural activities. – ONA

Key SME stakeholders address entrepreneurs’ challenges



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

In a pioneering effort, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) held its first dialogue session aimed at improving financing procedures and addressing the challenges faced by entrepreneurs.

The event brought together key figures such as Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), Mahmoud bin Abdullah al Awaini, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance, and Hussain bin Ali al Lawati, CEO of the Development Bank, alongside a group of entrepreneurs benefiting from the Authority’s financing programme, Azm.

The session primarily focused on streamlining financing procedures, reducing approval times and enhancing transparency to foster trust between entrepreneurs and financial institutions. The Authority emphasised the development of flexible financing mechanisms that cater to the unique needs of SMEs at different stages of growth.

Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah stressed the importance of automating processes and minimising human intervention in loan disbursements to speed up approvals. Likewise, Hussein

al Lawati announced that the Development Bank is working on a platform to provide entrepreneurs with real-time updates on their financing requests, ensuring transparency and accountability.

A key topic discussed during the session was the disbursement process, with entrepreneur Mohammed al Balushi, owner of Green Oasis Agricultural Company, highlighting the time delays that entrepreneurs face in securing financing. He called for faster, more efficient procedures to reduce obstacles and improve satisfaction among SME owners.

The session delved into four critical areas: Pre-financing, financing application, disbursement and post-financing stages, along with ensuring project sustainability.

Solutions were proposed, including automated systems and enhanced communication channels, to address challenges and increase the efficiency of financing services.

In a bid to strengthen the entrepreneurship sector, the Authority had previously launched nine financing programmes, with comprehensive information available on their website and social media platforms. By the end of June, 312 financing requests had been approved under the Azm lending portfolio, amounting to over RO 30 million.



Sultan Qaboos University

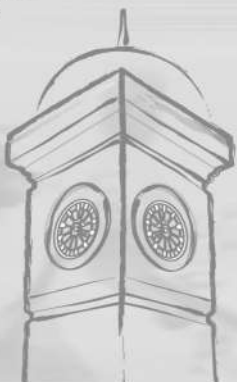
ANNOUNCEMENT

Sultan Qaboos University announces their desire to sell used furniture in sealed envelopes. Those wishing to enter the auction must adhere to the following conditions:

- Interested parties can view used furniture in auction yard and receive the bidding on Monday & Tuesday (30/09-01/10/2024) from 03:00 pm to 05:00 pm.
- Deposit of (200) Omani riyals in cash as an insurance. This amount will be refunded to the unsuccessful bidders.
- Submitting the offer in a sealed envelope after viewing the used furniture, entitled by the name of the head of the committee for selling used furniture, and put the envelope in bid box.
- The presented offer is binding on its owner if it is placed on it, and in the event that the buyer does not pay the purchase price on time, the insurance amount will be forfeited, and the sale will be awarded to another applicant.
- Those who win the bidding will be contacted. They must pay the remaining sum, and they are responsible for moving their items on Wednesday and Thursday (02-03/10/2024) from 09:00 am to 03:00 pm.
- The Used furniture are sold in their current condition and SQU is not responsible for any loss or damage to the sold material if the moving is not completed after the end of the sale (10) Omani riyals will be imposed for each day after 06/10/2024.

Notes:

- Prices are sorted according to groups and the higher price is taken.
- Funds will be collected electronically through visa cards.
- Entering the auction stores through Hospital Gate No (2).
- For more information contact on 24141272.



RECALL DATE: 26-09-2024

Recall

KIA
Telluride (ON)

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
Telluride (ON)	Jan 2019 - May 2024	506

*Not all vehicles in this production period, are affected.
#Subject to revision, based on the information received from the manufacturer, from time to time.

Recall consequence

On some Telluride (ON) of 2019 - 2024 MY produced within specific production date range provided in TSB. If there is an external impact with excessive force to the front power seat side cover and / or seat slide knob, the power seat switch back cover can dislodge resulting in internal misalignment of the seat motor control switch. A misaligned seat motor control switch with a stuck seat slide knob can lead to continuous operation of the motor. The continuous operation of the seat motor can result in overheating of the motor, thereby increasing the risk of fire while driving or while parked. The estimated defect ratio is 1%. However, Kia is conducting this recall as preventive measure to avoid the risk.

Recall Action

Verify affected vehicles as per the VIN list, inspect front seat motor control switch and repair or replace seat motor control switch and seat slide knob. All affected vehicles will be inspected and repaired at no expense to the vehicle owner.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>



Contact details: Toll free - 80073222
Working days: Sunday - Thursday
Working Time: 8.30 - 17.30 hrs.



Low pressure to affect Oman next week

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will be affected by a weather condition (low pressure) during the period between September 29 and October 1.

There are chances of cloud formation over the coastal and mountainous areas of Dhofar Governorate leading to rainfall of varying intensity early next week.

This is in addition to the possibility of some rains over Al Hajar Mountains, which may lead to the flow of wadis.



UN WARNS OF ‘FULL-SCALE WAR’ OVER LEBANON

UNITED NATIONS: World leaders lined up at the United Nations on Tuesday to call on Israel to refrain from a full-scale war in Lebanon, with the organisation's chief warning the situation was on the “brink”.

The UN General Assembly, the high point of the international diplomatic calendar, comes after Lebanese authorities said Israeli strikes had killed 558 people — 50 of them children.

“Full-scale war is not in anyone’s interest. Even though the situation has escalated, a diplomatic solution is still possible,” US President Joe Biden said in his farewell address to the global body.

“In fact, it remains the only path to lasting security to allow the residents from both countries to return to their homes on the border safely,” Biden said ahead of an emergency UN Security Council session on Lebanon planned for Wednesday.

Biden’s remarks drew disappointment from Lebanon’s Foreign Minister Abdullah Bou Habib who said they were “not promising” and “would not solve the Lebanese problem,” as he estimated that the number of people displaced by Israel’s strikes has likely soared to reach half a million.

“We should all be alarmed by the escalation. Lebanon is at the brink,” UN Secretary-General



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian during the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly at the United Nations headquarters in New York City. — AFP



A United Nations helicopter is parked at Lebanon’s Beirut International Airport. — AFP

Antonio Guterres said when he opened the gathering.

Israel’s ambassador to the UN Danny Danon said his country was “not eager” for a ground invasion of Lebanon. “We don’t want to send our boys to fight in a foreign country,” he said.

It is unclear what progress can be made to defuse the situation in Lebanon, with efforts to broker a ceasefire in Gaza — which Israel has relentlessly pounded since October 2023 — coming to nothing.

Biden on Tuesday pushed

again for an elusive ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, telling the global body it was time to “end this war.”

Mediator Qatar accused Israel of obstructing Gaza ceasefire talks, with Emir Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani saying

“there is no Israeli partner for peace” under the government of Benjamin Netanyahu. But he added: “We will continue our efforts of mediation to resolve the disputes through peaceful means.”

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused Israel of dragging the entire region “into war.” “Not only children but also the UN system is dying in Gaza,” Erdogan said in a scathing speech.

Guterres cautioned against “the possibility of transforming Lebanon (into) another Gaza,” calling the situation in the Palestinian territory a “non-stop nightmare.” — AFP


We should all be alarmed by the escalation. Lebanon is at the brink

ANTONIO GUTERRES
UN Secretary-General

China launches intercontinental missile into Pacific in rare test

BEIJING: China said it test-launched an intercontinental ballistic missile on Wednesday, firing it into the Pacific Ocean in its first such exercise in decades.

The launch sparked protests from other countries in the region, with China’s neighbour Japan saying it had not been given advance notice and expressing “serious concern” about Beijing’s military build-up.

Beijing has stepped up its nuclear development and boosted defence spending in recent years, with the Pentagon last October warning China was developing its arsenal more quickly than the United States had anticipated.

China held more than 500 operational nuclear warheads as of May 2023 and is likely to have more than 1,000 by 2030, it said.

On Wednesday, the Chinese military’s Rocket Force “launched an ICBM... carrying a dummy warhead to the high seas in the Pacific Ocean at 08:44 on September 25, and the missile fell into expected sea areas”, the defence ministry said in a statement.

An analyst said such tests were very rare.

“This is extremely unusual and



Military vehicles carrying intercontinental ballistic missiles travel past Tiananmen Square during the military parade marking the 70th founding anniversary of China on its National Day in Beijing. — Reuters File Photo

likely the first time in decades that we’ve seen a test like this,” said Ankit Panda, Stanton Senior Fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

“(The test) likely speaks to China’s ongoing nuclear modernisation manifesting in new requirements for testing,” he added.

China’s defence ministry,

however, called the firing a “routine arrangement in our annual training plan”.

“It is in line with international law and international practice and is not directed against any country or target,” it said.

Japan, however, said it was given “no notice from the Chinese side in advance”, with a government spokesman adding that Beijing’s military build-up

was a “serious concern”.

New Zealand also said the launch of the missile, which landed in the South Pacific, was “an unwelcome and concerning development”.

A spokesman for Wellington’s foreign minister vowed to consult with Pacific allies further as details become clear. Beijing first test-fired an ICBM into the South Pacific in the 1980s. — AFP

UK deploys troops to Cyprus, prepares for Lebanon evacuation

LONDON: Britain is moving troops to Cyprus to help its nationals leave Lebanon, as Prime Minister Keir Starmer warned that the escalation in fighting between Israel and Hezbollah was pushing the region towards the brink.

The government said in a statement late on Tuesday that 700 troops would travel to Cyprus, bolstering its presence in the area where it already has two Royal Navy ships, aircraft and transport helicopters.

“Events in the past hours and days have demonstrated how volatile this situation is, which is why our message is clear, British nationals should leave now,” said Defence Secretary John Healey.

“Our government is ensuring all preparations are in place to support British nationals should the situation deteriorate.”

Fierce fighting this week between Israel and the Lebanese Hezbollah has increased fears that nearly a year of conflict will explode and destabilise the Middle East, where a war between Hamas and Israel is already raging in Gaza.

Starmer said he was very



concerned that the region was spiralling out of control.

“All parties need to pull back from the brink,” he said in an interview with LBC radio. “I’m obviously going to New York to the UN General Assembly to talk to colleagues and allies, but my message will be very much ceasefire. Pull back from the brink. De-escalate the situation.”

Israel’s offensive since Monday morning has killed 569 people, including 50 children, and wounded 1,835 in Lebanon, Health Minister Firass Abiad has said.

Thousands of displaced people who fled from southern Lebanon were sheltering in schools and other buildings.

Israel has said it is shifting its focus from Gaza to the northern frontier, where Hezbollah has been firing rockets into Israel in support of Hamas, which is also backed by Iran. — Reuters

NEW DELHI

Hasina’s son wants role for her party in reforms

The son of Bangladesh’s ousted prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, said he was happy with the army chief’s timeline for elections within 18 months, though it was later than expected, but warned that genuine reform and polls were impossible without her party.

General Waker-uz-Zaman, said that democracy should return within a year to a year-and-a-half.

“I’m happy to hear we have an expected timeline at least now,” Hasina’s son and adviser, Sajeeb



Wazed, said.

“But we have seen this play out before where an unconstitutional, unelected government promises reform and then things only get worse.” — Reuters

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka’s new leader dissolves parliament

Sri Lanka’s new leftist president dissolved parliament and called a snap election as he prepares to renegotiate the bankrupt nation’s IMF bailout programme.

Marxist Anura Kumara Disanayake of the People’s Liberation Front (JVP) dismissed the 225-member legislature in which his party had just three seats and scheduled an election for November 14, nearly a year ahead of schedule. The order to dissolve parliament comes into immediate effect.



Hundreds of pricey government vehicles have been abandoned in Colombo after the new president took office, a member of his party said with hundreds of others missing. — AFP

SRINAGAR

Security high as Kashmir votes in regional polls

Kashmir voted to elect its first government since New Delhi scrapped the Himalayan territory’s semi-autonomous status. Soldiers carrying rifles stood watch outside polling stations in main city Srinagar as dozens of voters queued in the sun.

“We want to have a representative who will take our grievances forward,” said Abdul Rahim, 52, after casting his vote. “Our children are locked up and we are suffering. The government abrogated Article 370 so we don’t



have any representatives who can question their moves.” More than 24 per cent of voters had cast their ballots between 7 am when the polls opened, the chief electoral officer said. — AFP



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In brief

FLORIDA



TROPICAL STORM HELENE TO BECOME HURRICANE

Tropical Storm Helene promised to become a hurricane as it rapidly intensified in the eastern Gulf of Mexico, threatening to bring life-threatening storm surge to Florida within the next two days. More than 40 million people in Florida, Georgia and Alabama were under hurricane and tropical storm warnings as the Helene barreled northwest, near the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula, the National Weather Service said. Numerous evacuations are being ordered alone Florida's Gulf coast, including Sarasota and Charlotte counties, and dozens of counties have announced school closures, including Hillsborough and Pinellas counties. — Reuters

UNITED NATIONS



US TO PROVIDE ANOTHER \$424 M IN SUDAN AID

The United States will give a further \$424 million in humanitarian help to the people of Sudan, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield announced. War erupted in mid-April last year from a power struggle between the Sudanese army (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces ahead of a planned transition to civilian rule. "More than 25 million Sudanese face acute hunger. Many are in famine ... and some 11 million have fled their homes in what has become the worst humanitarian crisis on the planet," said Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield. — Reuters

LIVERPOOL



STARMER LOSES PARTY VOTE ON HEATING BENEFIT CUT

Prime Minister Keir Starmer lost a symbolic vote by his ruling Labour Party demanding that he reverse a controversial policy to scrap a winter heating benefit for millions of pensioners. The vote on the last day of his party's annual conference in Liverpool, is non-binding but its outcome is nonetheless embarrassing for the UK leader. It highlights the strength of feeling among activists and union backers against removing winter fuel payments for elderly people. Starmer has said the move was necessary to fill gaps in public finances, but it has sparked anger that has overshadowed his first weeks in power. — AFP

France vows new immigration 'rules'

PARIS: France's new government is open to toughening immigration laws, the interior minister said on Wednesday, under pressure from the far-right National Rally (RN) after the arrest of a Moroccan male suspect in the murder of a 19-year-old female student in Paris.

Marine Le Pen's RN party has said in past weeks it reserved the right to withdraw its tacit backing for Prime Minister Michel Barnier's cabinet if its concerns over immigration and other issues were not addressed, saying the fate of the government was in its hands.

The RN has seized on the murder of the 19-year-old, identified by the authorities only by her first name, Philippine, whose body was found buried in a Paris park on Saturday, to push its agenda.

"It's time for this government to act: our compatriots are angry and will not be content with just words," RN chief Jordan Bardella said, accusing the state of being too soft on security and immigration after French media



French Minister of the Interior Bruno Retailleau

said the suspect was a 22-year-old migrant with a criminal record.

"Philippine's life was stolen from her by a Moroccan migrant targeted by an OQTF (obligation to leave France)," he said on social media platform X.

Marine Le Pen's RN party acquired kingmaker status by signalling support for a new coalition between centrists and conservatives, after a July election in which President Emmanuel Macron's centrist government suffered heavy losses.

On Wednesday morning, new Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau said: "If we need to



French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Michel Barnier meet with members of the new government during the weekly cabinet meeting at the Elysee Palace in Paris. — Reuters

Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau: 'If we need to change the rules, let's change them. Faced with such a tragedy, preceded by many others, we cannot just condemn it or be outraged'

change the rules, let's change them."

"Faced with such a tragedy, preceded by many others, we cannot just condemn it or be outraged," Retailleau said in a statement. "It's up to us,

public officials, to ... update our legislation, to protect the French."

Retailleau, from the conservative Republicans party, had already signalled earlier this week that France was likely to see much tougher immigration and security measures.

Greens lawmaker Sandrine Rousseau warned against the far right using the murder to "spread its racist hatred".

The suspect had been due to be expelled from France after serving time in jail, Le Monde newspaper and BFM TV said, adding that on June 20 he had been sent straight from jail to

a detention centre for illegal migrants pending his expulsion.

A judge set him free on September 3, as the expulsion process was getting bogged down in administrative delays, under the condition that he check in regularly with police and stay on at a specific hotel, French media said.

Three days later, the paperwork to expel him was completed, but the man had disappeared, they said.

France deports more non-EU citizens than any other European Union nation, official Eurostat data shows. — Reuters

EU backs plan to downgrade wolf protection status

BRUSSELS: EU member states on Wednesday voted in favour of lowering the protection status of wolves, a move decried by conservationists that paves the way for a relaxation of tight hunting restrictions.

Grey wolves were virtually exterminated in Europe a century ago, but their numbers have rebounded thanks to conservation efforts, triggering howls of protest from farmers angered at livestock losses.

Representatives for the bloc's



European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen

27 countries backed a proposal to push for changes to an international wildlife convention that would see the species downgraded from "strictly

protected" to "protected".

The European Commission, which initially put forward the plan, welcomed its approval by a wide majority of member states during a meeting in Brussels.

Only two voted against it, according to a diplomatic source.

"Adapting the protection status will be an important step to address the challenges posed by increasing wolf population while keeping the overall objective to achieve

and maintain a favourable conservation status for the species," commission spokesman Adalbert Jahnz told reporters.

In 2023, there were breeding packs of grey wolves in 23 European Union countries, with a total population estimated at around 20,300 animals, bringing the elusive creatures into more frequent contact with humans.

In announcing plans to revise the species' status last year, Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said the

"concentration of wolf packs in some European regions has become a real danger especially for livestock".

In late 2022, von der Leyen herself lost her beloved pony Dolly to a wolf that crept into its enclosure on her family's rural property in northern Germany — leading some to suggest the matter had become personal.

The wolf became a "strictly protected" species under the 1979 Bern Convention, to which the EU is a party. — AFP

Russian army claims more advances in east Ukraine

MOSCOW: Russia's army said on Wednesday it had captured two more villages in eastern Ukraine, the latest gains for its advancing troops.

Moscow's soldiers have claimed a series of territorial gains in the area over the course of 2024, pressing on even as Kyiv mounts its own cross-border offensive into Russian territory.

The defence ministry in Moscow said its troops had "liberated the settlements" of Gostre and Grigorivka in the Donetsk region, in a statement posted on Telegram.

Gostre is a small village located 30 kilometres west of Donetsk city, the capital of a region Moscow claims to have annexed.

Grigorivka lies close to the hilltop town of Chasiv Yar, another key Russian target.

Military correspondents have also reported that Ukraine faces a precarious situation in Vugledar, a former coal mining town further south in the Donetsk region where heavy fighting is underway.

"It is highly likely that Russian forces now threaten the town from three sides," Britain's defence intelligence unit said on Wednesday.



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky addresses the 79th United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York. — Reuters

The Institute for the Study of War said on Tuesday that the possible "capture of Vugledar is unlikely to afford Russian forces any particular operational edge for further offensive operations".

Ukraine's General Staff did not respond to a request to comment on the situation in the town. The Ukrainian brigade that holds the town and the larger command unit fighting in the region both declined to comment.

Donetsk regional governor Vadym Filashkin acknowledged on Wednesday that Russian troops were trying to break through Ukraine's defences and enter Vugledar, a former coal mining town further south in the

Donetsk region.

"Some Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups are trying to break into the city, but Ukrainian soldiers are destroying these groups," the governor said.

"About 100 people remain in the town and refuse to leave. It is impossible to deliver humanitarian aid to them because the enemy is shooting at all roads," Filashkin added. Military experts have already reported that Ukraine faces a precarious situation in Vugledar.

"It is highly likely that Russian forces now threaten the town from three sides," Britain's defence intelligence unit said on Wednesday. — AFP

Greens' leadership quits after election blows

BERLIN: The co-leaders of Germany's Greens party, which is part of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's ruling coalition, said on Wednesday they would quit after a series of election blows that saw their party ejected from two regional parliaments.

The decision of Omid Nouripour and Ricarda Lang comes at a time of turbulence for the coalition, buffeted by voter angst over the economic challenges facing Germany and by fierce debates over migration as a national election looms next year.

While their move has no direct impact on the government or on Greens ministers serving in it - including Scholz's deputy Robert Habeck and Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock - analysts said it could stoke greater political instability.

"The result in Brandenburg (regional election) on Sunday is a sign our party is in its deepest crisis for a decade," Nouripour told a news conference. "It is time to lay our beloved party's fate in others' hands."

The Greens failed to clear the 5 per cent hurdle needed to enter parliament in Brandenburg and also that of Thuringia on September 1.

Habeck, who is Germany's economy minister, said he



Co-leaders of Germany's Green party Ricarda Lang and Omid Nouripour give a press conference in Husum, northern Germany. — AFP File

shared responsibility for the poor election results and called for an open debate on the Greens' future at their party congress in mid-November, when a new leadership will be elected.

"The Greens will reorder their ranks to start the catch-up ahead of the elections with new force," Habeck said.

A new left-wing populist party and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) have outperformed all three coalition parties this year, while the main opposition conservatives lead in national polls.

All three coalition partners also suffered big losses in their vote share in the Saxony regional election on September 1 and for the European Parliament earlier this year. — Reuters

Control fear before it controls you



Hyesha Barrett
@coach_hyesha

Hyesha is a certified Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat

With our planet under stress and lives riddled with so much uncertainty, a natural subsequent knee-jerk reaction is to flee in fear, overtly attempting to escape the craziness that often surrounds the unknown.

Fear activates our nervous system into a frenzied state, a heightened condition triggering the ‘fight or flight’ mode, rendering our bodies to be on amplified alert — our body’s defence mechanism activated to keep us safe.

Unsustainable in its nature, fear can galvanise our bodies into overdrive, and if left unattended will eventually equate to complete degeneration.

First and foremost, acknowledge your fear. Denying or suppressing its overpowering intensity can manifest its hold over you. If we allow fear to consume us, it can easily hinder our resilience and growth, which in turn will create the adverse reaction of rendering us unable to perform even mundane daily activities.

When we might feel out of control, we can reframe the nervousness to empower our choices

and find ways to move through the pain. Navigating through the overwhelming debilitating nature which fear can instigate, is a process that requires self-awareness, emotional regulation and strategic structures to take heed of our responses.

Fear often distorts our perception of reality. Our minds tend to exaggerate potential negative outcomes, leading us to expect the worst-case scenario. Sometimes, fear is more a projection of our anxieties than a reflection of actual danger. By distinguishing between real risks and imagined ones, we can regain control over our thoughts.

Otherwise, fear can render us paralysed. Often producing intense physical reactions, learning to manage these physiological symptoms can help calm our mind.

Mindfulness techniques, such as deep breathing or meditation can activate our body’s relaxation response, reducing the physical symptoms of fear, pulling our attention away from future anxieties and help us think more clearly.

Fear thrives in isolation hence sharing it with trusted friends, family or a mentor can provide perspective and support. Often, others can help

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us see the situation more clearly or offer guidance based on their own experiences. You may also realise that you are not alone in your fears, which can be comforting.

Fear often stems from uncertainty about the future or things beyond your control. While it’s easy to dwell on the unknown, shifting your focus to what you can control helps reduce apprehension. Break down the situation into elements you can influence and direct your energy towards managing those aspects.

Fear is an inevitable part of life, and it doesn’t have to consume you. By acknowledging it, separating it from reality, practicing mindfulness, reframing it as an opportunity, seeking support and focusing on what you can control, you will subsequently face fear with confidence and move forward with greater courage.

Fear will always be present, however taking responsibility for your choices, reframing your feelings and supercharging your relaxation strategies are forthright ingredients to ensure you don’t get impeded from being fraught with dread, to living the life you desire.

Japan ruling party to hold ‘toss-up’ vote for next PM

NATSUKO FUKUE AND TOMOHIRO OSAKI

Japan could get its first woman or youngest-ever prime minister on Friday when the ruling party holds a leadership vote described as the most “unpredictable” in many years.

A record nine candidates are in the running after the long-powerful factions of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) disbanded earlier this year over a funding scandal.

Because the conservative LDP holds a parliamentary majority, the winner is certain to become prime minister, and will likely call a snap election to shore up their mandate.

Three frontrunners have emerged in polling: former defence minister Shigeru Ishiba, 43-year-old Shinjiro Koizumi — the son of a popular ex-premier — and nationalist hardliner Sanae Takaichi, who would be the first woman in the job.

Whoever wins must face down regional security threats, from an increasingly assertive China and its deepening defence ties with Russia to North Korea’s banned missile tests.

At home the leader will be tasked with breathing life into the economy, as the central bank moves away from decades of monetary easing that has slashed the value of the yen.

In debates and campaigning, many candidates “have claimed that ‘I’m the one who can handle Trump’ or ‘I’m the one who can stand up to China’”, Jeffrey J Hall, a lecturer at Kanda University of International Studies, said.

But there are significant differences in their approach to such issues, and although some of the nine have “no hope whatsoever”, the race remains “a toss-up”. “This is the most unpredictable that an LDP election has been in many years,” Hall said.

LDP presidents are in office for three years and can serve up to three straight terms. Unpopular Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is not running for re-election.

With the factions dissolved, it’s unlikely that any one candidate will win enough votes — split between lawmakers and rank-and-file party members — to win outright.

That makes a run-off between two top candidates the most likely scenario, with the winner announced on Friday afternoon.

Ishiba, 67, has come close to the top job before, including in 2012 when he lost to arch-rival Shinzo Abe, Japan’s longest serving leader who was later assassinated.

The military model-maker with an affinity for 1970s pop idols once alienated party veterans with his “outspoken criticism of LDP policies under Abe”, said Yu Uchiyama, a political science professor at the University of Tokyo. — AFP

The unexpected pager attack



Zahir al Mahrooqi

The author is an Omani writer and the author of ‘The Road to Jerusalem’

On Tuesday, September 17, 2024, at precisely 3:30 pm, a shocking event unfolded that would forever mark the history of Lebanon and Hezbollah.

Wireless communication devices, commonly known as pagers, exploded, causing the death of twelve people and injuring around 3,000, including the Iranian ambassador to Lebanon. The scale of destruction and the impact on both the Lebanese population and Hezbollah itself was immense.

Many analysts have tried to understand the root cause of this incident. Some claim that the pagers were booby-trapped right from their point of origin.

According to Lebanese security officials, an integrated circuit (IC) chip, containing explosive materials, had been planted inside the devices. This type of IC chip is normally used in electronic devices to control their functions.

However, in this case, it was turned into a lethal weapon. Sources from Al Mayadeen television revealed that this chip was undetectable by standard security equipment, including those found at international airports. Such a revelation exposed vulnerabilities in even the most advanced security systems.

The explosion signalled a new kind of warfare — one that no longer relies on traditional military tactics but on high-tech devices designed to disrupt and destroy from within.

Perhaps the most alarming outcome of the attack was that it compromised Hezbollah’s long-standing strategy of secrecy. The party had managed to keep the identities of its members hidden from Lebanese families for years, but within just a few seconds, the pager incident shattered this protective barrier.

Another concerning aspect of the event is the ongoing dispute between two companies, one from Taiwan, ‘Gold Apollo’, and another from Hungary, ‘BIC’. Gold Apollo had granted BIC the licence to manufacture pagers, raising questions about responsibility.

However, no matter which company is at fault, it’s clear that a major security breach occurred. What’s even more puzzling is how Hezbollah, known

for its technological advancements, fell victim to such a simple but devastating trap. This vulnerability sparks questions: If Hezbollah could be infiltrated so easily, what does that imply for other groups or nations?

Michael Young, a senior analyst at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, commented on the effect this attack had on Hezbollah’s morale. According to him, the ease with which Israel penetrated Hezbollah’s operations must have been demoralising for the group, as it exposed weaknesses that were previously unimaginable.

One of the most perplexing aspects of the incident is the timing of the explosions. Why did all the devices explode simultaneously? There are various theories, but one explanation stands out.

According to American news outlet Axios, Israeli officials feared that Hezbollah was on the verge of discovering the planted devices. To prevent this, Israel decided to detonate the booby-trapped pagers all at once, a move intended to protect their covert operations.

The New York Times added further details, suggesting that Israel tampered with the devices before they were shipped to Lebanon, embedding explosives within each pager.

Now, was the attack foreseeable? A look back at a speech delivered by Hezbollah’s Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in February 2024 suggests that the group was aware of the dangers posed by modern communication technologies.

Nasrallah had warned his followers that their mobile phones were more dangerous than Israeli spies, urging them to disconnect, secure their devices, and even bury them if necessary. In response, Hezbollah began transitioning away from mobile phones, relying instead on landlines, coded messages and pagers. Despite these precautions, they were unable to prevent the disaster.

In his speech following the attack, Nasrallah described the event as a ‘severe blow’. One notable revelation that came to light afterward was an article published by *The New York Times*, claiming that the Hungarian company involved in the manufacturing of the pagers was

actually a front for Israeli intelligence.

If true, this would confirm that Hezbollah had walked straight into a well-laid trap. The full extent of the consequences remains to be seen.

However, one thing is clear: despite Hezbollah’s advanced capabilities, this incident exposes vulnerabilities that should serve as a wake-up call not just for the group, but for the entire Arab world.

How can a nation or a group that relies on its enemies for technology, weapons, and even food, hope to defend itself? This question opens up a larger debate about self-reliance and the future of the Arab world.

In a previous article, I argued that a nation that depends on others for its basic needs cannot survive.

This pager attack is a perfect example of what happens when a country or a group is overly reliant on foreign technology.

We have young people with technological expertise, so why aren’t we empowering them? Why do we continue to import solutions from countries that do not have our best interests at heart? It’s time we start relying on our own capabilities. After all, no one can defend you better than yourself.

In the aftermath of this attack, the response from Hezbollah — and indeed, from the Arab world — has been slow. Many people, myself included, are growing tired of empty threats. If there’s no real action, then what’s the point of making grand promises of revenge? The lack of a strong, decisive response only emboldens our enemies, encouraging them to continue their operations without fear of retaliation.

As the dust settles, it’s essential that we learn from this event. The pager attack is not just a warning to Hezbollah, but to all Arab nations. It serves as a painful reminder that we must invest in our own technological capabilities and take control of our future, instead of relying on others. If we fail to do so, we risk becoming perpetual victims in a world that grows more dangerous by the day.

(The original version of this article was published in the print edition of Oman Arabic newspaper July 23, 2024 and translated by Badr al Dhafari)

Financing sustainable development...

The just-concluded United Nations Summit of the Future in New York, and next year's Second World Summit for Social Development, aim to "chart a path towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and responding to emerging challenges and opportunities." But the question of how to finance the necessary investments – particularly at a time when many countries are weighed down by debt – stalks global discussions.

The world is more complicated than it was a decade ago, when the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which sets out the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets, was drafted. When the Agenda was approved in January 2016, we had not yet faced the Covid-19 pandemic, war had not engulfed Ukraine or Gaza, and the United States and China were not at loggerheads.

Today, the world economy is more fragmented, geopolitical tensions are higher, and multilateralism is sputtering. Moreover, the number of people living in poverty has increased: in 2020-23, an estimated 165 million people, mostly in developing countries, fell below the World Bank's poverty line (\$3.65 per day at purchasing power parity).

Meanwhile, many countries' debt burdens have become less manageable, after governments were forced to increase public spending in response to the pandemic and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis. Today, only 27 developing countries – 18 per cent of the total – are not burdened with excessive debt. The rest are struggling with debt overhang, which undermines economic growth and development, and raises the risk of an eventual default. The International Monetary Fund estimates the debt-burden threshold for low-income countries is between 35 per cent and 70 per cent of GDP, after which debt can become unmanageable.

When debt-servicing costs are high, countries often end up making big sacrifices to stay solvent. For example, they might tap foreign-exchange



Paola Subacchi

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A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN FINANCING, AT BOTH THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS, IS VITAL TO ACHIEVE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS BY THE 2030 DEADLINE

reserves, thereby weakening their ability to respond to future crises, or reallocate resources from critical areas – such as education, health, and social protection – to keep up with their payments. In low-income countries, interest payments are now 2.3 times larger than spending on social assistance, and 1.4 times larger than domestic health expenditures, on average. They amount to 60 per cent of spending on education.

A country that is reducing social spending to service its debts – despite the increase in poverty that will inevitably follow – is unlikely to be able to make long-term investments in sustainable development. And yet, as the UN and other multilateral organisations have made clear, a significant increase in financing, at both the national and international levels, is a prerequisite for achieving the SDGs by the 2030 deadline.

Thus, it is urgent to offer relief to countries that face debt distress. Governments should not have to choose between servicing their debts and taking care of their citizens, and today's debts should not act as a drag on the future. Countries' ability to manage their debt should be assessed against a broader range of indicators – human, social, and environmental, not just financial. Where debt relief, debt restructuring, or both is in order, it must be implemented quickly and efficiently as part of a comprehensive debt-management strategy, possibly making use of instruments like debt-for-climate swaps, which commit the debtor government to invest the savings from debt relief in climate adaptation or mitigation.

But debt relief alone is not enough. If developing countries are to achieve the SDGs, they will need new sources of funding. So far, multilateral development banks have taken the lead on this front. As a recent OECD report shows, in 2012-20, outflows from the World Bank Group increased by 72 per cent, and outflows from other MDBs soared by 155 per cent. In 2021-22, total MDB outflows rose by another 22 per cent. @Project Syndicate, 2024

FIVE MOUNTAINS FOLK FESTIVAL



A dancer poses with a mask before performing at the Five Mountains Folk Festival, started by farmers on the slopes of Mount Merapi Merbabu, in Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia, on Wednesday. – AFP

Displaced Lebanese recount their ordeal

After evacuating her family from the village of Seddiqine in southern Lebanon, Feryal Mehsen went back to fetch belongings. It was then that an Israeli air strike hit close by. Now in a shelter in Beirut, she sits scrolling through messages from friends and relatives checking if she survived the blast.

"Are you still alive? I heard that you're dead," one man asked her in a voice recording.

Israel's bombardment of southern villages in Lebanon, striking what it says are sites linked to Hezbollah, has driven tens of thousands of people like Mehsen, 58, from their homes.

Seddiqine residents had grown used to sporadic bombardment of the area near their village over months of cross-border fire triggered by the war in Gaza that began a year ago but were not prepared for Monday's sudden escalation. "All the people rushed out but I don't panic easily so I helped my neighbours get out. Then I came inside again and helped my family to leave with me," Mehsen said.

She left with her daughter and grandchildren, taking them to the southern city of Tyre before returning to Seddiqine to collect their belongings. That was when the air strike hit.

"The rocket landed in front of me. I was shocked. I couldn't hear or see after that. Dust was everywhere. So I drove off quickly," she said.



Emilie Madi

The writer is a Visual Journalist with Reuters

ISRAEL'S BOMBARDMENT OF SOUTHERN VILLAGES IN LEBANON HAS DRIVEN TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE FROM THEIR HOMES

As Israeli strikes intensified across southern Lebanon, with Hezbollah firing at targets in northern Israel, the family joined the throng of displaced people seeking refuge in Lebanon's capital, Beirut.

They ended up in the same shelter that Mehsen had used during the last major conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in July 2006. "Now the situation is much harder," she said.

In the same shelter, 63-year-old Souad Mahde was registering her name after fleeing her own southern Lebanese village of Qsaibah.

"The day before yesterday strikes started getting closer and planes were in the sky. We were scared," she said.

As the strikes started to creep closer into the village from the fields outside, Qsaibah's residents fled.

"The first thing I thought of was to take some clothes so I could change if we got somewhere. Just the basics, and medicine of course. Nothing more than that. No one cares any more about things like the house because fear takes over," she said. As people across southern Lebanon headed north, the roads filled with crawling traffic. A journey that would normally take two hours turned into a day-long journey.

"Our way out was very slow. The traffic was horrible. It was really hard. We moved for a bit and stopped for a bit. There were strikes here and there until we reached Beirut. It took us until evening," she said.

Reaching her destination did not bring her a sense of peace.

"Even in Beirut, there is an atmosphere of war. Of course, we are in a war," she said.

SEEKING SHELTER

Meanwhile, thousands of refugees fleeing sustained Israeli strikes in southern Lebanon over the past two days have sought shelter in schools across Beirut.

Many displaced individuals

appear deeply distressed, with some devastated after losing loved ones in the attacks.

"I cannot believe what is happening to us," said Zeinab who is from an area near the southern port city of Tyre.

Several refugees reported fleeing with only the clothes on their backs, without money or identification papers.

"My main concern was to get my family out to a safe place," Mohammed from the village of Srifa said.

On Wednesday, the streets of Beirut appeared largely deserted as Israel intensified its strikes deep into Lebanon, targeting areas in

Christian-populated regions north of the capital.

While Israel says that its strikes are aimed at the Hezbollah movement, Lebanese officials have reported numerous civilian casualties.

Clad in black and tearful, Haji Um Mohammed, expressed her devastation over the loss of her sister's family in a strike near Tyre.

Most residents of southern villages are known to support Hezbollah. Some expressed defiance when asked about the ongoing Israeli aerial campaign.

"Israel is the aggressor. We hope the resistance will teach them a good lesson," a man clad in black said, angered by the loss of his home.

"Even if we lose our homes, even if now we are displaced we still have dignity," he added.

Meanwhile, hundreds of Syrian refugees who fled their country during the 2011 war are taking refuge in Saraf and near Tyre where they are sitting in open areas and gardens.

"We fled our country a few years back. I am from Homos (in central Syria). Look now we are on the streets. We don't know where to go," Mohammed, a Syrian refugee and a father of six said.

Lebanon is currently home to an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees.



Souad Mahde, who fled from southern Lebanon due to ongoing cross-border hostilities, sits in a classroom, at the Technical Institute of Bir Hassan turned into a shelter, in Beirut, Lebanon on Wednesday. – Reuters

SPORTS

WORLD PADEL QUALIFIERS



Oman women's team in action.

OMAN WOMEN BLANK UAE TO MOVE INTO QUARTERS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The Oman women's padel team progressed to the quarterfinals of the FIP World Padel Championships Asia-Africa Qualifiers, which is underway in Kuwait City until Friday. Oman takes on the Philippines on Wednesday in a key match that will decide the winner advancing to the semifinals. The final stage of the FIP World Padel Championships is scheduled to take place in Doha, Qatar from October 28 to November 2.

The national women's padel team, comprising Leena al Zadjali, Marah al Abduwani, Eathar al Bulooshi, Sarah al Balushi, Maryam al Balushi, and Aisha al Suliemani, managed to secure a crucial win against the UAE in their concluding group match. Oman had a strong start with a resounding 3-0 win over Lebanon. Oman was represented by Sara al Balushi, Eathar al Balushi, Leena al Zadjali, Aisha al Suliemani, Mariam al Balushi and Ruaa al Suwaid. Oman's women's team was placed alongside the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon in Group B.

Japan topped Group A after a 3-0 win over Kuwait, with both teams advancing to the quarterfinals. Iran and Egypt also secured their places, as Egypt defeated Iran 2-1. In Group D, Australia claimed a 3-0 victory over Thailand, clinching a qualifying spot, while the Philippines edged Senegal 2-1.

Oman's men's team concluded their participation in the event. Drawn into a tough group with Iran, Japan, and China in Group C, Oman suffered a 3-0 loss against Iran in the opening game. The team, represented by Abdullah al Barwani, Sami Habib, Younis al Rawahi, Muneer al Rawahi, Khalid al Nabhani and Abdulaziz al Balushi, faced a second successive loss against Japan. However, they concluded the group stage with a win over China in the third game. In the 9-14 position play-off, Oman triumphed over Thailand, ending their participation in the qualifiers.



Seeb players celebrate with the Super Cup. — Abdulwahid Al Hamadani

Seeb beat Ahli Sidab to clinch Super Cup

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

SEEB Club won the Super Cup in hockey after defeating Ahli Sidab Club 4-3 in a penalty shoot-out. The match took place at the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat, under the auspices of Dr Salem al Araimi, President of the Oman University Sports Committee.

The match began with Seeb dominating, as their players managed to reach Ahli Sidab's goal and created several dangerous opportunities. The most notable was a powerful shot from outside the box by Mohammed al Lawati, but Ahli Sidab's goalkeeper was up to the challenge. In contrast, Ahli Sidab relied on defensive retreats and counter-attacks. In one of those fast counter-attacks, Ahli Sidab's Al Qasmi got a dangerous chance that almost resulted in a goal, but the first quarter ended in a goalless draw.

At the start of the second quarter, Seeb continued their offensive pressure, and Mohammed al Lawati scored the opening

goal from a free hit in the 18th minute. After the goal, Ahli Sidab responded with pressure on Seeb's goal, attempting to equalise, and they succeeded in scoring, but the referee disallowed the goal. They didn't delay in applying pressure again and earned a free hit, from which Ammar al Shuaibi scored the equalising goal in the 25th minute, making the score 1-1.

Ahli Sidab continued their pressure, posing a threat to Seeb's goal, which caused Seeb's defence to make errors that nearly gave Ahli Sidab the lead. As both teams exchanged chances, the second quarter ended with a 1-1 draw.

In the third quarter, Seeb players dominated possession and created dangerous attacks, but they couldn't convert them into goals. On the other side, Ahli Sidab capitalised on a counter-attack in the 34th minute, where Aseel al Maini scored the go-ahead goal. Afterwards, Ahli Sidab continued their pressure and scored the third goal through Rashid al Fazari in the 38th minute. Seeb tried to press afterwards, but they couldn't threaten Ahli Sidab's goal, and the third quarter ended

with Ahli Sidab leading 3-1. Seeb entered the final quarter with great determination to stage a comeback, increasing the pace of the game with high pressure on Ahli Sidab's defence. In the 48th minute, Seeb reduced the deficit after being awarded a free hit, which was once again expertly executed by Mohammed al Lawati with a stunning shot into the net, bringing the score to 3-2.

The pressure on Ahli Sidab intensified, forcing them to retreat to their defensive zones, while Seeb continued their attack and created several dangerous opportunities. In the 53rd minute, Seeb came close to equalising, but the goalkeeper made a brilliant save.

As the match neared its end, in the 58th minute, Huzaifa al Balushi scored the equalising goal with a powerful shot from inside the box after a brilliant pass from his teammate, making the score 3-3. Ahli Sidab tried to regain control, but Seeb successfully held on to the draw until the end of regular time, leading to a penalty shootout, where Seeb won the match with a score of 4-3.

Al Nasr dominate Ibri, Al Shabab defeat Al Rustaq to secure first win

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

Al Nasr defeated Ibri 2-0 in the game held on Tuesday at the Ibri Sports Complex as part of the sixth round of the Omantel League.

Al Nasr players started the match with pressure on Ibri, searching for an early goal. In the seventh minute, Mulham al Snaidi missed a clear chance when his cross-shot went just past the left post.

Al Nasr continued the pressure until the 34th minute, when Marwan Taib scored the first goal for Al Nasr with a brilliant header from a corner kick.

Just before the end of the first half, Mulham al Snaidi added a second goal for Al Nasr after a beautiful dribble inside the pen-

alty area and a shot to the right of the goalkeeper. The first half ended with Al Nasr leading 2-0.

In the second half, Ibri attempted to get back into the match, pressing Al Nasr. Raed al Mukhaini struck a powerful free kick in the 50th minute, but Al Nasr goalkeeper Saeed al Sinani saved it excellently. Despite Ibri's repeated efforts, they failed to score due to the players' haste and missed opportunities.

With this victory, Al Nasr raised their tally to 10 points and climbed to fourth place, while Ibri remained on four points and stayed in 10th place.

AL SHABAB EDGE AL RUSTAQ
In another match, Al Shabab defeated Al Rustaq 2-1 at Al Rustaq Sports Complex.



In the opening minutes, Al Rustaq created several opportunities, the most notable being a powerful shot by Ammar al Shiyadi in the fifth minute and a dangerous chance missed by Abdul in front of Al Shabab's goal in the seventh minute.

Al Shabab responded with a powerful shot from Hatem al Roshdi, which was saved by Al Rustaq's goalkeeper, resulting in a corner in the 10th minute.

Both teams continued to exchange attacks, and in the 34th minute, Issam al Subhi managed to score the opening goal for Al Shabab after a one-on-one with the Al Rustaq goalkeeper.

Al Rustaq tried to come back into the match with a dangerous header from Musab al Shaqsi, which hit the crossbar in the 38th

minute, but the first half ended with Al Shabab leading 1-0.

In the second half, Al Rustaq increased the pressure to equalise, but Al Shabab extended their lead with a second goal in the 54th minute by Hatem al Roshdi following a well-organised attack.

In the 58th minute, Al Rustaq was awarded a penalty after Douglas was fouled, and the same player scored to narrow the deficit. Despite Al Rustaq's repeated attempts to equalise, Al Shabab successfully held on to their lead until the end of the match.

With this victory, Al Shabab secured their first win of the league, raising their points tally to four and moving up to ninth place, while Al Rustaq remained on four points but stayed in eighth due to goal difference.

NEW LIFE



France World Cup winner Raphael Varane.

WORLD CUP WINNER
VARANE RETIRES

Paris: France World Cup winner Raphael Varane on Wednesday announced his retirement from football at the age of 31, adding that he will remain at Como in a non-playing capacity.

Former Real Madrid and Manchester United centre-back Varane had joined the Italian club for this season but was then excluded from their Serie A squad having suffered a knee injury in August.

“A new life begins off the pitch,” Varane said on social media. “I will remain with Como. Just without using my boots and shin pads.

“Something I am looking forward to sharing more about soon,” the four-time Champions League winner added.

Varane came through the academy at French club Lens before joining Madrid as an 18-year-old in 2011. He claimed the first of his three La Liga titles in his maiden season in his first season in the Spanish capital.

In 2014, he secured the first of his four Champions League crowns with a league and European double three years later.

Varane joined United in 2024, lifting a League Cup and an FA Cup with the English club.

He left Old Trafford last season to move to Cesc Fabregas’ newly-promoted Como, playing just one Coppa Italia match, when he sustained a knee injury. “From Lens to Madrid to Manchester, and playing for our national team,” Varane said.

“I have defended every badge with everything I have, and loved every minute of the journey,” he added.

With Les Bleus, Varane made his debut in 2013 with the pinnacle of his international career coming in 2018 and the World Cup success.

He finished his France career two years ago on 93 caps. “I have won more than I could have even dreamed of,” Varane said.

“But beyond the accolades and trophies, I am proud that no matter what, I have stuck to my principles of being sincere and have tried to leave everywhere better than I found it,” he added.

Various former team-mate paid tribute to Varane, including United’s Portugal playmaker Bruno Fernandes. “It was a pleasure for all of us,” Fernandes said on Instagram. — AFP

Brook’s maiden ton keeps
England alive in series

HARRY Brook said he felt a sense of relief after his maiden one-day international hundred paved the way for his first win as England captain.

Following heavy defeats by world champions Australia at Trent Bridge and Headingley, England had to win at Chester-le-Street on Tuesday to keep the five-match series alive.

Brook came in to bat with England struggling at 11-2 after Australia fast bowler Mitchell Starc had removed both openers. But the 25-year-old Yorkshire-man responded with a superb 110 not out. He received excellent support from Will Jacks (84) in a match-changing stand of 156.

By the time rain curtailed England’s pursuit of a target of 305, they had long since done enough to win by 46 runs on the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method.

It was yet more evidence of Brook’s talent and temperament with the novice captain, leading England this series in place of the injured Jos Buttler, appearing in just his 18th ODI.

Brook was simply pleased to be back in the runs. “I’m relieved, for sure,” he told reporters. “It’s nice to get that first hundred on the board and hopefully there’s plenty more to come.”

“I feel like I’ve been a little bit stop-start this summer. I’ve had a lot of starts — 30s and 40s — and then not managed to convert, which is frustrating.

“To do that today, I feel like I’m back in a good place. Obviously it’s nice to score runs against Australia, but scoring runs is amazing, no matter who it is against.”

‘WANT TO WIN’

Brook came under fire for his post-match comments following England’s defeat in the series opener in Nottingham when he tried to explain some loose dismissals by saying: “If you get caught somewhere on the boundary or in the field then who cares?”

But Brook was adamant he had been misunderstood. “I think people took that a little bit the wrong way,” he said.

“You’ve seen it so many times in the Test environment, at the start Stokesy (England red-ball captain Ben Stokes) was getting out caught at mid-on which is unheard of before, so you’ve got to go out with that fearless attitude and try to take it to the bowlers.”

Australia coach Andrew McDonald was left to rue the absence of key spinner Adam Zampa, a late withdrawal through illness, as England ended his side’s run of 14 consecutive ODI wins.



England’s Harry Brook in action during third ODI against Australia. — Reuters

McDonald had no doubt about Brook’s quality, saying: “Full credit to Harry. He’s an impressive player and he’s going to have a long career for England.

“He’s going to give us some headaches over the journey. The way he played, the way he led today... sometimes you’ve got to take your hat off to the opposition. This is one of those moments.” — AFP

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA	
M Short c Rashid b Archer	14
M Marsh c Smith b Carse	24
S Smith c Carse b Archer	60
C Green c Jacks b Bethell	42
M Labuschagne c Smith b Jacks	0
A Carey not out	77
G Maxwell c Carse b Livingstone	30
A Hardie run out (Rashid/Potts)	44
S Abbott not out	2

Extras (lb1, nb1, w9)	11
Total (7 wkts, 50 overs)	304
Fall of wickets: 1-21, 2-47, 3-131, 4-132, 5-172, 6-226, 7-294	
Bowling: Potts 9-0-48-0, Archer 10-0-67-2, Carse 10-0-55-1, Rashid 10-0-56-0, Bethell 5-1-33-1, Jacks 3-0-20-1, Livingstone 3-0-24-1	

ENGLAND	
P Salt c Short b Starc	0
B Duckett c Maxwell b Starc	8
W Jacks c Abbott b Green	84
H Brook not out	110
J Smith c Maxwell b Green	7
L Livingstone not out	33
Extras (lb1, nb3, w8)	12
Total (4 wkts, 37.4 overs)	254
Fall of wickets: 1-7, 2-11, 3-167, 4-197	
Bowling: Starc 8-1-63-2, Hazlewood 8-0-43-0, Abbott 7.4-0-53-0, Hardie 5-0-26-0, Maxwell 2-0-11-0, Green 6-0-45-2, Short 1-0-12-0	

Seeb dominate Ahli Sidab for thumping win in Credit Oman Cup

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

Seeb defeated Ahli Sidab 71-38 in the Credit Oman Basketball Cup 2024 match held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex’s secondary hall in Bausher on Tuesday.

The game was dominated by Seeb, who controlled the proceedings from start to finish, winning all four quarters. Thanks to the outstanding performance of several players, including Abdulrahman al Shaibi, Rasheed al Zuhaiibi, Mazen al Hadeed and Zakaria al Wahaibi. Seeb started the match strongly, with Noah al Amri opening the scoring, followed by Rasheed al Zuhaiibi adding two more points. Ahli Sidab responded with a three-pointer by Abdulaziz al Balushi. Both teams exchanged attacks, but Seeb ended the first quarter ahead 9-6.

In the second quarter, the exchange of attacks continued, with

The third quarter saw Seeb further extend their lead with Abdulrahman al Shaibi scoring 4 points, widening the gap to 30-19. Although Ahli Sidab attempted a comeback through Sami al Ghilani, Seeb continued to score, ending the third quarter 50-26.



Seeb and Ahli Sidab players in action. — Abdulwahid al Hamadani

Ahli Sidab’s Sami al Ghilani scoring two points, but Seeb quickly replied through Rasheed al Zuhaiibi. Seeb maintained their lead at 19-10 and kept scoring with contributions from Al Zuhaiibi and Mazen al Hadeed. Ahli Sidab tried to reduce the

deficit with points from Abdulaziz al Balushi and Suhail al Busaidi, but Seeb finished the first half leading 26-19.

The third quarter saw Seeb further extend their lead with Abdulrahman al Shaibi scoring 4

points, widening the gap to 30-19. Although Ahli Sidab attempted a comeback through Sami al Ghilani, Seeb continued to score, ending the third quarter 50-26.

In the fourth quarter, the exchange of attacks between the two teams continued, with Suhail al Busaidi of Ahli Sidab scoring two points from a shot under the basket. Seeb players responded by scoring 7 points bringing the score to 57-28. Ahli Sidab tried to narrow the gap by adding two more points from a shot under the basket. The offensive attempts continued between the two teams, with each side scoring several points, and the game concluded with Seeb defeating Ahli Sidab 71-38.

The match was officiated by an international refereeing team led by Rashid al Mushayfari, assisted by Ali al Salmani and Mazen al Hilali, while the scoring table was managed by Mariam al Zadjali, Miad al Hamdhani and Fatima al Harthi.

SPORTS/FOOTBALL



Real Madrid’s French forward #09 Kylian Mbappe celebrates scoring his team’s second goal during the Spanish league match between Real Madrid CF and Deportivo Alaves at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. — AFP

MBAPPE STRIKES AGAIN AS MADRID HOLD OFF ALAVES

MADRID: Kylian Mbappe struck for the fourth consecutive game as Real Madrid survived a late scare to beat Alaves 3-2 in La Liga on Tuesday.

Real Madrid, second, cut the gap on Barcelona to one point before the leaders host Getafe on Wednesday.

Madrid dismantled Alaves with goals from Lucas Vazquez, Mbappe and Rodrygo before a late salvo from the visitors rocked Carlo Ancelotti’s side.

Carlos Protezioni and Kike Garcia scored two goals in two minutes in the final stages but Madrid held on.

“This is football, you can think the game has finished, (then there’s) a small slip and they score the first, they get confidence and you lose it, this is what happens,” Ancelotti said.

“Obviously we don’t want this to happen, but it can. We have to highlight that for an hour the team played well and that gives us confidence.”

Los Blancos overpowered Alaves from the start in what was a hugely uneven contest for most of the game, despite the Basque side’s solid start to the season.

Ancelotti brought Vinicius Junior back into the starting line-up and gave Vazquez a rare start and the pair combined inside the first minute.

The Brazilian winger surged in from the left flank and cut the ball back for a simple finish from Vazquez.

Ancelotti said on Monday he wanted more intensity at the outset of matches after Madrid had scored just one first half goal this season in La Liga or the Champions League, and his demand was swiftly met.

Los Blancos dominated with Alaves barely reaching Thibaut Courtois’ penalty box. Despite that Madrid’s second goal only came five minutes before the interval, when Mbappe and Jude Bellingham combined beautifully.

FIFTH LEAGUE GOAL FOR MBAPPE

France captain Mbappe conjured a clever flicked pass to the England international, who completed a one-two by sending his team-mate through on goal.

Mbappe took two deft touches to shake his marker and get a sight of goal, before stroking home clinically for his fifth league goal.



Real Madrid’s Rodrygo in action with Deportivo Alaves’ Tomas Conechny. — Reuters



Rodrygo expanded Madrid’s lead soon after the interval, roaming in with freedom from the right and firing through Alaves goalkeeper Antonio Sivera’s legs.

Brazilian striker Endrick hit the post with a deflected effort and Abde Rebach also struck the woodwork as Alaves made a rare foray forward.

Madrid substitute Endrick, 18, was fortunate not to be dismissed when he kicked out at Alaves defender Santiago Mourino.

Mbappe was taken off after 80 minutes and appeared to be suffering some discomfort, holding the back of his thigh.

“He’s fine, he’s fine, a little overloaded, he asked me for the change to avoid problems,” explained Ancelotti.

The visitors pulled one back after 85 minutes when Protezioni curled home a sweet strike from the edge of the box.

— AFP

Spanish La Liga results on Tuesday:
Sevilla 2 (Torres 45-og, Ejuke 85) Valladolid 1 (Perez 56)
Valencia 0 Osasuna 0
Real Madrid 3 (Vazquez 1, Mbappe 40, Rodrygo 48) Alaves 2 (Protezioni 85, Garcia 86)

Al Faisal’s team suffers setback after Monza retirement over accident

MONZA, ITALY: The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Team suffered a setback to its 2024 Fanatec GT World Challenge powered by AWS Endurance Cup title ambitions after a premature retirement from the fourth round at the Monza circuit in Italy on Sunday afternoon.

After starting the three-hour race from the rear of the Gold Cup grid, Oman’s Al Faisal bin Khalid al Zubair was hit from behind by another car after just six laps of the race and the damage sustained to the Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo made it impossible for Al Zubair, Australian team debutant Broc Feeney and Austrian Dominik Baumann to continue.



Al Faisal al Zubair at Monza after his accident on Sunday.

A disappointed Al Faisal said: “Unfortunately, it was not the best of weekends. It started off quite difficult with the car set-up for us and the Pro car in the team. Then, in qualifying, we had a real issue where we couldn’t get our tyres to really switch on. That allowed us to qualify sixth in class.

“From then on, we went for quite an aggressive set-up for the race. About 20 minutes into the race, I had an accident into turn one. There was too much damage to the car and that forced us to retire the car from the race. We are still second in the championship with one round to go. That is a positive and I am looking forward to the next

round in Jeddah.”

Gold Cup victory after 87 laps on the Italian circuit went to the Haupt Racing Team Mercedes trio of Michele Berretta, Jusuf Owega and Arjun Maini. The Comtoyou Racing Aston Martin crew of Matisse Lismont, Jon Van Uitert and Charles Clark led for long periods after regaining the advantage they had lost to the Tresor Attempto Racing Audi on the 18th lap when the Audi slipped out of contention nine laps later.

The Sainteloc Racing trio of Paul Evrard, Gilles Magnus and Jim Pla extended their lead in the title race after finishing second in their Audi. The Comtoyou Racing Aston Mar-

tin eventually reached the finish in third.

After a two-hour free practice session and pre-qualifying on Saturday, it was down to the serious business of qualifying on Sunday morning. The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed crew were at the foot of the Gold Cup standings after Q1, were fourth in Q2 and at the foot of the rankings again in Q3. With the three sessions combined, the Al Manar Racing by Getspeed crew started at the rear of the Gold Cup field after ongoing tyre issues.

The Fanatec GT World Challenge powered by AWS Endurance Cup reaches its conclusion in Jeddah on November 21-23.



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BUSINESS

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Pact signed to position Oman as global low-carbon fuel bunkering hub

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

Oman's integrated global logistics services provider Asyad Group, in collaboration with OQ Alternative Energy and Sumitomo Corporation Middle East FZE, have announced a joint study agreement to explore the potential of establishing Oman as a global leader in low-carbon fuels for bunkering.

This initiative represents a pioneering step in promoting sustainable shipping practices to meet global decarbonisation goals in the maritime industry and leveraging



A RFI issued to the world's leading shipping companies seeks to drive the adoption of global green logistic solutions in Oman.

Oman's renewable resources on a global scale.

The group has issued a Request For Information (RFI) to the world's leading shipping companies to drive the adoption of global green logistic solutions in Oman.

Additionally, a feasibility study will be conducted to assess key factors including the levelised costs of delivered low-carbon fuels, the infrastructure required to support such operations, and the alignment with global regulatory standards for sustainable fuels.

Early findings suggest that Oman's unique geographical advantage and

superior renewable energy resources could position the country as a frontrunner in providing competitively priced low-carbon fuels to the global shipping industry.

The insights derived from the RFI will represent the cornerstone for the study and will be crucial in guiding the development of a world-class low-carbon bunkering infrastructure in Oman, thus making a lasting impact on global maritime practices.

In line with Oman's Vision 2040 and its sustainable energy strategy, the parties aim to leverage the Sultanate of Oman's abun-

dant renewable resources to offer low-carbon fuels such as e-methanol and ammonia at competitive prices.

Current bunkering facilities at the Ports of Salalah and Duqm are earmarked as strategic sites for potential retrofitting to support low-carbon fuel operations.

By updating these existing infrastructures and transforming these ports into key nodes on vital global trade routes, Oman aims to become a leader in the global transition to low-carbon shipping fuels and further support the growth of the nation's burgeoning logistics sector.

Oman targets 35% increase in foreign investments

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

ENHANCING Oman's attractiveness for foreign investments remains a key pillar of the financial sector's development initiatives, with specific targets set at 24 per cent by 2025, 27 per cent by 2030, and 35 per cent by 2040, while the rate reached 22 per cent in 2022. This was revealed by the latest report issued by the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit earlier this week.

Major progress have already been made in the path of financial sector development, including the launch of a comprehensive financial sector development plan. A memorandum of cooperation was signed with the British Embassy to explore the establishment of the Omani Growth Capital Fund, which will involve several commercial banks operating within Oman.

Additionally, preparations are underway for the initial draft of the Insolvency Law, complete with executive regulations to provide a structured regulatory framework for personal insolvency cases. Central oversight is also being established for initiatives related to the sustainable green financing



Major progress have already been made in the path of financial sector development, including the launch of a comprehensive financial sector development plan

maintaining the fixed exchange rate of the Omani Rial while ensuring adequate levels of money supply through effective management of domestic liquidity.

This is supported by appropriate foreign currency reserves and the implementation of sound macroprudential policies to ensure financial stability.

The Central Bank of Oman plays a critical role in managing these policies, working in tandem with the Ministry of Finance to achieve financial stability and macroeconomic objectives.

This coordinated approach is expected to have a tangible positive impact on Oman's credit rating, stabilise prices, boost confidence in the national economy, and drive economic growth.

Among the Central Bank's most ambitious initiatives is the enhancement of monetary policy effectiveness under the fixed exchange rate system.

This project aims to bolster the Central Bank's capacity to influence local liquidity conditions through a comprehensive operational framework for active liquidity management. Further efforts include completing the institutional and legal frameworks that enable the Central Bank to function as a lender of last resort, thereby supporting financial stability.

Gold backed innovative investment opportunities made available in Oman



Under the wise stewardship of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultanate of Oman, continues to scale milestones of success, to achieve a bright future for the country. In 2023, Oman marked several key developments, each playing a pivotal role in the nation's progress.

In line with HM's Vision, robust & innovative investment opportunities have been made available to the people of Oman and foreign investors alike.

Singapore's Digital Asset Exchange (SDAX), is pleased to announce the successful closing of its US\$50 million Series B2 funding round led by the Oman-based Muscat Precious Metals Refining Company LLC ("MPMR").

MPMR is incorporated in the Sultanate of Oman led by CEO, Shihab Al Busaidi.

Oman's first and to date, sole licensed gold refinery, MPMR specialises in the smelting, refining, testing, trading and minting of precious metals such as gold, silver, platinum and palladium. It refines approximately 40 tons of gold annually.

With years of experience, it plays a vital role in the pioneering, development and improvement of many industry standards in Oman, setting new benchmarks through the on-going integration of industry-leading technologies and the knowledge and skill sets of a highly specialised and dedicated team.

In April this year, SDAX teamed up with MPMR to securitize Gold Tokens on the SDAX Exchange platform, empowering investors with access to private markets and alternative investment opportunities. First of their kind, these tokens offer investors fractional gold investments and trading, backed by physical gold bullion held at Le Freeport in Singapore. Following this, SDAX

has issued a popular series of short-term gold-backed loan notes offering investors double-digit yields.

Brimming with confidence, Nick Cochrane-Dyet MBE of MPMR, and Chair-designate of SDAX says, "After more than a year of working with SDAX, the results of our partnership have demonstrated the potential SDAX has to offer in democratizing investments for financial inclusion. We look forward to deepening our partnership with SDAX by developing capabilities in Oman to provide companies in the GCC with an alternative source of funds, and to building a strong investor base in the region."

Rachel Chia, Chief Executive Officer of SDAX, said, "The successful Series B2 funding round is a testament to SDAX's commitment to democratise access to institutional-grade private markets and alternative investments. We value the continued support of our current investors, and welcome both our new shareholders MPMR and the business potential that this new partnership brings. We are particularly excited about the opportunity to expand into the GCC region."

Regional expansion is another priority for SDAX, as is the launch of a digital asset exchange in Oman. This platform will not only provide a strategic gateway to the GCC and Africa but will also connect Oman to liquidity pools globally.

Oman continues to implement economic plans, and financial and investment programmes within the framework of the 10th Five-year plan (2021-2025), guided by the priorities of Oman Vision 2040. The outcomes of these plans have contributed to enhancing GDP growth, raising financial and economic indicators, improving credit ratings, and achieving some financial surpluses that were directed to economic and social priorities.

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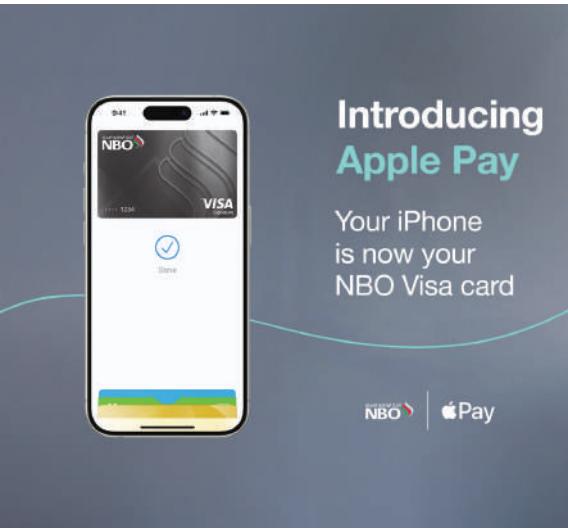


OMAN ARAB BANK PARTNERS WITH BADIR FUND TO BOOST SME GROWTH

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has signed a strategic partnership with the “Badir” Fund, a development initiative managed by the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) in Kuwait. The collaboration aims to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Oman by providing enhanced financial and advisory services, fostering growth, and expanding the scope of their businesses. The agreement, signed by Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of OAB, and Bader Mohammed al Saad, Director General of the Badir Fund, represents a joint effort to strengthen entrepreneurship in Oman. With both institutions having extensive experience in the SME sector, the partnership will focus on providing tailored support to entrepreneurs, aligning with Oman’s Vision 2040 goals, which emphasise the private sector’s role in economic diversification and growth.

Al Harthy emphasised that OAB remains dedicated to fostering an environment conducive to the growth of SMEs, particularly through its “Tumouhi” programme, which offers a range of innovative products and services designed for these enterprises. He noted that the collaboration with the Badir Fund will enhance the bank’s ability to support SME projects, boosting their success and creating greater opportunities within the sector. Al Saad echoed these sentiments, praising OAB’s leadership in the banking sector and its long-standing commitment to supporting Omani entrepreneurs. He highlighted the Badir Fund’s role in not only providing financing but also offering technical and advisory assistance to SMEs across the Arab world, reinforcing the importance of the private sector as a driver of sustainable economic growth.

NBO AND MUZN BRING APPLE PAY TO CUSTOMERS



MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) and Muzn Islamic Banking bring its customers Apple Pay, a safer, more secure and private way to pay that helps customers avoid handing their payment card to someone else, touching physical buttons or exchanging cash — and uses the power of iPhone to protect every transaction. Customers simply hold their iPhone or Apple Watch near a payment terminal to make a contactless payment. Every Apple Pay purchase is secure because it is authenticated with Face ID, Touch ID, or device passcode, as well as a one-time unique dynamic security code. Apple Pay is accepted in grocery stores, pharmacies, taxis, restaurants, coffee shops, retail stores, and many more places. Customers can also use Apple Pay on iPhone, iPad, and Mac to make faster and more convenient purchases in apps or on the web in Safari without having to create accounts or repeatedly type in shipping and billing information. Apple Pay makes it easier to pay for food and grocery deliveries, online shopping, transportation, and parking, among other things. Apple Pay can also be used to make payments in apps on Apple Watch. Security and privacy are at the core of Apple Pay. When customers use a credit or debit card with Apple Pay, the actual card numbers are not stored on the device nor on Apple servers. Instead, a unique Device Account Number is assigned, encrypted, and securely stored in the Secure Element, an industry-standard, certified chip designed to store the payment information safely on the device. Apple Pay is easy to set up. On iPhone, simply open the Wallet app, tap +, and follow the steps to add any NBO or Muzn card.

Drive Toyota’s Corolla with Akeed benefits

DRIVE one of Toyota’s best-selling sedans with exclusive Akeed benefits. Become a Corolla owner and get service upgrades from 2 Years/20,000 km or 10 years/100,000 km (whichever is earlier) along with 1st year free insurance. Enjoy the winning season at Toyota and participate in the grand raffle to win an all-new Toyota Prado. Don’t miss out before the campaign ends on October 31, 2024. Head to your nearest Toyota showroom to learn more and checkout Toyota’s amazing product lineup. Take advantage of the Akeed benefits and invest in a Corolla this season. Built on the brand ethos of quality, durability, and reliability, the sedan remains a top-notch household choice. It delivers an exhilarating experience packed with advanced safety, technologies and unmatched fuel efficiency. Exploring the vehicle dynamics, the Corolla features a 2.0-litre, four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine that produces 168 hp and 20.39 kg/m of torque. For a more fuel-efficient option, opt for the 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine that produces 121 hp and 15.7 kg/m of torque. Each engine type is paired with a direct-shift CVT transmission. Promising agility and high confidence, the Corolla is utilitarian at all trim levels. Make fun memories and create joyous moments in the Corolla which is built for comfort, convenience, and safety of your family. The makers of the Corolla have always opted for a simple yet appealing interior style with



As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the Corolla, which includes a comprehensive array of features to protect its occupants,

impressive space, integrated functionalities, and intuitive controls. Experience the pillowy, cushion-fitted seating space created with fine-quality material with supporting armrests, comfortable legroom space, cup holders, seamless connectivity options, and the latest technologies for the driver’s assistance. The sedan offers a smart-key system that allows keyless switching on and off the car. Its 8-inch display audio screen is augmented with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto to boost the driving mood. Seamlessly connect phones to the six-speaker sound system and hit the cruise control for longer drives. Adding more to the experience are the rear seat AC vents, a moonroof, a 4.2-inch multi-information display (MID), and 60:40 split-folding rear

seats. As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the Corolla, which includes a comprehensive array of features to protect its occupants, such as four SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Brake Assist, Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD), and Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), among many others. Visit your nearest Toyota dealership for a closer look. A vehicle test drive option is also available for those looking for experience before making the purchase. All models are available across all showrooms in the Sultanate of Oman and our team awaits and looks forward to your arrival.

National Finance extends support to Dar Al Atta’a’s Tamkeen programme

MUSCAT: Demonstrating its resolute pledge to community empowerment, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, renewed its partnership with Dar Al Atta’a in an esteemed signing ceremony. This collaboration reaffirms support to the latter’s “Tamkeen” programme, which aims to equip 27 individuals from underprivileged backgrounds with essential skills and qualifications to work as certified dental assistants. The agreement was signed by Tariq bin Suleiman 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. The Tamkeen programme provides a comprehensive Dental Assistant certification course designed to prepare candidates for vital roles in the medical sector, thereby fostering sustainable income opportuni-

This collaboration reaffirms support to the latter’s ‘Tamkeen’ programme, which aims to equip 27 individuals from underprivileged backgrounds with essential skills and qualifications to work as certified dental assistants.



ties for their families. This partnership marks yet another milestone in National Finance’s distinguished legacy of community welfare initiatives, which are spearheaded by its Imtidad social responsibility arm. Tariq bin Suleiman al Farsi remarked, “At National Finance, social

responsibility stands as a core pillar of our operational ethos, reflecting our commitment to enhancing the everyday lives of the communities we serve. We are proud to reaffirm our support for Dar Al Atta’a’s Tamkeen programme, which has profoundly impacted the lives of

numerous individuals and families over the years. Through our investment in such educational and training initiatives, we are creating pathways for disadvantaged families to achieve sustainable income and secure promising futures, while also aligning our efforts with national priorities for workforce development.” Al Zadjali, expressing gratitude on the occasion, said, “We are immensely grateful to National Finance for their unwavering support to Dar Al Atta’a throughout the years. Bolstered by the company’s steadfast partnership, we’ve been able to launch numerous initiatives that positively impact communities nationwide. We firmly believe in our responsibility to uplift the underprivileged, and our Tamkeen programme empowers individuals through education and training, equipping them with vital skills, and creating meaningful opportunities for a brighter future.”

PDO drives growth with local content initiatives

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

PETROLEUM Development Oman (PDO), the biggest producer of hydrocarbons in the Sultanate of Oman, continues to play a pivotal role in the nation's economic growth through its robust local content initiatives.

The company's ongoing commitment to empowering Omani talent and supporting local businesses has translated into significant socio-economic benefits for Oman.

PDO's efforts to enhance In-Country Value (ICV) are reflected in its creation of 2,000 jobs annually across its contractor base.

These jobs are critical to supporting the growth of Oman's workforce, contributing to PDO's broader goal of ensuring sustainable economic development.

In a post, the company has invested a substantial \$420 million in value through realised opportunities that have now reached the operational stage, providing long-term economic benefits to Omanis. These initiatives have directly resulted in the creation of 3,200 jobs for Omani nationals, further bolstering local employment.

In a bid to empower small and medium enterprises (SMEs), PDO has also achieved 18% SME spending as part of its local procurement strategy. By setting aside 18 ring-fenced scopes of work specifically for local businesses, PDO has ensured that homegrown enterprises have access



PDO's efforts to enhance In-Country Value (ICV) are reflected in its creation of 2,000 jobs annually across its contractor base.

Highlights

PDO invested a substantial

\$420 MILLION

in value through realised opportunities that have now reached the operational stage.

to opportunities that enable them to grow, innovate, and contribute to the national economy.

PDO's emphasis on local retention of value is evident in the staggering \$2.4 billion retained within Oman, reinforcing the company's dedication to sustainable development.

The company has maintained a high Omanisation rate of 91%, underscoring its long-term commitment to building local capacity across its operations.

These achievements highlight PDO's strategic alignment with

Oman Vision 2040, which focuses on economic diversification, job creation, and local empowerment.

PDO's local content efforts are not only essential to the energy sector but are also crucial in supporting the broader Omani economy through job creation, skill development, and SME empowerment.

As PDO continues to invest in its people and local businesses, the company is positioning itself as a cornerstone of Oman's economic future, ensuring that its success translates into prosperity for the nation.

JOINT INITIATIVE TO BOOST INDUSTRIAL INNOVATION IN OMAN

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

UNITED Engineering Services (UES), a member of Mohammed Al Barwani Group, in partnership with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, hosted a joint meeting to strengthen collaboration on intellectual property and industrial innovation.

The meeting, chaired by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (Mo-HERI), gathered key officials, including Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Research and Innovation and Innovation, and representatives from various Omani universities



Dr Rahma al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, chaired the meeting on Wednesday.

and colleges. This initiative aimed to bring together government, academia and industry to enhance innovation. The focus was on activating the concept of asset generation

for industrial innovations and reinforcing Oman's intellectual property framework.

The meeting included representatives from several universities, such as Sharqiyah University, Nizwa University, the German University of Technology, and Dhofar University, demonstrating extensive academic involvement. Dr Rahma said: "Collaborating with the industrial sector is crucial for driving innovation and enhancing Oman's global standing. By registering the innovations and inventions of our researchers, we can not only strengthen the country's intellectual property framework but also position Oman as a leader in innovation both locally and internationally. This initiative will play a vital role in improving Oman's global innovation ranking and achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040."

JV partners make progress in financing for Oman's Marsa LNG project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

AHEAD of the anticipated start of construction work on Marsa LNG's bunkering terminal at Sohar Port in the Sultanate of Oman, the joint venture partners are targeting the completion of negotiations on the financing of the project before the end of Q3 2024.

Marsa LNG – a joint venture between TotalEnergies (with an 80 per cent working interest) and Omani integrated energy group OQ (with a 20 per cent working interest) – is overseeing the development of a 1 million metric tonnes per annum (mmta) capacity plant at Sohar Port. LNG output from the facility will be supplied to ships as a low carbon alternative to marine bunker fuel currently used to power most ships globally.

According to wholly Omani

government-owned OQ, the construction of the LNG plant will be financed through a subordinated loan from the joint venture partners and a drawdown under a \$500 million bank loan to be provided to Marsa by a syndicate of Omani, regional and international banks.

"In connection therewith, \$100 million and \$400 million of the facility is expected to be support guaranteed by the Company (OQ Exploration & Production – OQEP) and TotalEnergies, respectively, with each being liable pursuant to their respective support guarantees for any drawdowns on a pro rata basis," OQEP revealed in the prospective of its upcoming Initial Public Offering (IPO).

"The Company (OQEP) expects to complete the negotiation of, and to execute, the final form of facility documentation by the end of September 2024, and for Marsa to make



Construction work on Marsa LNG is expected to commence soon.

an initial drawdown thereunder during the fourth quarter of 2024," it added.

OQEP – the upstream arm of OQ – made the revelations in a

prospectus published ahead of the launch of its Initial Public Offering (IPO) covering 25 per cent of its capital for public subscription on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX)

starting later this month.

OQEP also holds a 13.4 per cent working interest in Block 10, a gas and condensate asset in central Oman, that will provide natural gas as feedstock for Marsa LNG. Shell holds a 53.5 per cent working interest, with the Marsa LNG JV holding a 33.2 per cent working interest.

In addition, through OQEP's 20 per cent ownership interest in Marsa LNG, it has an indirect 6.6 per cent working interest which it acquired simultaneously with its direct stake, giving it an aggregate working interest of 20 per cent in Block 10.

French engineering and technology firm Technip Energies has been awarded the contract to build the Marsa LNG train on an Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) basis. The plant is expected to be operational in 2028.

BANK INITIATIVES

CBO STRENGTHENS MONETARY AND FINANCING LANDSCAPE



NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 25

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) is enhancing the efficiency of monetary policy within the fixed exchange rate system, according to the latest report of Oman Vision 2040, issued here earlier this week. The monetary policy managed by the Central Bank of Oman, alongside continuous coordination with the financial policy administered by the Ministry of Finance, plays a significant role in achieving financial stability and macroeconomic goals.

Consequently, this will have a tangible positive impact on improving Oman's credit rating, maintaining price stability, enhancing confidence in the national economy, and stimulating economic growth.

The project focuses on strengthening CBO's ability to influence local liquidity conditions by adopting a comprehensive operational framework for managing local liquidity effectively. This includes completing the institutional and legal frameworks governing the performance of the Central Bank as a lender of last resort to support financial stability.

In the context of advancing the financial sector, the apex bank is currently implementing numerous initiatives in collaboration with relevant entities.

Among the most notable of these initiatives are enhancing the role of the Development Bank in financing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), developing a financial adequacy system to enable financial institutions to provide diverse financing tools based on creditworthiness, establishing a venture capital fund for various segments with contributions from banks, creating a market maker and liquidity provider, and establishing a promising companies market on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Furthermore, the programme aims to stimulate the offering and listing of companies in the capital market, develop the local debt instruments market, establish a national incubator for financial technology, and prepare a sustainable sovereign financing framework.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority is working with the CBO to address the challenges faced by small and medium-sized enterprises in accessing facilitated loans from commercial banks. The authority has also collaborated with the National Financial Sustainability Programme and the financial sector development initiative, "Sustainability," to explore the need for a fund to guarantee loans for small and medium-sized enterprises through the Development Bank.

The programme, in partner with the Development Bank, is set to implement an initiative to enhance the bank's role in financing small and medium-sized enterprises, ensuring that government funding is effectively directed toward financing economically impactful projects with added local value.

OPINION

Pakistan-Oman relations: A strategic partnership in the making



AHMAD SUBHANI

The author is CEO of Falcon Eye Group

OMAN is becoming the centre of attention as an emerging market with significant opportunities for Pakistani investors and job-seekers. Pakistan and Oman share a long-standing relationship built on historical, cultural and economic ties, enhanced by their geographic proximity across the Arabian Sea. This connection is strengthened by the significant Baloch community in Oman, which traces its roots to Pakistan's Balochistan province, fostering cultural bonds between the two nations. Diplomatic relations have been cordial since Pakistan's independence in 1947, with both countries cooperating in various global and regional forums like the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Security and defence cooperation are crucial, as Oman's strategic location near the Strait of Hormuz is vital for regional stability, maritime security and counterterrorism efforts. Economic ties are growing steadily, with Oman emerging as a key trading partner for Pakistan within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Pakistan exports textiles, food, and agricultural products, while Oman supplies oil, gas, and petrochemicals. The proximity of Oman to Pakistan's Gwadar port, part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), offers opportunities for expand-

ing trade routes and economic collaboration. Recently, a high-level Omani delegation visited Pakistan in late July 2024, led by Ibtisam al Farooji, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion at Oman's Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. The delegation engaged in both Government-to-Government (G2G) and Business-to-Business (B2B) meetings. They focused on enhancing trade relations and exploring investment opportunities in Pakistan, particularly in sectors like energy, agriculture, and infrastructure. The delegation expressed interest in the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) and Pakistan's ongoing economic reforms, especially under the Green Pakistan Initiative. As a follow-up to the recent visit of the Omani trade delegation to Pakistan, the Pakistan Embassy in Muscat is organising the Pak-Oman Expo 2024, which will take place from October 13-14, 2024 in Muscat. This event aims to showcase Pakistani exports, including agro-food products, textiles, sports goods, surgical instruments, and IT services etc to the Omani market. The Expo is designed to foster trade relations by bringing together Pakistani exporters and Omani buyers, along with opportunities for business-to-business (B2B) and government-to-business (G2B) meetings.

Highlights

Labour migration is another essential aspect of bilateral relations. Approximately 400,000 Pakistanis work in Oman, contributing to Oman's economy, especially in construction, services, and healthcare, while remittances from these workers support Pakistan's economy.

Both countries are working to strengthen labour migration frameworks and improve working conditions for expatriates. Cultural ties, driven by shared traditions and frequent cultural exchanges, along with emerging tourism opportunities, further deepen relations. Improved air connectivity and visa agreements are expected to boost tourism between the two nations, as Omanis explore Pakistan's scenic destinations, while Pakistanis travel to Oman's historic sites and landscapes. Looking ahead, Pakistan and Oman have the potential to expand cooperation in fields such as renewable energy, technology, and education, particularly as Oman pursues economic diversification under its Vision 2040 initiative. Despite regional challenges, both countries remain committed to deepening their partnership, benefiting from each other's strengths and contributing to regional stability and prosperity.

A NEW PLATFORM FOR CITIZENSTOREGISTER THEIR COMPLAINTS



HAIDER AL LAWATI

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

AT THE latest meeting of the esteemed Council of Ministers, chaired by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, several key decisions were issued to support economic and social development activities in the next phase, following a difficult growth phase due to global challenges. The country has faced significant social and economic hurdles, largely as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the state's focus on reducing public debt, and high bank interest rates.

These factors have increased operational costs for institutions and companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises.

Additionally, many citizens have struggled to find employment in public and private sectors. Several large companies also suffered losses due to the departure of expatriate workers and the inability to secure new contracts, which in turn led to layoffs of national workers over recent years.

The economic and social impacts of these challenges require careful monitoring by the relevant authorities, prompting the establishment of specialised platforms and units to track complaints from citizens and their respective ministries and agencies. In response, the Council of Ministers recently decided to launch a new electronic platform dedicated to receiving complaints and suggestions across 45 government institutions.

This national platform, scheduled to be operational by 2025, will be connected to the Oman Vision 2040 Foundation, allowing authorities to lay the groundwork for its successful implementation and prepare the necessary steps.

This initiative does not imply that authorities were not addressing citizens' complaints in the past, but many felt that the response times were lengthy and did not adequately reflect the concerns raised.

With the launch of this platform, various media outlets will also be informed of the number of complaints received, allowing visual, audio, and print media to report on citizens' issues more directly and understand the nature of the complaints being submitted to the competent unit. By receiving these complaints, authorities will be able to take official and timely action.

There is no doubt that the new platform will establish a direct link between citizens and relevant government agencies, ensuring that problems are conveyed to the appropriate departments and resolved fairly.

It will facilitate and accelerate the process of receiving and addressing complaints, thereby increasing institutional efficiency in handling these issues and ensuring they are resolved within a specified timeframe.



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is the founder of Knowledge Oman

ARWA, Badriya, and Ruqaiya are three respected and qualified team members of an initiative who were assigned a task during one of the group's periodic meetings to create a detailed organisation chart, define the relevant legal structure required for the organisation to operate, and then finally illustrate a real-world and practical case study of an existing organisation setup as a recommendation. During the team meeting, the three members not only received a distinct briefing but also received periodic gentle reminders and follow-ups on their assignment. However, despite the quality, unique strength, and experience that each of the members possesses and brings to the table, the outcome of their assigned deliverable was not as per the agreement expected by the entire group. Did the 3-team member receive a clear briefing of their assignment? Yes. Were there any challenges raised by any of the members about the assignment? No. Were there periodic follow-ups on the progress and support given to each of the 3 team members about the assignment? Yes. Was there any concern and/or challenge pertaining to time, money, or resources to deliver the agreed assignment?

No. Then, what went wrong? The 3 team members did not listen and failed to clarify the clear details of the assignment! Time and effort were wasted as a result. Upon investigating the issue further, it was learned that despite the clear assignment of roles among the team members, there was misalignment among them to start with (e.g., Badriya was not even consulted on the decisions and recommendation of the assignment), and the team failed to grasp the key details of the assignment (and that's most probably due to lacking necessary listening skills). This story is a powerful reminder of the importance of effective listening, be it for personal and/or professional growth. One can have the best knowledge, experience, and skillsets, yet without an effective listening skill, he/she will most of the time face a similar outcome as the 3 great team members I have illustrated at the beginning of my article today. Benefits of effective listening include, but are not limited to, meaningful and clear communications, stronger and more impactful relationships, and indeed a learning opportunity, to mention a few. Requirements of initiatives will be crystal clear. Many problems and disagreements would be solved. Stronger and more effective relationships will be built as a result.

And lastly, one would learn a lot from just being a good listener. I may not be a great listener myself (and know this is a common challenge to many), yet this is a skill I noticed to have resolved many challenges in my personal and professional life as an experience. When we listen actively, we not only hear the words but also can deduce and derive solutions, suggestions, and advice (if that was required in the first place) as a conclusion from something known or assumed. I know it may not be easy at some time and in some context, yet trust me, it is one thing you must not avoid doing (practicing and improving) to have better relationships and solutions to problems. I will try to share some of the practical listening skills that I personally follow (on my future articles) as part of my personal and professional endeavours. To conclude my article this week, let me emphasise that effective listening will not only result in great personal and professional relationships, yet will also ensure your communication is meaningful. The next time you're invited for a meeting, in any context it is, try and be a good listener (apart from only speaking). I promise you that the results will be profound. Until we catch up again next week, stay positive and continue winning.



A man poses at John Baldessari Beethoven's Trumpet (With Ear) sculpture exhibition at Saatchi Gallery, London. Image for illustration only.

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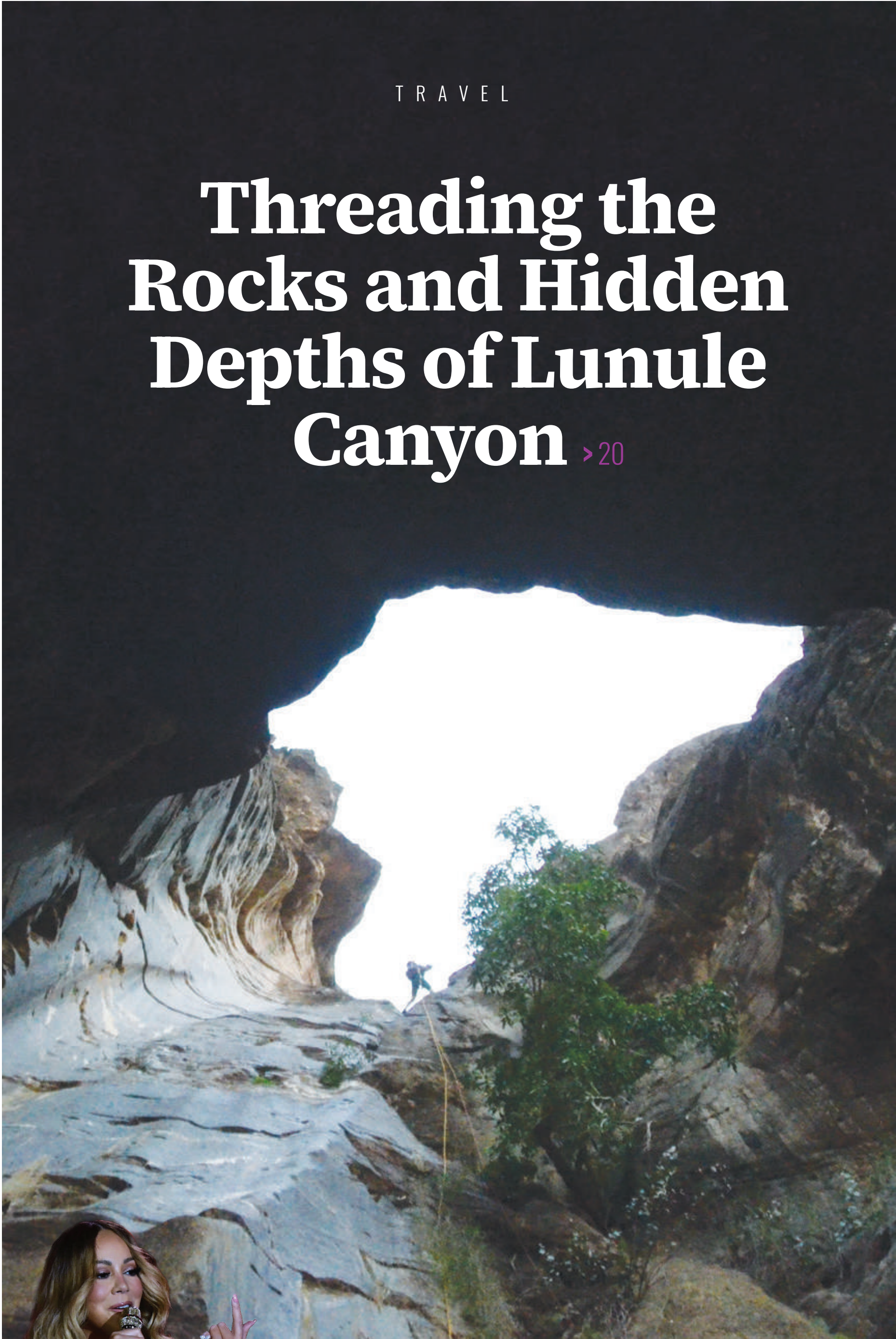
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ART/LIFE



T R A V E L

Threading the Rocks and Hidden Depths of Lunule Canyon >20

IN FASHION



Prada offers topless hats, huge sunglasses and lots of metallics at Milan show

Italian fashion house Prada played with distortion for its womenswear Spring-Summer 2025 collection at Milan Fashion Week on Thursday, presenting skirts suspended from belts, glasses with hugely oversized lenses and topless hats.

Designers Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons opened the show, called "Infinite Present" with a floral strappy frock followed by a black dress adorned with metallic rings, an embellishment seen on several outfits.

Models wore stiff shiny silver skirts, some bearing see-through decorative holes, colourful tights that morphed into trousers and tailored trousers as well as skirts that hung from belts.

The latter were prominent throughout the show, also appearing on handbags as a fastening or hanging low on one model's hips.

There were fitted tops, hot pants, knotted blouses and plenty of outerwear including macs and jackets in bright colours. One dark feathered dress was worn with an orange rain jacket. Some models wore sheer skirts over the tight trousers.

Accessories included huge sunglasses and topless goggle-like bucket hats that covered faces.

Shoes were varied from sandals to cowboy boots as well as plenty of colourful heels, some with stick out flaps on top.

On Wednesday evening, fashion house Roberto Cavalli looked to the Sicilian coast for its womenswear show, the first since the death of its founding designer.

Creative director Fausto Puglisi called the line "Views from Zancle", referring to the ancient name of his hometown of Messina in northeastern Sicily.

He opened the show with ivory and ecru outfits - asymmetric frocks, loose trousers and jackets, worn with belts reminiscent of fishermen's ropes, as well as dresses and skirts that looked like fishing nets. Prints of the sea adorned mainly blue designs while other creations bore depictions of golden sunsets.

Puglisi closed the show with seven archive pieces, which included feathered zebra print gowns, as an homage to founding designer Roberto Cavalli, who died in April, aged 83.

Milan Fashion Week runs until September 23. — Reuters

I N D U S T R Y H I G H L I G H T S

MUSIC

US singer Mariah Carey performs during the Rock in Rio music festival in the Rio 2016 Olympic Park in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. —AFP



LIFESTYLE

A worker unloads bananas from a truck, at a market in Colombo. Bananas are widely grown and consumed across the country, and they are an important part of the local diet and culture. —AFP



CULTURE

This photograph shows a gold hairpin, originating from the kingdom of Tabanan (Bali), part of 288 museum pieces the Netherlands is returning to Indonesia, at the Wereldmuseum in Amsterdam. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



The Camel Herder



The Outskirts

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Colin Farrell’s transformation into ‘The Penguin’ stuns co-stars

When Colin Farrell looked in the mirror after donning prosthetic makeup for his role as the title character in the Max series “The Penguin,” he could no longer recognise himself. “I looked in the mirror, and I saw something looking back that was not me,” the Irish actor said. Farrell added that, except for his hands, every part of his body was transformed by “The Penguin” designer Mike Marino. The crime drama series is based on the popular DC Comics villain named Penguin and serving as a spin-off of the 2022 film “The Batman,” which Farrell also starred in as the Penguin. It unpacks Oswald “Oz” Cobb’s — AKA the Penguin’s — rise to power

through crime in fictional Gotham City. Along with the “The Banshees of Inisherin” actor, the series stars Cristin Milioti as Sofia Falcone, heiress of a mob family, and Rhenzy Feliz as Victor Aguilar, a teenager who becomes the Penguin’s driver. “Sofia comes from such astronomical wealth, and Victor and Oz come from the rough, poor, side of the city,” Milioti said of the main characters. “Yet they all go through these horrible things,” she added. The show is produced by DC Studios in association with Warner Bros. Television and arrives on Max on Thursday. All three are units of Warner Bros. Discovery. For Farrell, what he calls his “powerful transformation” into the Penguin wasn’t just about external alterations to his appearance; it was a psychological change. “There was a particular internal change that happened with such an abundance of external brilliance that was placed upon me,” he said. Like Farrell, Feliz was taken off guard by the striking difference in Farrell’s appearance for his sinister role. —Reuters



A researcher from the University of Southampton has found evidence that the treeless, grassland landscape of the

FALKLAND ISLANDS

was home to a lush, diverse rainforest up to

30 MILLION years ago

THE rugged Falkland Islands were home to a “lush, diverse rainforest” up to 30 million years ago, a study has found. A researcher from the University of Southampton has found evidence that the treeless, grassland landscape of the Falkland Islands was home to a lush, diverse rainforest up to 30 million years ago. Dr Zoe Thomas, from the university, found that the South Atlantic archipelago was once covered in the cool, wet woodland, similar to the present day rainforests in Tierra del Fuego, off the tip of South America. Working with a team of international scientists, Dr Thomas conducted the research after clues to the whereabouts of buried remains of the ancient forest reached them via word of mouth in the community of Port Stanley, the Falklands’ capital. She said that chance conversations led them to find perfectly preserved prehistoric tree remains and pollen at a building site in early 2020. Dr Thomas explained: “We were in the Falklands carrying out research for a different project when a fellow researcher, based on the island, mentioned they’d heard from a friend that something interesting had been dug up by a builder they knew. “Excavators at the site of a new care home in Stanley had cut into a deep peat layer which was filled with large tree trunks and branches. “These were so well preserved, they looked like they’d been buried the day before, but they were in fact extremely old. “Our interest was immediately piqued, as finding tree remains here was baffling. “For at least thousands, prob-

Falkland Islands ‘covered in lush rainforest’ up to 30m years ago

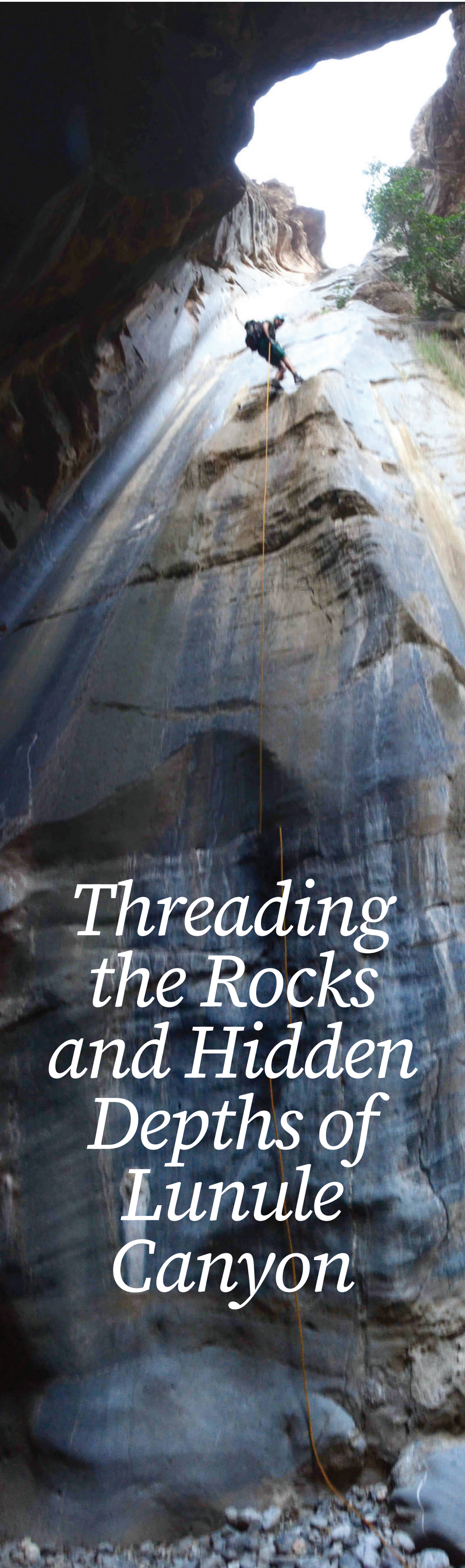
ably millions of years, the Falkland Islands have not been able to sustain trees. “It’s too windy and the soil too acidic. “This raised the intriguing ques-

years old, according to the research published in the journal *Antarctic Science*. Dr Thomas said it was possible that a change in climate to colder, drier conditions had led to the Falklands’ forests dying out. —PA Media/dpa



tion of just how old the wood from this forest bed was?” With the help of members of the South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute in Port Stanley, samples of the peat layers and deposits were removed from the site at Tussac House near Stanley Harbour. These were transported to Australia for laboratory testing at the University of New South Wales, where the sediment was sampled and the wood analysed with specialised scanning electron microscopes. The tree remains were too old to obtain conclusive results from radiocarbon dating so pollen spores were used instead which showed they dated to between 15 and 30 million

and wetter than today and capable of supporting a rainforest environment which would have been cooler than tropical rainforests. She added that many of the tree species growing on the Falklands at the time of the Tussac House sample were now extinct, but would have seeded on the islands by being carried on the prevailing westerly winds from rainforests that covered much of the southern hemisphere, including what is now mainland South America. Dr Thomas said it was possible that a change in climate to colder, drier conditions had led to the Falklands’ forests dying out. —PA Media/dpa



Threading the Rocks and Hidden Depths of Lunule Canyon



BY DR KHALED ABDUL MALAK

A COUPLE of years ago, two fellow French canyoningers, Guillaume and François, came to Oman for the third time to explore new wadis in “Amazing Oman.”

I joined them when they explored and opened three new canyons in Wadi Bani Awf, but I could not join them in exploring Wadi Al Thuqbiyah, a tributary of Wadi Al Jamal.

A few months later, I teamed up with Chris, a friend of mine, to cross the newly opened canyon, and again, a couple of months after that, I accompanied my friends Nadhira and Ahmed to cross this exceptional wadi.

On the early morning of that Friday, Nadhira and Ahmed picked me up from home in Mawaleh, and we drove to Al Hijir, a small village in Wadi Halhal, a tributary of Wadi Bani Kharous.

On the way to Al Hijir, we stopped in Al Awabi in a coffee shop where we usually take a break to have some paratha bread with cheese and eggs, our regular breakfast before our canyoning trips. After a quick bite, we hit the road again to Al Hijir.

From my place in Mawaleh, it took us around one and a half hours to reach the starting point of canyoning in Al Hijir.

Our backpacks were quite heavy. The canyon is very dry and we had to carry all the water we needed for the full day in addition to our canyoning gear and some snacks.

The beginning of our journey started in the wadi bed (Wadi al Jamal) following the falaj on the left bank, after which we started a very steep trail going up the mountain.

We were progressing quite slowly because of the heavy weight of our bags. On the trail, we had a superb panorama of the north face of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. We reached the beginning of the canyon after an approximately one-and-a-half-hour walk.

After a short break, we put on our harnesses and our canyoning equipment (descender, carabineers, safety line, gloves, and helmet) and we started moving in the wadi



bed. Soon after, we reached the first drop, which was no more than 7 minutes in height.

We set up our ropes using a natural anchor (lunule in French), which is a thread in the rock.

I was the first to abseil, followed by Nadhira and Ahmed.

The first part of the wadi is very steep and narrow with plenty of drops not more than 15 metres in height each, and then it opens up and becomes very wide and horizontal before becoming very narrow and vertical again.

We decided to stop at this flat part of the canyon to have a quick bite before starting the second part of the wadi.

So far, we have used only

rock threads or trees as natural anchors to fix our rope.

The second half of the canyon was pretty similar to the first part.

It took us another hour to reach the last drop, some 50 metres high, where our French friends had fixed a metallic anchor because there was no natural anchor there.

This drop was superb, with moss growing on the rock face.

While I was abseiling, Ahmed kept on asking me to stop to take pictures of this superb dry waterfall.

I did the same with him and with Nadhira, taking pictures when they were sliding down on the rope on their turn.

I could see their tiny silhouette sliding down the dry waterfall.

Once Ahmed reached the bottom, we retrieved and packed the rope, and we started the steep descent to the falaj. From there, it took us around 20 minutes to get to the water channel and another 15 minutes to reach our car.

It was almost 5 pm when we reached our vehicle.

On our way back to Mawaleh, we stopped at the same coffee shop in Al Awabi and this time it was to have a Karak tea. We all agreed to baptize this wadi “The Lunule Canyon” because almost all the anchors were threads in the rock.

On the way back home, I was already thinking about the next trip for my following weekend in “Amazing Oman.”