



P9

MBAPPE REINSTATED BY PSG TO FIRST TEAM



P11

A BLOODLESS POSTSCRIPT TO 'JAWS' IN 'THE SHARK IS BROKEN'



P13

RO 46 MILLION IN FUNDING ASSISTANCE DISTRIBUTED TO 275 AGRI-FISH PROJECTS



OMAN REPAYS RO 1.5 BILLION OF PUBLIC DEBT

GENERAL BUDGET REGISTERS A SURPLUS OF RO 656 MILLION

MUSCAT: The State's General Budget registered a surplus of RO 656 million by the end of the first half of 2023, compared to a surplus of RO 784 million achieved over the same period in 2022.

According to the Fiscal Performance Bulletin issued by the Ministry of Finance, public revenue of the State Budget at the end of the first half of 2023 amounted to RO 6,342 million, down by 6 per cent compared to RO 6,725 million registered over the same period in 2022.

The ministry by the end of



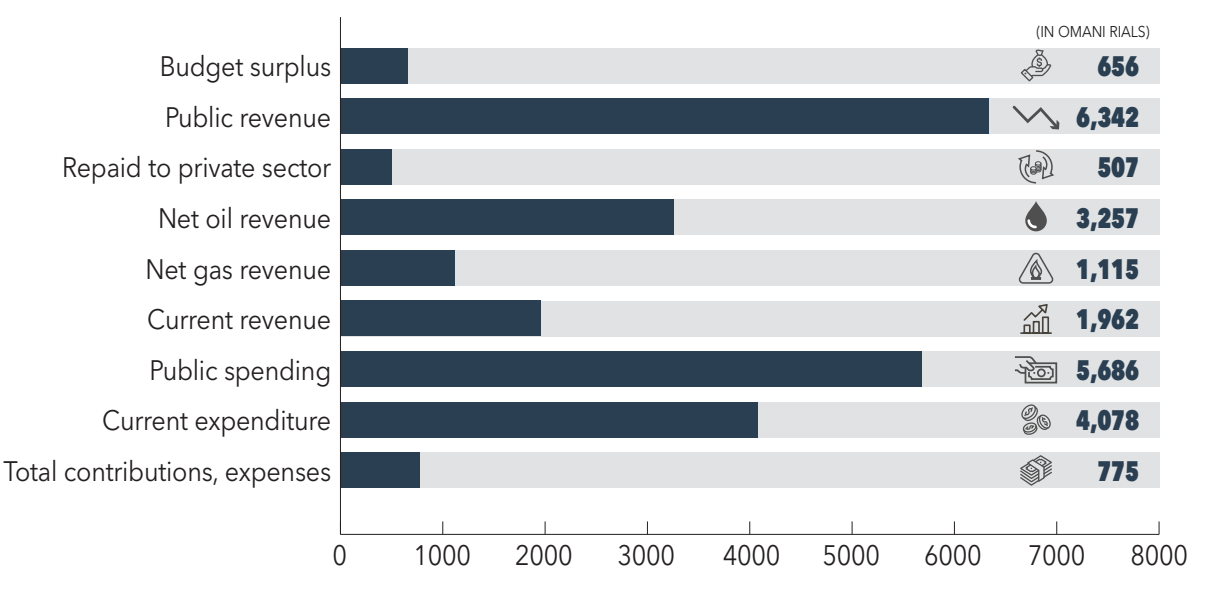
AVERAGE OIL PRODUCTION AT
1,061,000
BPD

the first half of 2023 repaid more than RO 507 million to the private sector. This reflects the payment vouchers received through the e-financial system,

and which have completed the documentary cycle.

The ministry also repaid more than RO 1.5 billion against public debt by the end of the first half of 2023, reducing the total public debt to RO 16.3 billion. By the end of the first half 2023, the ministry did not withdraw from reserves as planned, as a result of generating additional revenue.

At the end of the first half of 2023, net oil revenue amounted to RO 3,257 million, up by 2 per cent when compared to RO 3,187 million registered over the same period in 2022. [TURN TO P5](#)



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO PAKISTAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Arif Alvi of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Dr Arif Alvi. His Majesty also wished the people of Pakistan further progress and prosperity. — ONA



LPG CYLINDER BLAST INJURES 18 IN MAABELA

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) sounded caution to ensure safety following an LPG cylinder blast at a restaurant in south of Maabela in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, injuring 18 people on Sunday. The CDAA said safety is everyone's responsibility. Rescue and ambulance teams from Muscat Governorate were called to deal with a cooking gas cylinder explosion at a restaurant building in the south of Maabela area in the Wilayat of Al Seeb. [DETAILS ON P2](#)

42 PER CENT GROWTH IN OMAN AIR CARGO

Oman Air Cargo has recorded a remarkable 42 per cent increase in cargo volumes compared to the same period in 2022. This is primarily driven by capacity expansion. Between January and June, total cargo revenue surpassed RO 22.3 million, reflecting the resilience of operations amidst challenging market conditions. Oman Air Cargo added several new destinations in 2022 and introduced its innovative 'Cargo-in-Cabin' service to Europe, the Far East and Indian subcontinent.

Organ donation gaining momentum in Oman

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
[@AfrahAlBalushia](#)

In commemoration of World Organ Donation Day, observed annually on August 13, the Ministry of Health (MoH) divulged the latest statistics pertaining to organ donation in the Sultanate of Oman for the year 2022. These significant figures underscore the nation's ongoing commitment to advancing organ transplantation initiatives.

In terms of kidney transplants, the Sultanate of Oman saw a total of 12 procedures facilitated



by living donors, while an additional two transplants were sourced from brain-dead donors. Liver transplantation also demonstrated notable progress, with 10 transplants conducted

during the same period.

The recent statistics for 2022 reveal that approximately 7,092 post-death donors have registered on the 'Shifa' application provided by the Ministry of Health. Since the inaugural organ transplant operation in 1988, Oman has carried out a cumulative total of 347 organ transplant operations, encompassing kidney transplants. Out of these, 325 operations involved living donors and 19 were sourced from deceased donors. Furthermore, there have been 22 liver transplants executed by living donors. [TURN TO P5](#)



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Omani, Arab fans contribute to Ronaldo’s Instagram history

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 13

Portuguese footballer Cristiano Ronaldo has made Instagram history by becoming the first person to reach 600 million followers on the Meta-owned platform.

The historic record comes months after he reached the 500-million follower milestone in November 2022.

Rated as one of the world’s most exceptional footballers, Ronaldo holds the position of forward for Saudi Arabia’s Al Nassr and serves as the esteemed captain of the Portuguese national team.

Eight months prior to his transfer to Saudi Arabia, Cristiano Ronaldo’s Instagram following stood at approximately 450 million. Since then, he has experienced an extraordinary



FILE PHOTO: Cristiano Ronaldo poses for a selfie with the presenters during his unveiling at the Mrsool Park Stadium in the Saudi capital Riyadh in January. – AFP

surge in his followers, reaching around 150 million new followers.

This growth has propelled him ahead of Lionel Messi who commands an audience of approximately 482 million followers.

Fans from around the globe, including Oman, celebrated the impressive accomplishment on various social media platforms. They have hailed Ronaldo as an exemplary role model, not merely confined to his exceptional performance on the pitch, but also for his influence across various spheres beyond the stadium. His prominent digital presence has particularly resonated with his admirers.

In remarks to the Observer, Ali al Balushi, a staunch fan of Ronaldo, said, “Ronaldo has been a source of inspiration for us in the

realm of football. I have followed his career since my early years. His achievements highlight his exceptional prowess both on and off the field.”

Amidst orchestrated campaigns to tarnish his image, Youssef al Abari, another fan, expressed Ronaldo’s resilience, asserting that he has been subjected to unwarranted criticism and calculated media attacks day in and day out.

“Yet, his success has thrived against all odds and he achieved new title with Al Nassr club recently, underscoring his ability to overcome adversity,” Al Abari said.

For Majid Issa, an astute observer of the football landscape, Ronaldo’s acquisition not only bolsters a team’s prowess but also significantly augments its revenues.

Three die after cars swept into a wadi

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The weekend rains proved fatal for some families as their relatives were reported to have gone missing after being stranded in flowing wadis.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Departments and the Police Command in Al Buraimi and Al Batinah North governorates, said the three were found dead.

The Department of Civil Defence and Ambulance in Al Buraimi Governorate had received a report about the drifting of two vehicles, including seven people, in the wadi in Mahdha, where four of them were rescued, and the other three were reported missing.

This set the search party for the missing three. The authority thanked the citizens for their cooperation with the civil defence and ambulance members during the search operations.

According to Oman Met Office, areas likely to be affected by active downward winds, which is expected to reach higher than 40 knots and may lead to a decrease in horizontal visibility due to the

rise of dust and dirt, and the flying of debris throughout the Hajar Mountains.

The weather forecast has also stated that there is continuing chance for formation of low clouds and fog during the late night and early morning of tomorrow in parts of the coastal areas overlooking the coasts of the Arabian Sea, the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta, and Dhofar, that may affect the level of horizontal visibility.

Sea condition is expected to be moderate to rough along the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea with maximum wave height range between 2.0 to 4.0 metres. Slight along the rest of the coasts with maximum wave height of 1.25m.

On Monday the weather is expected to be partly cloudy to cloudy skies along the coastal areas of Dhofar Governorate and adjoining mountains with intermittent drizzle and chances of isolated rain.

There is a chance for convective cloud development and isolated rain occasionally thundershowers associated with downdraft over Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas.



Jabreen Capital Invests in Healthcare Transaction in KSA

Jabreen Capital, a fully owned subsidiary of Ominvest, has announced a partnership with Sobhi Batterjee, a major shareholder of Bait Al Batterjee, to open a new multi-specialty, state of the art hospital in Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The sponsor was represented by Humania Capital, a specialized asset manager in the healthcare and education verticals. With this anchor partnership, Jabreen Capital continues with its commitment to strategically align with partners and invest in the healthcare sector across the MENA region, alongside reputable and experienced healthcare players. Jabreen Capital intends to build on this investment as an asset manager by partnering with Humania Capital for subsequent investments in the healthcare sector.

This new hospital will be built on approximately 19,000 square metres of land (63,000 square metres BUA) in Jeddah and will have over 300 beds and 90 multi-specialty clinics. The construction is expected to be completed in the next year. The facility will be operated by a respected well known operator brand in the region.

Commenting on the importance of the partnership, AbdulAziz Mohammed Al Balushi, Group CEO at Ominvest, states, “We strongly believe that businesses are a significant catalyst when it comes to enriching societies. The value this partnership brings to the table will not only benefit the immediate community, it is also a step in the right direction for the healthcare sector at large. Committing to work with reputable operators aligns with our focus on meeting strategic ESG goals and profits a much wider audience.”



Abdulaziz Al Balushi,
Group CEO of Ominvest

Anwar Al Jabri, CEO of Jabreen Capital, adds, “It makes sense for Ominvest, through Jabreen Capital, to expand into markets and industries that are stable yet have room for growth. The healthcare sector has been an area of interest because it allows us to diversify our investment portfolio as well as tap into the overall positive macro-economic trends the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is witnessing. This marks the start of a meaningful collaboration, of which the new hospital and rehabilitation centre is only the start.”



Anwar Al Jabri,
CEO of Jabreen Capital

JABREEN CAPITAL

Sobhi Batterjee, Chairman of Bait al Batterjee states “Our partnership with an Ominvest subsidiary represents another important institutional partnership following what we have successfully built with global Development Financial Institutions in North Africa. We look forward to expanding on this partnership with a view to relieving suffering wherever and however possible”.

Makarem Batterjee, Vice Chairman Bait al Batterjee and Co-Founder Humania Capital added: “Humania Capital and Jabreen Capital together are poised to play a key role in fulfilling the aspirations of investors and society at large by building and managing a strong healthcare platform”

The partnership with Sobhi Batterjee is also in line with the longstanding bilateral relations between Oman and Saudi Arabia. Ties that were further strengthened with the signing of a memorandum of understanding on the establishment of the Omani-Saudi Coordination Council during the historic visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in July 2021.

For more information on Jabreen Capital and its investments, please visit www.jabreencapital.com

CDAA SOUNDS CAUTION AGAINST WORKPLACE ACCIDENTS

LPG cylinder blast injures 18



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) sounded caution to ensure safety following an LPG cylinder blast at a restaurant in south of Maabala in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, causing injury to 18 people on Sunday. The CDAA said safety is everyone’s responsibility.

“Rescue and ambulance teams in the Muscat Governorate were called to deal with a cooking gas cylinder explosion in a restaurant building in the South Maabala area in the Wilayat of Al Seeb. As a result of the explosion, 18 people were hurt, with injuries ranging from light to moderate. Nearby buildings and several vehicles were also affected,” a CDAA statement said.

Besides human injuries, several neighbouring buildings and vehicles parked near the restaurant were damaged in the incident. However, no casualties were reported, according to the CDAA. Search and rescue



teams and the team dealing with hazardous materials rushed to the spot after the incident was reported.

Balakrishnan Valliyatt, who lives near the restaurant, said that there was a huge noise, and many people were seen running in panic.

“Further to the previous reports on the blast incidence on Sunday, the authority’s teams in Muscat Governorate dealt with the accident,” said a CDAA spokesperson, adding that the injuries ranged from light to

moderate.

Fire incidents in Oman shoot up during the summer season. The CDAA cautioned against industrial, workplace and automotive fires, mostly during summer. As many as 31.2 per cent of the 4,186 fire incidents reported in the country in 2022 occurred in Muscat, and a majority of them are due to recklessness and short circuit or faulty wires.

“Loss of property and life can be saved if proper care is taken against faulty wires and defunct cables etc,” he said.



Combating begging is a collective responsibility

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 13

Begging has become a nuisance affecting families across various public settings such as parks, road intersections, markets, religious sites, and commercial complexes. This undesirable phenomenon negatively influences society and demands a collaborative approach for effective resolution.

To address the issue, the involvement of civil organisations and volunteer groups is as significant as competent authorities.

All these entities must play a pivotal role in educating different segments of society to refrain from enabling beggars through financial contributions, thereby encouraging the perpetuation of practices that are detrimental to societal norms.

A range of motivations and objectives fuels begging. Some individuals resort to begging due to hunger, attempting to alleviate their immediate food scarcity. Others adopt begging as a profession, exploiting it to deceive unsuspecting donors. Certain beggars seek sympathy from passersby on streets and in front of mosques. Their rationales for begging vary widely, encompassing claims of needing medical treatment, sustenance, rent payment, or travel funds. Curiously, their appeals



often revolve around monetary assistance rather than material goods, signalling that their genuine requirements might be secondary. In contemporary times, begging has extended to exploit modern technologies and communication methods, transforming it from a plea for help into fraudulent attempts to accumulate funds.

According to Youssef al Salmi, begging manifests in diverse patterns, including direct, indirect, and seasonal approaches such as Khahreef Salalah. Beggars frequently ask for money directly by positioning themselves at

mosque entrances, traversing through markets and shops, or in gas stations.

Al Salmi emphasises that numerous citizens fall victim to manipulation and deceit through the deluge of daily messages and online posts on social media platforms. These communications implore financial assistance under various pretexts, capitalising on people's emotions. Examples range from funding patients' medical treatments, university fees for students, medication expenses, or accumulated rent.

Al Salmi said that some beggars

orchestrate their actions in an organised manner, hinting at a level of professionalism that surpasses spontaneous begging. Citizens are urged to play an active role in mitigating the beggary phenomenon by refraining from giving direct monetary donations and instead guiding beggars toward relevant institutions. In cases of genuine necessity, individuals should report such instances to the appropriate authorities tasked with combating this issue.

Abdullah al Amri said that the motives for begging are the desire to earn money in any way, given

“The motives for begging are the desire to earn money in any way, given that begging is easier and more profitable without much effort and in a very short period of time. Therefore, people often notice that the beggar asks for money without in-kind goods

ABDULLAH AL AMRI

that begging is easier and more profitable without much effort and in a very short period of time. Therefore, people often notice that the beggar asks for money without in-kind goods because he often does not need food or medicine but seeks to collect money until this becomes his profession and daily work.

Al Amri added that everyone should contribute to addressing the phenomenon of beggary and inform the concerned authorities about them. Citizens are advised to refrain from offering monetary aid, as this inadvertently fuels the

persistence of such practices.

He suggested that alms are encouraged to channel their donations into well-established collection boxes or official institutions or to assist the genuinely needy through avenues that yield broader societal benefits, in stark contrast to the harmful effects of begging.

Acknowledging the pivotal role played by the Ministry of Social Development, it collaborates closely with the Royal Oman Police, Public Prosecution, and relevant agencies to combat the begging issue.

Joint efforts are aimed at reducing the prevalence of this problem. Legal measures, as outlined in the Omani Penal Code, are employed against beggars involved in seized cases. Penalties encompass imprisonment for periods ranging from a month to a year, along with fines ranging from RO 50 to RO 100. Repeated offences must result in more severe consequences.

Saif al Kaabi emphasises the importance of stringent legislation and society's role in addressing begging. Alongside imposing penalties, society should extend support to beggars, offering them opportunities for legitimate earnings through simple professions. This approach holds beggars accountable while facilitating their transition towards self-sufficiency.

Oman, Türkiye discuss cooperation in research

MUSCAT: Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation received on Sunday Prof Dr Hasan Mandal, President of the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TUBITAK).

The visit comes within the framework of the Ministry's aim to strike strategic international partnerships that contribute to developing higher education, research and innovation in the Sultanate of Oman. It also boosts the Ministry's role in transferring international scientific experiences and technologies.

Al Mahrouqi highlighted the capabilities and incentives offered at the Innovation Park Muscat (IPM), as well as the role of the ministry in supporting research and innovation in Oman.

On his turn, Prof Dr Hasan underscored the bilateral relations



between the two countries. He also expressed his keenness to boost scientific cooperation through an agreement that will be signed in the near future by the two sides.

The two sides discussed areas of cooperation through the draft agreement. They also agreed to form a work team to study the possibility of holding a scientific event that brings together higher education establishments from Oman and Türkiye.

The two sides also reviewed the possibility of establishing joint

research projects and means of benefiting from the Turkish side in terms of transforming innovations into industrial projects.

Meanwhile, the guest and his accompanying delegation toured the Innovation Park Muscat. During the visit they viewed IPM's various facilities.

Moreover, the meeting was attended by several officials from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and the delegation accompanying the guest. — ONA

Muscat Municipality floats tender for integrated festivals site

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 13

Muscat Municipality has issued a tender for consultancy services to design and develop a festival ground as part of the efforts to present all types of events, activities, and programmes at one integrated site.

Earlier this year, Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Ahmed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, said that it is time to have a permanent venue to organise festivals and events such as Muscat Nights.

He said, “We have also discussed the proposals and



Muscat Municipality will have the festivals and events at a later time.”



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tenders

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Site Visit	Tender Price (OMR)
NESC/ 01/2023	Upgrade of Network Infrastructure	17/08/2023	27/08/2023	Specialist	N/A	52.500
NESC/ 02/2023	Supply and Delivery of Hyperconverged Infrastructure and Enterprise Backup & Cyber Recovery Solution	17/08/2023	27/08/2023	Specialist	N/A	52.500

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -						
Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and in I Supplier with Nama Groupe may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please contact us by email Tender@supply.nama.om					
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to Tender@supply.nama.om, (3) Three days before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.					
Tender Submission Guarantee	- Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in the Prime Document - The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. - The bid bond should including 5% VAT. - The bid bond should be submitted as seprate envelope. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.					
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Organization - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.					



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SCHOOL BAGS

TOO HEAVY TO HANDLE



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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As the new school year approaches, the focus shifts not only to academic pursuits but also to the health and well-being of students. Recognising the adverse impact that heavy school bags can have on young learners, the Consumer Protection Authority has unveiled a set of school bag standards aimed at safeguarding students' physical health and comfort.

A well-designed school bag policy is must as it plays a pivotal role in shaping a student's daily experience and long-term health. The Authority has outlined several key principles that contribute to the creation of an ideal school bag, promoting a

balanced and injury-free lifestyle for students.

Weight matters for school bags. It is advisable to have light and well-fitted bags. The foremost guideline emphasises the importance of a lightweight school bag. The bag's weight should be minimal to avoid exerting undue pressure on the feet, heart, and lungs. Moreover, a well-fitted bag, appropriate for the child's height and weight, prevents strain on vital organs.

School bags must be compact in size to prevent strain on the neck and shoulders. The bag should adhere snugly to the child's back, ensuring proper weight distribution. Equipped with two wide, equal-length straps, it prevents shoulder pain and discomfort. To mitigate negative effects and ensure children's

well-being, the Consumer Protection Authority offers practical advice. Students should avoid carrying bags improperly and switch shoulders frequently. Engaging in 20 minutes of daily exercise further supports a healthy lifestyle.

Parents are pivotal in the well-being of their children. Selecting a lightweight bag from the range of 300 grams to approximately, 2 kilogrammes, accounting for wheeled bags, sets the foundation. Additionally, parents can manage the weight by regulating items within the bag, such as pencil cases, food containers, water bottles, and geometry sets.

Books are another factor within a student's control. Opting for lightweight and appropriate books is crucial. Eliminating unnecessary

heavy covers and excessive pages enhances the overall load.

Orthopaedists and spine doctors stress the importance of choosing bags that suit the child's body in length and weight. Proper alignment minimises the risk of exhaustion, muscle stress, and potential physical discomfort.

Medical professionals advise that school bags should not exceed 10-15 per cent of the child's weight. It should also match the child's torso length, avoiding the bag extending more than 10 cm below the waist. Wide, padded straps protect against injury from sharp objects. A study conducted in Italy underscores the correlation between bag weight and performance. Carrying bags that exceed 15 per cent of body weight can lead to problems in daily tasks

like climbing stairs, while bags within the recommended limit maintain balance and functionality.

Efficient organisation within the school bag is essential. Heavy items should be placed closer to the child's back, while lighter items should be positioned towards the front. This approach helps in maintaining a balanced posture and minimising strain.

By adhering to these standards and insights, students, parents, and educators can work together to ensure that the school bag becomes a facilitator of learning rather than a source of discomfort.

The Consumer Protection Authority's initiative not only protects students from physical strain but also fosters a healthier and more comfortable educational journey.



Jabal Akhdhar fest offers opportunities, entertainment

AMAL AL RIYAMI
AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR

The Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival 2023 is drawing significant attention, having welcomed over 24,000 visitors since its commencement on August 3. The festival, hosted by Al Dakhiliyah Governorate in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, is set to run until August 19. The festival's inauguration was held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. It is featuring diverse events, including performances by the Royal Guard of Oman's music and the Dark Thoughts show.

The festival spans two main locations: The primary site adjacent to Hail Yemen Park and another at Saih Qatnah. Highlights encompass the Bait al Rudaida exhibition at Birkat al Mouz's Bait al Rudaida Castle, displays of productive families and small-to-medium enterprises, and engaging corners tailored for various interests, including youth and children. An emphasis on Omani cuisine and the presentation of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar farmers' products



further enrich the experience. Beyond entertainment, the festival offers paragliding demonstrations, theatrical presentations, adventure sports races, and historical exploration. The festival goers have the chance to delve into Al Jabal Al Akhdhar's history by visiting the historical village of Al Sujarah, partaking in the Ain al Sujara experience, and enjoying stargazing activities. Engineer Mohammad bin Ali al Wardi, Director of the

Municipality Department of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, sees the festival as a means for visitors to acquaint themselves with the area's natural beauty and local products, while simultaneously generating temporary employment opportunities. Ahmed bin Salim al Toubi, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs at the Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, praised the festival's broad appeal and its

contribution to the economic and tourism development of the region. This aligns with a broader strategy to position Al Jabal Al Akhdhar as a premier year-round tourist destination, capitalising on its unique heritage and weather conditions. In tandem with the festival, a mountain bike race was organised by the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah in partnership with the Omani Cycling Federation. This event aims



to promote mountain biking within Oman's diverse terrains and cultural elements, fostering competition, skill refinement, talent discovery, and cycling awareness. The event featured categories for different age groups and genders and prioritised safety measures. Furthermore, a mountain tourism trail was arranged in collaboration with the Al Sumoud Adventures Team, spotlighting key tourist attractions across

several villages. This initiative not only fosters physical fitness but also promotes local heritage, encouraging participants to explore the region's rich history. The Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival effectively combines entertainment, tourism, sports, and cultural activities to bolster the appeal of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. It engages small businesses and the local community, enhancing the region's historical and tourist allure.

Oman repays RO 1.5 billion of public debt

FROM PAGE 1
The average oil prices amounted to \$83 per barrel while average oil production reached 1,061,000 barrels per day. Net gas revenue at the end of the first half of 2023 amounted to RO 1,115 million, comprising a decline by 36 per cent compared to RO 1,729 million registered over the same period in 2022. This is due to the deduction of gas purchase and transport expenses from total revenue collected from the Integrated Gas Company. Current revenue amounted to RO 1,962 million by the end of the first half of 2023, going up by 9 per cent compared to RO 1,796 million collected over the same period in 2022. Moreover, by the end of the first half 2023, public spending amounted to RO 5,686 million, constituting a drop by RO 255 million, i.e. 4 per cent compared to actual spending over the same period in 2022. At the end of the first half of 2023, current expenditure amounted to RO 4,078 million, down by RO 472 million, i.e. 10 per cent when compared to an amount of RO 4,550 million registered over the same period in 2022. Development expenditure of civil ministries and government units by the end of the first half of 2023 reached RO 383 million, representing 43 per cent of total development spending, i.e. RO 900 million, allocated for 2023. By the end of the first half of 2023, total contributions and other expenses amounted to RO 775 million, decreasing by 10 per cent when compared to an amount of RO 863 million registered over the same period in 2022. The oil product subsidy and transport sector subsidy amounted to RO 155 million and RO 54 million, respectively. Furthermore, an amount of RO 200 million was transferred to future debt obligations budget-item. — ONA

Hadatha cybersecurity forum kicks off in Salalah

SALALAH: The Wilayat of Salalah in the Dhofar Governorate on Sunday hosted 'Hadatha' (Modernity) cybersecurity forum focusing on the extent to which cybersecurity influences economic diversification and the generation of investment opportunities. The opening ceremony of the two-day forum was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. The forum was organised by the Arab Regional Centre for Cybersecurity of the International Telecommunication Union, in cooperation with the Middle East Centre for Consultation and Studies. The event stems from the global trend in realising digital transition and the 4th industrial revolution (4IR), as well as an uptake in cybersecurity risks that threatens the global economy, putting billions of dollars at stake on an annual basis. — ONA



Organ donation gaining momentum in Oman

FROM PAGE 1
The ministry, through its National Programme for Organ Transplantation, is dedicated to fostering a sense of hope and optimism among patients awaiting organ transplants. To this end, the ministry urged both citizens and residents to consider contributing to this noble cause by pledging to donate organs after death, utilising the user-friendly 'Shifa' application. Oman, under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, stands as a testament to its robust endeavours in the realm of organ transplantation. Striving

to enhance the orchestration of organ transfers and transplants, the ministry is actively engaged in augmenting services related to these procedures. Moreover, the ministry is devoted to nurturing a cadre of proficient national medical professionals capable of delivering advanced organ transplantation services. In pursuit of a comprehensive framework, the ministry is diligently reviewing and refining existing laws, legislation, and ethical benchmarks to ensure the safeguarding of both donors and transplant recipients. A definitive marker of the country's commitment is the

establishment of the Omani Centre for Organ Transplantation. This landmark initiative reflects the pressing need for organ transplantation among citizens, promising a substantial leap in the nation's organ transplantation programme. With a visionary outlook, the centre aims to fulfil the aspirations of patients grappling with organ failure and their families, heralding a future where suitable donors and seamless transplantation processes are the norm. Oman holds the distinction of being a pioneer in the region, having embarked on organ transplantation as early as

Oman announces official partnership for ITB Berlin 2024

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, announced its official partnership for the 2024 edition of the International Berlin Tourism Exchange (ITB), one of the largest and most reputed tourism fairs globally. The strong representation of the Sultanate of Oman as the official partner of ITB Berlin 2024 comes as an affirmation of the Sultanate of Oman's plans to develop its tourism sector and enhance the country's ranking as a global tourism destination. ITB 2024 will be held from March 5 to 7, 2024, with the participation of more than

160 countries and above 5,000 exhibitors. Around 7,000 media representatives are expected to participate in the event. The Sultanate of Oman's partnership for ITB Berlin 2024 is considered an ideal opportunity to introduce the tourism potential, products, services and tourism experiences that abound in the Sultanate of Oman. It is also an opportunity to promote tourism, increase the flow of tourists and promote multiple investment opportunities. Haitham bin Mohammad al Ghassani, Director General of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism



Haitham Al Ghassani

said: "This partnership represents a platform for strengthening the Sultanate of Oman's status on the global tourism map, and reflects its commitment to expand the base of international visitors.



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Russian warship fires warning shots on cargo ship in Black Sea

MOSCOW: A Russian warship on Sunday fired warning shots at a cargo ship in the southwestern Black Sea as it made its way northwards, the first time Russia has fired on merchant shipping beyond Ukraine since exiting a landmark UN-brokered grain deal last month.

Russia in July halted participation in the Black Sea grain deal that allowed Ukraine to export agricultural produce via the Black Sea and Moscow cautioned that it deemed all ships heading to Ukrainian waters to be potentially carrying weapons.

Russia said in a statement that its Vasily Bykov patrol ship had fired automatic weapons on the Palau-flagged Sukru Okan vessel after the ship's captain failed to respond to a request to halt for an inspection.

Russia said the vessel was making its way towards the Ukrainian port of Izmail. Refinitiv shipping data showed the ship was currently near the coast of Bulgaria and heading towards the Romanian port of Sulina. "To forcibly stop the vessel, warning fire was opened from automatic weapons," the Russian defence ministry said.

The Russian military boarded the vessel with the help of a Ka-29 helicopter, the ministry said.

"After the inspection group completed its work on board, the Sukru Okan continued on

its way to the port of Izmail," the defence ministry said. A Turkish defence ministry official said he had heard an incident had taken place involving a ship heading for Romania, and that Ankara was looking into it.

Reuters could not immediately reach the vessel or its owners for comment. Ukraine did not immediately comment on the incident. Firing on a merchant vessel will ratchet up already acute concerns among shipowners, insurers and commodity traders about the potential dangers of getting ensnared in the Black Sea - the main route that both Ukraine and Russia use to get their agricultural produce to market.

Russia and Ukraine are two of the world's top agricultural producers, and major players in the wheat, barley, maize, rapeseed, rapeseed oil, sunflower seed and sunflower oil markets. Russia is also dominant in the fertiliser market.

Since Russia left the Black Sea grain deal, both Moscow and Kyiv have issued warnings and carried out attacks that have sent jitters through global commodity, oil and shipping markets.

Russia has said it will treat any ships approaching Ukrainian ports as potential military vessels, and their flag countries as combatants on the Ukrainian side. — **Reuters**

Militants in Balochistan attack Chinese convoy

QUETTA: Two separatist militants were killed on Sunday when they attacked a convoy carrying Chinese workers to a Beijing-financed port project in Pakistan's Balochistan province, officials said.

A spokesman for China's consulate in Karachi said none of its nationals were killed or wounded in the attack, and urged Chinese citizens to heighten their vigilance.

Various Baloch separatist groups have claimed attacks on projects linked to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project in the past, with thousands of security personnel deployed to counter threats against Beijing's interests.

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) said on Sunday two of its fighters died in a "self-sacrificing" attack on a convoy going to Gwadar port in Pakistan's southwest.

"The operation has concluded with the elimination of two assailants," a senior police official said, adding that three Pakistani soldiers were wounded.

China's consulate in Karachi said it had asked Pakistan to "severely punish the perpetrators and take concrete and effective measures to ensure the safety of Chinese citizens, institutions and projects".

"A Chinese convoy from the Gwadar port project was hit by roadside bombs and gunfire on



The Beijing-financed Gwadar port is one of the key projects of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. — AFP file photo

its way back to the port area from the Gwadar Airport," it said in a statement.

"No Chinese citizens were killed or injured."

The BLA, which frequently exaggerates its successes, claimed in a statement that four Chinese workers and nine Pakistani soldiers had died in the attack.

The CPEC project is the cornerstone of Beijing's massive Belt and Road Initiative and seeks to link China's western Xinjiang province to Gwadar port in Balochistan -- Pakistan's least populous province but rich in mineral resources.

Baloch people have long complained they do not get a fair share of the province's profits, giving rise to more than a dozen separatist groups.

Three Chinese academics and their Pakistani driver were killed when a woman suicide bomber detonated her device as they were

driving into the University of Karachi's Confucius Institute in April 2022.

The BLA claimed responsibility for that attack.

A year earlier, five people were killed in an attack claimed by Pakistan's Taliban at a luxury hotel hosting the Chinese ambassador in Quetta. Also in 2021, 12 people -- including nine Chinese workers -- were killed by a blast aboard a bus carrying staff to the Dasu dam site.

Islamabad blamed that explosion on a gas leak but Beijing insisted it was a bomb attack.

Since its initiation, CPEC has seen tens of billions of dollars funnelled into massive transport, energy and infrastructure projects.

Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng was in the Pakistani capital last month to mark the 10th anniversary of the project's start. — **AFP**

Israel rules out Jerusalem base for Saudi Arabia envoy

JERUSALEM: Israel ruled out on Sunday a diplomatic base in Jerusalem for the new Saudi envoy to the Palestinians, whose appointment comes as Washington tries to forge formal Israeli relations with Riyadh.

Saudi Ambassador to Jordan Nayef Al-Sudairi on Saturday expanded his credentials to include non-resident envoy to the Palestinians. A social media post by his embassy in Amman said "consul-general in Jerusalem" was now among Al Sudairi's duties.

That appeared to correspond with the Palestinians' long-standing and so-far fruitless goal of founding a state in territories occupied by Israel in a 1967 war, with East Jerusalem as capital.

Israel deems Jerusalem its own capital, a status recognised by the United States under then-President Donald Trump in 2017 but not by other world powers. Israeli authorities bar Palestinian diplomatic activity in the city.

Saudi Arabia has championed the Palestinian cause and shunned official ties with Israel but the US is seeking to promote what could be a historic Middle East deal that would include normalising Israeli-Saudi relations.

"This (Al-Sudairi) could be a delegate who will meet with representatives in the Palestinian Authority," Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen said. "We will not allow the opening of any kind of diplomatic mission" in Jerusalem, Cohen added. "Will there be an official physically sitting in Jerusalem? This we will not allow." Israel's hard-right government has played down any prospect of it giving significant ground to the Palestinians as part of a normalisation deal with Saudi Arabia. Riyadh has previously conditioned recognition of Israel on Palestinians' statehood goal being addressed.

Among challenges to that goal is the schism between the internationally backed Palestinian administration and Hamas.

Bassam al Agha, the Palestinian ambassador to Riyadh, cast Al Sudairi's appointment as Saudi affirmation of Palestinian statehood and "rejection of what had been announced by former US President Trump". — **Reuters**

A second life for Cuba's seaside swimming pools

HAVANA: When summer temperatures start to sizzle in Havana, in-the-know locals head not to the beach but to seaside pools built by wealthy Cuban families in the first half of the last century.

Now abandoned and filled with seawater, the pools that survived the 1959 revolution are in the western Havana neighbourhood of Miramar that flourished in the 1940s and 1950s with lavish mansions and luxury hotels.

"These swimming pools are a tradition. From generation to generation, we come here," said Boris Baltrons, 44, accompanied by his daughter, sister and nephew.

"These houses belonged to rich people. At the time, everyone had their own little pool," he explained, pointing to traces of Spanish tiles that originally lined the walls.

Known only to locals, the pools



Cubans swim in a natural swimming pool off the coast of Havana. — AFP

are at the end of a rubbish-strewn walk. Swimmers sometimes share the pools with fish, crabs and even small octopuses. "It's not a beach

like Varadero, but children can have fun here," said Alberto, a 38-year-old scientist, referring to the seaside resort east of the capital.

He came on foot with his family, before sunset, to take a dip in one of the open-air swimming pools. Havana's closest sandy beaches

are about a 20-minute drive away, a luxury not everyone can afford on the Communist island where fuel shortages are common. Many of Cuba's swimming pools that require fresh water have fallen into oblivion, including ones built within sports facilities during the first decades of the revolution.

These days they are used by skateboarders, graffiti artists, videographers and children playing soccer.

One of Cuba's most famous pools is the "Giant Pool" — measuring 5,000 square meters (54,000 square feet) — inaugurated by Fidel Castro in the 1970s in Alamar, a Soviet-influenced housing complex in Havana.

Today, the island's lush vegetation has begun to devour parts of this vast slab of blue concrete, now deserted. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

VATICAN CITY

'Migrant deaths are open wound for humanity'

The number of migrants dying in the Mediterranean is an "open wound" for humanity, Pope Francis said on Sunday after a week marked by a string of deadly shipwrecks.

At his weekly Angelus prayer, the 86-year-old pontiff offered his prayers for the 41 people reported missing on Wednesday by four survivors brought to safety on the Italian island of Lampedusa.

He recalled "with pain and shame" UN figures showing more



than 2,000 migrants have lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea since the start of the year. "It is an open wound in our humanity," he told pilgrims gathered in St Peter's Square.

BEIJING

China landslide death toll rises to 21

The death toll from a landslide triggered by heavy rains in northern China has risen sharply to at least 21, authorities said on Sunday, with six others missing.

China has faced deadly floods and historic rainfall in recent weeks, with dozens killed in storms in the northern part of the country. "Twenty-one people were found dead so far, and six others are still missing," the Xi'an emergency management bureau said on Sunday. A mountain flash flood in the village of



Weiziping, south of Xi'an in Shaanxi province, caused a landslide on Friday that swept away two houses and damaged roads, bridges, electricity supply and other infrastructure.

CHITTAGONG

55 killed in Bangladesh floods in August

At least 55 people have been killed and more than a million affected by two weeks of torrential rains causing floods and landslides in Bangladesh.

Administrators of four of the worst-hit districts said floods and landslides since August 1 killed 21 people in Cox's Bazar, 19 in Chittagong, 10 in Bandarban and five in Rangamati.

"These are some of the heaviest rains in recent years," Bangladesh Meteorological Department chief Azizur Rahman said. He



said 312 millimetres of rainfall was recorded on August 7 alone. Officials said heavy rains lashed the region until August 11, triggering flash floods that caused rivers to burst their banks.

Be offspring’s first and best teacher

Is it true what has been said “parents are the best teachers”?! The concept of parents being the best teachers for their children is not only in educating them, but in all life-related and parenting matters. I believe this varies from one parent to another depending on their values, ethics and even educational and social background. However, many people assume that parents are still the best teachers for their offspring, no matter how good are other people around the children.

When parents are considered best teachers, they should also be good friends for their children; just to make the parent-children chemistry work effectively. You might wonder what kind of chemistry is this! It is a bonding between the parents and their children. But, parents are unconsciously utilising it or not giving it much attention in order to strengthen their sacred relation with their offspring. The chemistry is a set of emotions such as love, care, sympathy and mercy which are mutually shared between the family members in general and parents and children in particular.

In some cases, you see children a bit confused and not sure who is their best teacher in life. They are uncertain about their good friends at school or neighbourhood and their fathers and mothers who are very often busy. Sometimes, such circumstances psychologically affect the children’s personality; they tend to be shy, mystified and not confident. Therefore, parents should be as close as possible to children in order to avoid any kind of psychological heartbreaking problems or serious misunderstanding between them.

The first teachers we all have in our lives are our parents; it is an undeniable fact because parents are the children’s very first teachers since the early days of life. From the first day of birth, parents’ behaviour most of the time reflect their love and affection for their babies. By the time babies start growing up, parents teach them how to crawl, speak,



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PARENTS ARE THE MOST COMMITTED TEACHERS TO THEIR CHILDREN ALMOST IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE

walk, run and to have good manners before they reach adulthood. Later on, parents get involved in their children’s study affairs and help them in their education. It is an undeniable fact that parents are the best teachers in term of commitment and emotional support to their offspring.

Commonly, parents are the most committed teachers to their children almost in all walks of life. Some children regard their parents as their ideal role model, especially when parents show their dedication and are willing to sacrifice a part of themselves for the betterment of their children, love their children and have great patience while passing down their knowledge to them.

On the other hand, there are parents who are far away from their kids because they are more dedicated to their everyday responsibilities. Thus, they gradually lose the value and essence of their family life.

In order to be your child’s best teacher you need to win their hearts first of all and to be a good father or mother in terms of emotions, psychology and morals. You should also be your child’s friend, so that you share mutual respect, trust, understanding and stress-free relation. In a bid to strengthen the relation between you and your offspring, you eliminate all kinds of barriers and individual differences between your children.

However, never forget that each child has special skills, abilities and merits that differentiate him or her from other siblings. Parents are not only best teachers, but children look upon them as role model. In facing life obstacles like examination pressure or friendship problems, children would seek advice and mental support from parents.

Likewise, parents will provide unconditional encouragement and support in dealing with the challenges. Additionally, parents provide emotional support of all time to their children.

Never ever regret being a good father or mother and the best teacher for your offspring!

FULL-DRESS REHEARSAL



Indian security personnel stand guard during a full-dress rehearsal for the country's Independence Day celebrations at Red Fort in New Delhi on Sunday. - AFP

Trump heading for Republican ‘coronation’

As Florida Governor Ron DeSantis flipped chops in front of the cameras at the Iowa State Fair on Saturday, a plane appeared in the broiling blue sky.

It was Donald Trump’s Boeing 757 private jet. It circled the fairgrounds, and thousands in the crowd looked up and went wild, cheering for the Republican former president.

An hour later, Trump arrived in a motorcade from nearby Des Moines airport to a rock-star reception, stealing DeSantis’ thunder and reducing his nearest rival for the Republican presidential nomination to a bit-part player at one of the biggest political events on the US political calendar.

It was a moment that epitomised the state of the 2024 Republican presidential nominating race: Trump is far ahead in national polling, eclipsing Florida’s governor and the rest of the field, who have so far been at a loss over how to narrow that gap.

The Iowa State Fair is a political must for aspiring presidential candidates in the Midwestern state that kicks off the Republican nominating contest in January. But with Trump leading DeSantis by 34 percentage points among likely Republican primary voters in an August 3 Reuters/Ipsos poll, and the rest of the field languishing in single digits, the fair this year had the air of a coronation rather



Tim Reid

The writer is Reuters national affairs reporter

TRUMP IS FAR AHEAD IN NATIONAL POLLING, ECLIPSING FLORIDA’S GOVERNOR AND THE REST OF THE FIELD

than a beauty pageant.

Despite Trump’s legal problems — he has been indicted three times this year and could be indicted a fourth time in Georgia this week — he holds one of the biggest primary polling leads in US electoral history. No candidate in modern history has had such a big lead in a contested primary and gone on to lose the nomination.

Meanwhile, DeSantis has had two staff shake-ups in the past three weeks and has been sinking in the polls as he desperately tries to recalibrate his campaign.

As Trump walked from the pork chop tent to the Steer N’ Stein bar to make a speech, flocked by supporters chanting, “We love you Trump!,” a reporter asked him about DeSantis.

“He’s doing very, very poorly in the polls. He really should leave the race,” Trump said.

Sarah Longwell, a Republican strategist who opposes Trump’s nomination, has been holding focus groups with Republican voters all year. During the last two she held, in the past two weeks, not a single person even mentioned DeSantis. When asked directly about the Florida governor at the recent focus

groups, one voter called him “sneaky.” Another dismissed him as just “another regular politician.” A third said he was part of the “deep state,” a term often used by conspiracy theorists to refer to people in government they believe are working clandestinely to manipulate national policy. “DeSantis is in a death spiral,” Longwell said.

Bryan Griffin, a spokesperson for DeSantis, said the Republican contest was between Trump and DeSantis, who “is the only candidate in the race who can beat Joe Biden and implement the agenda we need to reverse this country’s decline and revive its

future.”

As for the rest of the Republican field, Longwell said, it’s hard to see how any of them might catch Trump.

There is a narrow path for somebody to beat the former president, “but they have to generate excitement and come first or second in Iowa to make it a two-person race and persuade people they are more electable,” she said.

At the state fair, that uphill struggle to catch up to Trump was on display amid the 32 Celsius heat.

In a dozen voter interviews, Reuters found that most liked

DeSantis — but not enough to back him over Trump.

“I like what DeSantis has done in Florida, but I want Trump, a businessman, running the country, I want Trump to get a second term. He was great for our economy; he’ll cut down the size of government. DeSantis can run next time around,” said George Knuckey, 67.

Asked about DeSantis, Carla Wilkinson, 68, said: “Hell no. He’s OK in Florida, but I don’t think he’s presidential material. I’m Trump all the way.”

On Saturday, tech billionaire Vivek Ramaswamy, former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley and DeSantis all appeared for interviews with Iowa’s Republican governor, Kim Reynolds.

They were greeted by about 200 people politely and warmly, although DeSantis had to speak over a half dozen women’s rights protesters blowing whistles and under a plane flying a banner that declared: “Be Likeable, Ron!”

The Florida governor has a reputation for being a wooden campaigner.

When Trump arrived, with Secret Service agents and sniffer dogs everywhere, his crowds were huge, with about 2,000 people waiting to see him.



Republican presidential candidate and former US President Donald Trump speaks as he campaigns at the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines, Iowa. – Reuters

sport

MBAPPE REINSTATED BY PSG TO FIRST TEAM

PARIS: French superstar Kylian Mbappe was reinstated in Paris Saint-Germain's first team on Sunday after being sidelined for several weeks amid an ongoing contract dispute.

PSG opened their Ligue 1 title defence with a goalless draw at home against Lorient on Saturday as the team's prize asset watched from the stands.

"After very constructive and positive discussions between Paris Saint-Germain and Kylian Mbappe before the PSG-Lorient match, the player was reinstated in first team training this morning," PSG said in a statement.

After a summer of flux at the Parc des Princes filled with new arrivals and Lionel Messi's departure, it is the Mbappe stand-off that continues to dominate the headlines.

The France captain has refused to sign an extension to his PSG deal, meaning he can leave for free next year, with Real Madrid long seen as his preferred destination.

Qatari-owned PSG want to sell him now and bring in a significant transfer fee for a player who cost 180 million euros (\$198 million) from Monaco in 2017.

"The position is very clear. If Kylian wants to stay, he must sign a new contract. We can't let the best player in the world today leave for free. It's impossible," PSG president Nasser al-Khelaifi said last month.

Mbappe has not been allowed train with the first team and played only one of PSG's five warm-up

games and was not invited to the pre-season tour in Japan and South Korea.

New coach Luis Enrique on Friday said he hoped a solution could be found, but Mbappe has not been allowed to train with the first team and was left out of the squad to face Lorient.

Instead he sat alongside fellow 2018 World Cup winner Ousmane Dembele, who completed his transfer from Barcelona earlier in the day, as Luis Enrique handed debuts to six players.

Despite his sidelining Mbappe was one of the first to welcome Dembele.

"Welcome home my brother, so happy to see you here, the adventure begins," Mbappe posted on social media.

The two friends then appeared smiling together in the stands while Brazilian star Neymar, whose future is also in doubt, was absent because of a "viral syndrome".

With his reinstatement, Mbappe has partly won his case, even if it is too early to know if it will lead to the contract extension the club are demanding.

Saturday's offensive weaknesses against Lorient may have prompted PSG to soften their attitude towards the top scorer in the club's history.

The 24-year-old forward is now available for the trip to Toulouse on August 19, even if he has played just once, a friendly against Le Havre, in the past two months.

— AFP



Oman youth basketball team concludes first camp for Gulf tourney

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 13

The Oman national youth basketball team has successfully concluded its inaugural training camp at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The camp spanned from July 10 to August 12 and was a crucial part of the team's preparation for the upcoming Gulf Youth Championship, scheduled for mid-August 2024.

The camp was marked by intensive training sessions led by national team coach Zuhair al Ayyash, alongside his assistants Saeed al Saadi, Saif al Tobi and team manager Ghassan al Busaidi.

The training regimen encompassed various aspects of the players' development. These included enhancing both physical and skill levels, refining individual player abilities, and intensifying



collective tactical drills in both offensive and defensive strategies.

Tunisian coach Zuhair al Ayyash highlighted that the first camp adhered to the preparation plans devised by the coaching staff and sanctioned by the Oman Basketball Association. The camp was strategically structured to focus initially on fundamental individual skills, followed by



collaborative teamwork in both offensive and defensive scenarios, all while prioritising physical fitness.

The training schedule comprised an average of three daily sessions. These sessions encompassed activities such as running and gymnasium workouts. On a weekly basis, the players participated in a total of 13

sessions, ultimately accumulating 62 training sessions by the camp's conclusion. Al Ayyash noted the positive progress observed during the latter stages of training with technical, tactical and physical prowess on the rise.

Emphasising the necessity of intensified efforts, Al Ayyash stressed the importance of enhancing technical and skill



aspects, elevating physical fitness and endurance, and refining strategic gameplay. These concerted efforts aim to ensure the team's full preparedness to compete in the upcoming Gulf Championship. He expressed gratitude to the OBA Board of Directors for their unwavering support in providing the necessary resources for the team's

preparation.

A total of 21 players actively participated in the camp, including Moeen bin Mansour al Battashi, Mohammad bin Salah al Raisi, Yunus bin Abdullah al Shuraiqi, Ibrahim bin Ismail al Balushi, Mazen bin Mohammad al Owaisi, Qusay bin Salem al Amri, Nour al Din bin Ishaq al Anquodi, Muath bin Abdullah Ambusaidi, Moayad bin Talib al Battashi, Akram bin Hamad al Rashidi, Yamen bin Farid al Zadjali, Youssef bin Muslim al Tobi, Al Mulhim bin Saeed al Obaidani, Salem bin Malik al Masrouri, Saddam bin Ali al Shizawi, Caesar bin Aqil al Balushi, Mishaal bin Abdulmoneim Qafqaf, Mohab bin Ramadhan al Hambasi, Khaled bin Walid al Mahrezi, Azzan bin Talal al Ajami and Abdulrahman bin Hammoud al Maamari.



Jannik Sinner (ITA) reacts after winning a game against Tommy Paul (USA) in semi-final play at Sobey's Stadium. – USA TODAY Sports

Sinner to face de Minaur for Toronto title

TORONTO: Jannik Sinner and Alex de Minaur both dominated opponents in straight sets on Saturday to reach the final of the ATP Toronto Masters.

Sinner, runner-up last spring in Miami, reached his second final of the season at the elite level with a 6-4, 6-4 defeat of American Tommy Paul.

De Minaur put an Australian into a Canadian final for the first time since 2001 with his 6-1, 6-3 defeat of Alejandro Davidovich Fokina.

The last Aussie to reach the title match here was Patrick Rafter — who had lifted the 1998 trophy.

De Minaur maintained his hardcourt form from last weekend in Los Cabos, where he finished runner-up to Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Sinner had to battle in his fourth career Masters semi-final, claiming the opening set in 53 minutes and winning a 46-shot rally to take a 5-2 lead in the second set.

Sinner was broken while

serving for victory but recovered a game later for victory on his third match point.

“This was a fight, he was playing great,” the winner said. “This is what I play for — the big matches.

“I know the feeling of a Masters 1000 final. Hopefully I can show my best tennis tomorrow.

“I’m happy with how I reacted to situations on the court. I’m happy to be in the final again. The pressure is something great, it’s positive.”

Sinner leads de Minaur — his doubles partner this week — 4-0 in previous meetings.

World number 18 De Minaur will bid for his eighth career trophy and second this season after winning a wind-swept semi-final over Davidovich Fokina that was littered with service breaks.

The Australian, who knocked out second seed Daniil Medvedev in the quarter-finals, said winning could not have

“My goal is to stay consistent and give myself the chance to play in the deep end of the tournament — go toe-to-toe with the best in the world.”

JANNIK SINNER

been more difficult.

“It was a very tough day, tricky conditions for playing tennis with all of the wind,” he said.

“From the first point I told myself to stay positive and not expect perfect tennis.

“I showed the level I knew I could — it’s about backing it up day after day.

The 31-minute opening set established the hit-or-miss tone of a contest where eight of nine



Alex de Minaur reacts after winning his semi final match against Alejandro Davidovich Fokina at Sobey's Stadium. – USA TODAY Sports

INDIA ROMP TO NINE-WICKET WIN TO LEVEL T20 SERIES WITH WINDIES

LAUDERHILL: India powered to an emphatic nine-wicket victory in their T20 international against the West Indies on Saturday thanks to a magnificent opening partnership from Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill as they levelled the five-match series at 2-2.

West Indies set India a target of 179 to win, which looked challenging on a slow surface but the opening pair made short work of the task, rattling up 165 before Gill finally departed for 77 in the 16th over.

Jaiswal, the 21-year-old left hander, ended unbeaten on 84 after some outstanding strokeplay, producing 11 fours and three sixes to the delight of the heavily pro-India crowd at the Broward County Stadium in South Florida.

The series decided concludes at the USA's recognised international cricket venue on Sunday and India will now fancy their chances of a comeback from trailing 2-0.

Shimron Hetmyer struck a lively 61 as West Indies recovered from a shaky start to reach 178-8.

Arshdeep Singh had removed West Indies openers Kyle Mayers (17) and Brandon King (18) and fans bedecked in India's blue shirts, including supporters who had travelled from across the United States, were lapping it up as West Indies struggling to 57-4 with left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav picking up two

wickets.

But then Shai Hope steadied the innings with 45 from 29 balls before he holed out to Axar Patel off Yuzvendra Chahal.

But it was Hetmyer who took on India's attack, hitting four sixes as he put up his 61 off 39 balls, combining some power hitting with strategic patience.

Odean Smith's last-ball six, smiting Arshdeep Singh over extra cover, helped West Indies set a respectable total but their bowling attack was soon being pulled to pieces.

India skipper Hardik Pandya was delighted to see his young opening batsmen deliver.

“Brilliant. As we've seen, there's no doubt in their skillset. They just needed to spend some time between the wickets. Going forward we have to take more responsibility as a batting group and support the bowlers. I've always believed bowlers win matches. Yashasvi and Shubman were brilliant. Very pleasing to see,” he said.

While the dominating nature of India's win suggests they have a strong chance of clinching the series, Pandya warned against complacency.

“In T20 cricket no one is favourite. You have to turn up and play good cricket. You have to respect the opposition. They were 2-0 up because they played better cricket than us. “On Sunday we have to turn up and do exactly what we did today,” he said. — AFP



India's Yashasvi Jaiswal, with West Indies' Shai Hope (L), celebrates his teams' win during the fourth T20. – AFP

LIFESTYLE

A man tends to a stall selling an array of eclectic items in Hong Kong—AFP



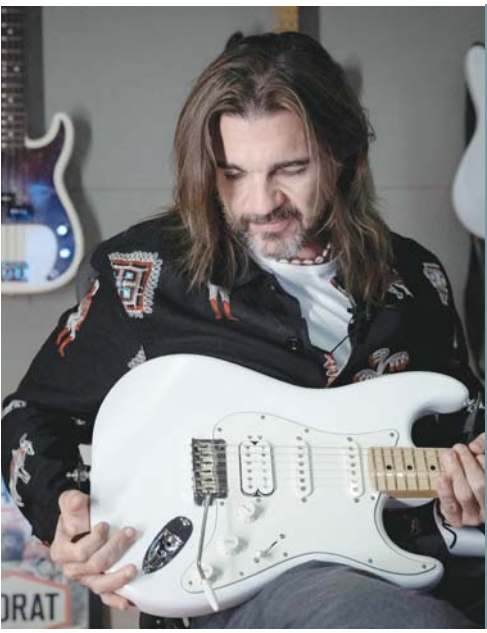
OUTDOORS

A Japanese surfer jumps in a pose before entering the water at Kuta beach near Denpasar, Bali —AFP



BOLLYWOOD

Bollywood actress Saiyami Kher takes part in a game of cricket during an event for promotion of her upcoming film ‘Ghoomer’ in Mumbai —AFP



MUSIC

Multi-Grammy award-winning artist Juanes poses for a photo as he holds a Juanes Stratocaster, a signature guitar created in his honour by Fender, in his recording studio at his home in Miami, Florida, US.—REUTERS



FOOD

A customer shops for fruits and vegetables at a market in Beijing — AFP

art & life

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Karaoke season concludes on a harmonious note

BY KHALID MOHAMMED AL BALUSHI
PHOTOS BY SANTHOSH THOMAS

In a celebration of music that transcends boundaries, the Funkar group bids adieu to the 7th season of their enchanting Karaoke series. This final performance, infused with the spirit of camaraderie and musical passion, is a heartfelt ode to the art form that unites souls. The event, titled after the iconic Bollywood song ‘Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna’ — translating to ‘Never Say Goodbye’, sets the stage for an evening of nostalgia and togetherness, brought to life by the melodious voices of 11 talented artists.

The spotlight falls on the silver screen gem ‘Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna’, a beloved Bollywood musical romantic drama that delves into the complexities of love and betrayal. The cinematic journey, lived by the luminous stars Shah Rukh Khan, Rani Mukherjee, Abhishek Bachchan, Preity Zinta, Kirron Kher, and Amitabh Bachchan, with a guest appearance by Arjun Rampal, weaves a tapestry of emotions. Crafted under the visionary direction of Karan Johar and produced by Dharma Productions, the movie’s evocative soundtrack is the creation of the esteemed



Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy trio. The enthralling programme is elegantly hosted by the charismatic Sanika Sawant and Shital Sawant, who bring a touch of operatic flair to the proceedings. The musical spectacle commences with a harmonious rendition by a lineup of exceptional talents including Urjit Tipnis, Unmesh Tipnis, Shital Sawant, Sanika Sawant, Uday Junnarkar, Rashmi Junnarkar, Medha Govilkar, Nilesh Govilkar, Varun Govilkar,

and the notable couple Jayraman and Seetha Jayraman, who journey from India to partake in this special performance. Karaoke, an interactive form of entertainment where individuals take turns singing along to pre-recorded tracks, is elevated to an art form in this presentation. The artists’ melodies were accompanied by skillfully edited video clips that synchronise seamlessly with their performances, a feat masterfully achieved

by Utkarsh Tipnis. The intricate soundtrack curation was credited to Nilesh Govilkar, while Ranjan Sagra and Ravindra Hemal deftly managed the music system, enhancing the illusion that the very characters on stage were serenading the audience. The meticulous organisation of the event is a collective effort, with Anuja Tipnis, Rutuja Tipnis, Gauri Govilkar, and Chirayu Sawant orchestrating the seamless execution. The culmination

of the season is marked by a tribute to Unmesh Tipnis, the visionary founder and driving force of the Funkar group, as he embarks on a new chapter in India. This gathering exemplifies the group’s unwavering dedication to both their audience and the art of music. Urjit Tipnis sheds light on the group’s ethos, emphasising, “The show is brought to life by the members who pool resources and seek sponsorship, ensuring that passion and creativity remain the driving forces.” Shital Sawant adds, “Our shows have always been a platform of inclusivity. With no entry fees, attend-

ees have the chance to engage in quiz contests, participate in raffle draws, savour a delectable dinner, and relish the performances from round table seating. It’s an immersive experience adorned with the backdrop of the artist’s banner.” As the final chords of the 7th season resonate, the Funkar group envelops the audience in an embrace of music and community. Their unwavering commitment to preserving and sharing the timeless treasures of Bollywood’s musical heritage shines through every note, creating an indelible memory of unity and harmony.



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REVIEW

A Bloodless Postscript to ‘Jaws’ in ‘The Shark Is Broken’

FOR NINE WEEKS in 1974, off the shore of Martha's Vineyard, the shooting of "Jaws" was repeatedly delayed by the whims of its temperamental stars. And by "stars," I mean Bruce.

Bruce was the name given to the three mechanical predators built to simulate the great white shark at the heart of the story. As one after another became bloated with saltwater or entangled in seaweed and failed to operate or flat-out sank — the crew called the movie "Flaws" — there was little the three equally temperamental human stars could do but try (and usually fail) to be patient. Occasionally they wondered if it might not have been better to train an actual great white for the role.

After seeing "The Shark Is Broken," a play about that disastrous shoot, you may wonder the opposite: whether it might not have been better to cast the movie with mechanical humans. The real ones were nearly as glitchy as Bruce. Aboard the Orca, the lobster boat on which much of "Jaws" was filmed, actors Robert Shaw, Richard Dreyfuss and Roy Scheider bickered, brawled, vomited, kvetched, drank, backstabbed and, like Bruce, broke down.

All of that is faithfully rendered in "The Shark Is Broken," which opened on Thursday at the Golden Theater, in a production directed by Guy Masterson. There's a perfect replica of the Orca

bobbing prettily on a CGI sea, and costumes minutely matched to the film. (Duncan Henderson is the designer.) Accents, postures, props and hairstyles are fanatically accurate; there's even a hat-tip (by Adam Cork) to John Williams' sawing, rasping theme at the start.

But these details do not on their own create much dramatic interest. Plots consisting of hurry-up-and-wait rarely do. Were it not for its curious meta-story, the play would be little more than a pleasant diversion: 95 minutes of bloodless, toothless, Hollywood-adjacent dramedy.

The meta-story gives it a bit more bite. Robert Shaw, who played the Ahab-like shark hunter Quint in "Jaws," is played here by Ian Shaw, who is one of his sons. Ian Shaw, who could be his father's twin, is also, with Joseph Nixon, the play's author. The ancient theme of paterfamilias versus prodigal is obviously engaged, also organising the arcs of the characters. Like a dorsal fin poking over the waves, their filial conflicts suggest the story's dark undertow.

Unfortunately, the undertow remains mostly under in Masterson's leisurely, self-satisfied staging; you could ask for more urgency even in a play about filling time. But this is quite clearly a love letter; if a complicated one, to a parent who achieved greater success in the same field as his son. (A noted stage actor who crossed back

and forth to film, Robert Shaw won an Oscar for "A Man for All Seasons.") So even though we see him drink himself into a stupor, ruthlessly bully

es, how fine an actor his father was and thus, in an Oedipal somersault, how fine he is, too.

One of those set pieces — the "USS



Dreyfuss (Alex Brightman) to "improve his performance," and browbeat Scheider (Colin Donnell) about his sunbathing and spirituality, Ian Shaw has him winking with gruff charm to take the edge off the awfulness. He also makes sure to show us, in two set pic-

Indianapolis" monologue from the movie, in which Quint reveals the origin of his shark hatred — can at least be justified by the story. We watch Robert Shaw rehearse it and flub it until, in the play's last beat, he nails it. But the barely motivated inclusion of Shakespeare's

Sonnet 29 ("When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes") comes off as overkill, even though gorgeously spoken; it's as if "The Shark Is Broken" were a brief for Robert Shaw's admission to actors' heaven, with John Gielgud at the gate.

The sonnet's supposed purpose is to calm Dreyfuss, who is having a panic attack, but Dreyfuss, playing the marine biologist Hooper in the movie, is a full-time panic attack anyway. Brightman's wicked impersonation, complete with Dreyfusian giggles, shrugs and glasses-pokes, highlights the boundless neurosis of a character who says, "Nothing good ever happened to any Jew on the water." When he admits he took the role in "Jaws" only because he was sure, at 26, his career was over; it sounds like he means his life was.

That he and Scheider (as the police chief Brody) are given daddy issues helps bind their stories thematically to that of both Shaws. Robert Shaw's father, we learn, was an alcoholic who died by suicide; Ian Shaw's, of course, was Robert — enough said.

Still, Dreyfuss' guilt over not becoming a lawyer and Scheider's mild recollections of his father's beatings feel underwhelming. In the competition for messed-up-ness, they lose every heat handily to Robert Shaw, and recede in his wake — especially Scheider, who has little to do but placate the others. His

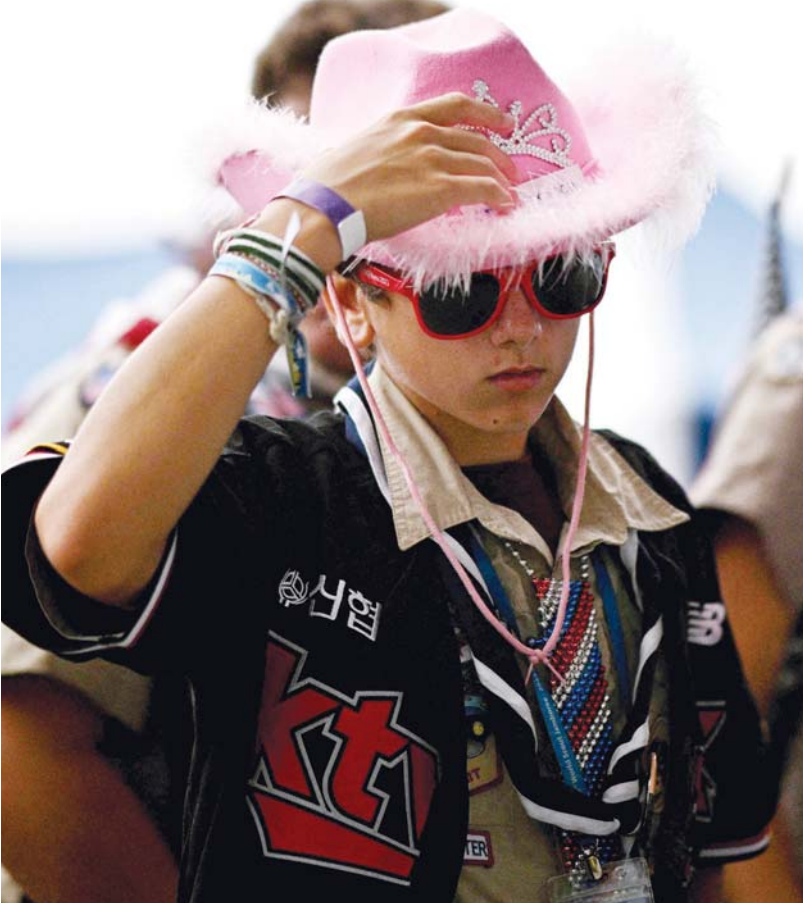
best scene, which the silky Donnell carries off perfectly, finds him stripping to his Speedo to catch some rays; there are no lines.

That's telling, because the dialogue overall is laboured. Through much of the longish first scene, the authors stuff resume excerpts and scraps of backstory into envelopes of supposedly casual dialogue. ("I shot this thing last year," Dreyfuss says, "The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz.") Casting about for laughs, they use whatever chum they can, whether it's borrowed W.C. Fields or cheesy backfired irony. "There will never be a more immoral president than Tricky Dicky," Scheider says of Richard Nixon, welcoming the audience's look-how-that-turned-out response.

In the end, "The Shark Is Broken" isn't interested in argument and interpretation any more than "Jaws" was. When Dreyfuss says the movie they're making is about the subconscious, and Scheider posits that it's about responsibility, Shaw, as always, wins by proclamation. "It's about a shark!" he brays.

So is the play, in a way, and that's why it remains diverting enough for a summer on Broadway. Its sharks are human, though. They're called sons.

"The Shark Is Broken"Through Nov. 19 at the Golden Theater, Manhattan; thesharkisbroken.com. Running time: 1 hour, 35 minutes. — **NYT**



MUSIC

K-pop to the rescue? S. Korea all-in for scout jamboree closing concert

TENS OF THOUSANDS of scouts danced, sang and waved glow sticks at a massive K-pop festival in Seoul on Friday, as South Korea sought to salvage a problem-plagued jamboree with "the power of Korean culture."

The quadrennial world jamboree gathered 43,000 scouts in North Jeolla province, but an unprecedented heat-wave prompted mass illnesses, US and UK contingents left early amid reports of



dire campsite conditions, and a tropical storm finally forced a full evacuation this week. The scouts were dispersed across the country and sent on government-sponsored cultural tours, but the "K-pop Superlive" concert —featuring major acts including NewJeans and The Boyz — reunited all the jamboree participants for a grand finale.

Tens of thousands of scouts in colourful uniforms and neckties, some wearing face paint and waving flags, filled Seoul's World Cup Stadium on Friday. "The last few days have not been easy," said Ahmad Alhendawi, secretary-general of the World Organization of the Scout Movement, at the official closing

ceremony ahead of the concert, adding to loud cheers that they had finally "reunited our jamboree".

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo told the scouts that he hoped "the cultural experiences you had in various parts of Korea... will remain as beautiful memories for you".

K-pop groups including HolyBang, The Boyz, ATBO and The New Six —the latter wearing scout-themed costumes —then performed to rapturous applause from the mostly teenage scouts.

The scouts, many wearing colourful raincoats, could be seen singing along, dancing and enthusiastically waving glow sticks.

Some used their smartphones to capture the faces of the K-pop stars, with many celebrating wildly when the cameras zoomed in on their faces, projecting them on the big screen.

Traffic control in Sangam-dong, the district where the stadium is located in Seoul, began hours before the concert, resulting in serious congestion in the area. More than 1,000 buses carried scouts to the venue. Seoul's culture ministry said all scouts were given photo cards of BTS as a gift, provided for free by the septet's agency, HYBE. The photo cards were said to have a total retail value of 800 million won (\$600,000), according to local media. — **AFP**



HSBC Oman shareholders opt for cash consideration in Sohar International merger

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUG 13

HSBC Oman, a subsidiary of HSBC Holdings, has reached a significant milestone in its merger with Sohar International. In an announcement via a regulatory filing yesterday and following previous disclosures, HSBC Oman revealed that a majority of shareholders have elected to receive cash consideration as part of the merger, marking a crucial development in the consolidation of the two banks.

The merger, which will be undertaken by way of incorporation, has garnered immense support from shareholders. The 172 shareholders, referred to as the ‘Cash Option Shareholders,’ collectively represent an impressive 96% of the total shareholding of HSBC Oman as of the record date of August 3, 2023. This overwhelming support reflects the shareholders’ confidence in the merger and their desire to unlock immediate financial benefits.

As per the terms and conditions approved by the Extraordinary General Meetings of HSBC Oman and Sohar International, each Cash Option Shareholder will receive 73% of their consideration in cash. The cash consideration will be provided at a ratio of RO 0.177

per eligible HSBC Oman share. This means that for each eligible share held by a Cash Option Shareholder, they will receive cash amounting to RO 0.177.

In addition to the cash consideration, the remaining consideration for Cash Option Shareholders will be issued in the form of shares of Sohar International.

This allocation will be calculated based on a ratio of 1.467 Sohar International shares for every remaining 1 HSBC Oman share. Any fractional shares resulting from the calculation will be rounded down to the nearest whole number of shares of Sohar International.

For HSBC Oman shareholders who did not elect or were not eligible to receive cash consideration, they will also receive shares of Sohar International. The allocation for these shareholders will be based on a ratio of 1.467 Sohar International shares for every 1 HSBC Oman share, rounded down to the nearest whole number of shares.

The merger represents a significant event in the banking sector of Oman. The incorporation method chosen for the merger ensures a seamless integration process, allowing for a smooth transition of operations and the consolidation of resources.

Oman attracts \$370 million investment in new data hosting, crypto mining centre

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 13

Oman’s Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has welcomed a new entrant to the country’s thriving data hosting and processing sector. The Afaaq for Advanced Technologies data hosting and cryptocurrency mining centre was inaugurated in the Salalah Free Zone, with Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in attendance.

The centre, set up by Exahertz International, is valued at over RO 135 million (around \$370 million) and is the second major data hosting and processing venture that the Ministry has attracted in recent months.

The first, Al-Madina Al-Khadraa, was announced in November 2022 and is valued at RO 150 million.

The combined investment of RO 285 million in these two data centres is a significant boost for Oman’s digital economy.

The centres will create hundreds of jobs for Omanis and help to position the country as a leading destination for data hosting and processing in the region.

In a speech at the inauguration ceremony, Eng Al Maawali said that the new data centres are a “major milestone” in Oman’s digital transformation journey.

He added that the centres will “help to accelerate the growth of our digital economy and create new opportunities for Omanis.”

The Minister also praised the efforts of Afaaq for Advanced Technologies in setting up the new data centres. He said that the



THE CENTRES WILL CREATE HUNDREDS OF JOBS FOR OMANIS AND HELP TO POSITION THE COUNTRY AS A LEADING DESTINATION FOR DATA HOSTING AND PROCESSING IN THE REGION.

company is “a leading player in the data hosting and processing sector, and we are confident that they will be a valuable asset to Oman’s digital economy.”

According to Sam Ferdos, CEO of Moonwalk Systems and Strategic Partner of Exahertz International, a wider network of blockchain-based data centres in planned in the Sultanate of Oman, starting with a pilot in Salalah.

Speaking to the Observer, Ferdos said the pilot is already online with 11 megawatts of power and over 2,000 machines.

By October, capacity will be ramped up to have up to 15,000 machines online, with

development fast-tracked to cover three locations in Salalah and one in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The pilot phase was designed to test the environment and see what modifications needed to be made to the data centres to enhance performance and create a more sustainable future, the CEO noted.

According to the executive, the added value of the project for Oman is that it will bring the knowledge and know-how of blockchain technology to the country.

Exahertz is looking to pass this on to the locals by training them in data centre operations and blockchain technology. The project will also use local infrastructure, from electrical infrastructure to civil, to boost the economy. When asked about training, Ferdos says that they are more focused on hiring locals for their projects. They are

also bringing in youths through internship programmes to transfer knowledge.

Ferdos says that they are using the latest cutting-edge technology available today from a manufacturer in China called Bitmain Technologies.

Bitmain is the world leader in high-performance computer machines.

They are specifically using hydro technology, which is a water cooling solution that cools the computers to create a very efficient process. This allows them to have a top-notch, high-performing, and high-efficient data centre in Oman.

Ferdos is excited about the project and the potential it has to bring economic growth and development to Oman.

He believes that blockchain technology is the future, and he is proud to be a part of bringing it to Oman.

RO 46 million in funding assistance distributed to 275 agri-fish projects

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, AUG 13

The Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund shared that it funded a total of 22 projects with a total value of RO 2.846 million in 2022.

According to Dr Masoud bin Sulaiman al Azri, a key official at the Fund, various sectors spanning the agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, water resources, and food safety sectors were supported with funding assistance with the goal of enhancing food quality and safety.

He added that the Fund’s 2040 strategy includes the following goals: improving the management of agricultural and fisheries resources, ensuring their sustainability, developing



production and manufacturing systems, marketing, value chain analysis, promoting food

safety and quality programmes, creating job opportunities for Omanis, diversifying sources of

income, raising income levels, and contributing to providing investment opportunities to enhance food security.

Since its establishment in 2004, the Fund has supported a total of 275 projects with a total cost of RO 46.157 million.

According to Al Azri, the Fund is currently seeking a bank to implement and finance projects in accordance with the standards authorised by the Fund, in collaboration with private sector establishments.

In addition to diversifying self-financing options.

Back in December, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, shared that total value of investment in food related projects reached RO 1.3 billion in 2022.

Oman’s grid operator nears completion of 400kV Barik overhead line

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUG 13

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) — a part of Nama Group — is on the verge of completing the construction of 400kV overhead lines between Barik and Suwayhat grid stations, with progress reaching an impressive 99%.

The company has announced its plans to finalise the remaining tasks and energise the Suwayhat grid station by the end of this month. This development is poised to significantly enhance the electricity transmission infrastructure in the region and support Oman’s growing energy demands.

The construction of the 400kV overhead lines is a vital project undertaken by



OETC to strengthen the power transmission network and improve grid reliability in Oman.

The project aims to facilitate the seamless transfer of electricity across vast distances, ensuring a stable and efficient power supply to meet the needs of consumers and businesses alike. The completion of this venture will mark a significant milestone in the country’s efforts to modernise its electrical infrastructure. **TURN TO P16**

Lexus campaign with exclusive benefits ending soon

MUSCAT: Owning a Lexus is now even more appealing. Customers can look forward to service 5 years / 50,000 kms (whichever is earlier) and 1 year free registration. Campaign ends on August 16, 2023. (Conditions apply. For details visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom).

Lexus vehicles in Oman includes the UX, NX, RX, GX, IS, ES, LS and LX.

The UX reflects the “Yet Philosophy,” in many ways, but especially in terms of design, performance and utility. The front wheel drive Lexus UX is powered by a high-efficiency 2.0 litre, four-cylinder engine, which is coupled with a Direct Shift Continuously Variable Transmission (DCVT).

The sleek and stylish NX SUV is equipped with two powertrain options. An inline 4-cylinder, 2.4L turbocharged engine that produces 275 hp and 6,000 RPM and is paired to an 8-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission (8AT).

The NX is also available with hybrid-electric system that combines two power sources consisting of a 2.5-litre petrol engine and two electric motors producing 240 hp.

The hybrid-electric system is paired to a Direct Shift Continuously Variable



Transmission (CVT).

The stunning all-new RX has been completely reimagined to deliver greater style, comfort, and performance than ever before and comes with a choice of three powertrains, two of which are electrified.

A newly developed inline 4-cylinder, 2.4-litre turbocharged engine that produces 275 hp and 430 nm of torque is paired to a new 8-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission (8AT).

Meanwhile, the new hybrid-electric system combines a 2.5-litre petrol engine and electric motor to produce a total of 247 hp, which is paired to an electronically-

controlled continuously variable transmission (E-CVT) to provide excellent fuel efficiencies.

A hybrid-electric system pairing a 2.4-litre turbocharged engine with an electric motor is also available, which provides a combined power of 366 hp mated to a 6-speed automatic transmission.

The powerful Lexus GX460 is perfect for families who seek no-holds-barred adventure on their days off, yet also desire an easy-driving, comfortable and versatile luxury SUV for the work week.

The Lexus GX460 features a 4.6L engine that provides outstanding power and responsive performance. The flagship LX is available with

a choice of two powertrain options, including two newly developed V6 twin-turbo engines.

The V6 twin-turbo 3.5-litre petrol engine achieves class-leading performance that surpasses that of a conventional V8, producing 409 hp and up to 66.28 Kg.m torque. Meanwhile, the V6 twin-turbo engine 3.3-litre diesel variant is capable of 302 hp and up to 71.38 Kg.m torque.

Both versions are mated to a 10-speed automatic transmission. In sedans, the range includes the IS350.

This sleek and stylish powerful sedan is equipped with a 3.5-litre engine that's paired to an 8-speed

automatic transmission.

The turbocharged IS300 features a 2.0-litre twin-scroll turbocharged inline four-cylinder engine with intercooler that generates 241 Hp.

The flagship LS which is an inspiring luxury sedan, is available in 3.5-litre V6 Multi Stage Hybrid System producing 354 hp, a 3.5-litre V6 naturally aspirated Atkinson-cycle producing 311 hp and 38.7 Kg.M Torque, and a 3.5-litre twin-turbo V6 engine producing 415 hp and 61.2 Kg.M of Torque.

Lexus ES emotional design elevated by the new design front grille is a thrilling drive personality imbued by two powertrain options. ES350 is powered by a 3.5 litre, 24 valve, V6 engine that produces 298 hp and 36.3 kg.m. of torque.

While the ES250 is powered by high efficiency 2.5 litre, 16-valve DOHC engine that produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg.m of torque.

In Oman, every Lexus vehicle comes with special benefits and privileges such as Manufacturer's Warranty of 4 years/100,000 Kms (whichever is earlier) and 24 hours on-road assistance from AAA.

For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or subscribe to YouTube channel “Lexus Oman”, or like Lexus Oman on Facebook or Follow Oman.

Crowne Plaza Resort Salalah recognised as best coastal resort in Oman

MUSCAT: The Crowne Plaza Resort Salalah has been recognised as the Best Coastal Resort in Oman in the 2023 Haute Grandeur Global Hotel Awards.

The prestigious award honours establishments that continuously excel through remarkable hospitality experiences.

As the winner of this regional award, the Crowne Plaza Resort Salalah has been acknowledged as the leading beachfront resort in Oman.

Situated along the picturesque shoreline near Salalah, the resort offers luxurious accommodations, five-star amenities, and impeccable Omani hospitality.

“We are honoured to be named the Best Coastal Resort in Oman by the Haute Grandeur Global Hotel Awards,” said Maher Bahsoun, General Manager of the Crowne Plaza Resort Salalah.

“This award recognises the hard work and dedication of our entire team in creating memorable experiences and pampering service for every guest.”

OAB celebrates reopening of upgraded Nakhl branch

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) celebrated the opening of its upgraded and relocated Nakhl branch under the auspices of Said al Hakmani, Member of the Municipal Council of Nakhl. Located at Nakhl Mall, the new relocated branch is offering customers an enhanced banking experience from a new, more advantageous location and will allow OAB customers to be served more efficiently.



With enhanced digital capabilities, the Nakhl branch will also feature increased privacy for

customers, including personal and business clients.

The renovation is part of OAB's ongoing programme of branch improvements across the Sultanate of Oman, opening new branches and updating existing branches with new design and customer experience elements.

Other recent openings include the enhanced and relocated Ibra and Duqm branches, as well as OAB's new flagship Ruwi branch, with state-of-the-art services offering an improved banking experience for customers.

Vodafone Oman hears from youth in Dhofar during Youth Centre's 'Lamat Shabab'

MUSCAT: Vodafone Oman's partnership with the Youth Centre has garnered positive momentum during the khareef 2023 season. As part of the long-term collaboration, Vodafone took part in a youth discussion forum called 'Lamat Shabab' with HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, listening from the youth first-hand on their aspirations for a bright future.



Bader al Zidi, CEO of Vodafone Oman, said: “At Vodafone Oman, we are ensuring that our advanced digital capabilities drive the future of our nation, and nurture a tech-savvy generation. The discussions during 'Lamat Shabab' were very useful, giving us great insight into what really matters for Dhofaris. We believe in our youth and understand the key role they will have in building the Oman of tomorrow.

It is therefore our joint responsibility to empower them with the means, knowledge, and

expertise to achieve their goals and aspirations, and ultimately contribute to the growth of the national economy.”

Vodafone's partnership with the Youth Centre was kicked-off earlier this month with a carefully designed programme that includes workshops, vocational sessions, networking and entertainment activations, as well as gaming tournaments and competitions across the governorate.

“At the Youth Centre, we select partners who share our vision for the future and who believe in the capacities and capabilities of Omani youth,” said Zaid al Salmani, Managing Director of the Youth Centre.

“Working together with Vodafone Oman starting with the Khareef season, our aim is to upskill our youth and expose them to experiences that will enable them to compete in the

global jobs market, in line with the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2024.”

Since launch, the Youth Centre programmes have impacted more than 110,000 youth, providing them with opportunities to develop their knowledge, exposure, skills and talents in creative and innovative fields, through its collaborations with local, regional and international organisations. Backed by its extensive experience establishing a greenfield 100% digital operator in Oman, Vodafone will aim to catalyse youth participation and contribution to the nation through a series of joint projects, campaigns, initiatives and events with the Youth Centre.

The company will also train and develop the capabilities of the Centre's call centre team, utilising best practices and expertise gained from setting-up its own Care Team through the Vodafone Academy.

Genesis announces enhanced version of G70

MUSCAT: The luxury sports sedan G70 is back with more agility and powerful driving performance.

Genesis Middle East & Africa has announced that the enhanced version of the G70 has started production in the Middle East in August and will be available in our showrooms soon.

The highly anticipated G70 is arriving soon to the Middle East Market. Building upon its resounding success in 2022 and its exceptional performance in 2023, The G70 returns as a new and improved version, featuring interior and exterior upgrades that emphasise luxury and performance. The G70 & G70 Shooting Brake feature a 2.0 turbo engine and high-performance Brembo brakes as standard to ensure strong braking performance, interior and exterior with more details to emphasise luxury, and customer convenience specifications are standardised, and new specifications are added to enhance driving and braking performance and convenience.

The G70 will be available in two lineups: a 2.0 turbo and a 3.3 turbo, and the G70 Shooting Brake as a 2.0 turbo.

Equipped with a 2.0 turbo engine, the G70 & G70 Shooting Brake provides an agile and dynamic driving experience with driving systems such as 'Sport + (Sport Plus) mode', a driving mode specialised for limit driving.

The design of the G70 & G70 Shooting Brake inherits Genesis' unique design identity of “athletic elegance” while enhancing the driver-centric interior design.



The exterior design features a new Genesis emblem decorated with a Guilloché pattern, creating the image of a luxury sedan.

In addition, newly designed wheels such as 19-inch dark gray matte wheels, as well as new exterior colours such as Vatna Gray and Kawah Blue, have been added to further reinforce its sportiness and luxurious image.

The interior space has a functional design improvement that enhances the convenience of operation and details enhances the driver's immersion.

Genesis emphasises the sense of luxury by upgrading touch-type climate control display, frameless room mirror, leather steering wheel with new emblem, multi-function switches, door & console garnish patterns, air vents, cup holders and more to realise the delicate interior sensibility of a luxury sedan.

As for the built-in colours, Obsidian black/fog gray two-tone, Obsidian black/vanilla beige two-tone, Forest blue/vanilla beige two-tone are newly added to expand the range of customer choices.

The G70 & G70 Shooting Brake retains the existing excellent driving comfort technology and is equipped with new features to provide customers with a pleasant and comfortable driving experience.

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Khalifa al Buseidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court Shuhayb Al Maashari, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq took the oath of office at Al Bakhrah Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

NEW YORK: Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen. In a virtual video call to countries backing the global ceasefire initiative, Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed to establish peace and security in Yemen. "The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said. Guterres added that the "Sultanate represents a unique model, not only in the Middle East, but also in the world" He urged other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in advocating and supporting peace and stability. — OMA

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT: The frequent orders and fervent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are failing on deaf ears. A drive around the downtown Muscat and its adjoining areas reveals how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder. While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not. "In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves. enough times that they pave the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can ensure them away," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and in commemoration of the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a new series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4

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Oman's grid operator nears completion of 400kV Barik overhead line

FROM PAGE 13
Last month, OETC announced that the Barik grid station project, built with an investment of around RO 45 million, has been successfully connected to the mammoth Rabt project, which aims to link the Main Interconnection System (MIS) of north Oman, with the isolated Dhofar System in the south.

The Barik to Suwayhat 400kV overhead line project has progressed steadily since its commencement.

The construction team has demonstrated exceptional dedication and efficiency in overcoming various challenges, including adverse weather conditions and complex terrain.

OETC's meticulous planning and execution have enabled the project to stay on track and remain within the stipulated timelines, ensuring minimal disruption to the power supply during the construction phase.

Upon completion, the new 400kV overhead lines will have a substantial impact on the electricity transmission capacity between Barik and Suwayhat grid stations. The enhanced infrastructure will enable the efficient transfer of electricity over long distances, reducing transmission losses and ensuring a reliable supply of power to the region.

The upgraded grid station at Suwayhat will play a crucial role in receiving, distributing, and monitoring the transmitted electricity, further bolstering the overall grid stability.

Oman must harness vast beaches, khareef season to drive tourism: Expert

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 13

White sandy beaches overlooking the azure waters of the Arabian Sea, punctuating the 3,165 kilometre wvcoastline of the Sultanate of Oman, should be suitably harnessed to attract beach loving tourists from around the world, says a Turkish tourism expert.

Mehmet Tunc Mustecaplioglu (pictured), Area General Manager of Orascom's Dhofar destinations, insists that the tourism potential associated with Oman's beaches can surpass that of a popular destination like Egypt.

"Oman is currently only using 5 per cent of its beach potential," Mehmet told the *Observer*. "We have to attract investors to come here and develop the country's beaches. People will come here for beach holidays in the wintertime, and Oman will face no competition, except perhaps from its GCC neighbours and Egypt."

In this regard, the veteran hotelier who has spent three decades in the hospitality industry, urged the government to invest in developing the country's beaches and promoting them to tourists from around the world.

Turning to Salalah, the expert appealed for more efforts to promote Salalah beyond the markets currently being targeted



by authorities. With its pleasant, subtropical climate, Salalah becomes a magnet for people seeking an escape from the heat, he said.

"We are expecting 800,000 tourists to Salalah during the khareef season," Mehmet said. "Of these tourists, 80 per cent will be from other cities in Oman and 20 per cent will be from Gulf

countries." He noted that many people in Saudi Arabia are not aware of Salalah, and that they tend to focus on tourist destinations in northern Oman.

"We need to do a better job of promoting Salalah to tourists from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries," Mehmet said. "We also need to improve the infrastructure in Salalah to make it more attractive to tourists."

Mehmet, who previously served as CEO of a hotel chain in Türkiye, said that tourists from new markets, such as Russia, Georgia, and Iran, are not familiar with Oman's khareef season.

"They don't know that Oman has a monsoon season," Mehmet said. "They think it's always hot

and sunny here." As a result, these tourists are not as likely to spend money on activities and amenities at hotels, according to Mehmet.

"They just have breakfast and then come back to their rooms in the evening," he said. "They don't use the hotel facilities."

Hoteliers in Oman are also facing challenges during the khareef season, he points out, primarily because of the brevity of the khareef season, lasting only from July to September. This makes it difficult for hotels to make a profit during this time, as they have to cover their costs for the rest of the year.

"Nobody should build a hotel for the khareef season," Mehmet said. "It's just a short period."

Despite the challenges, Mehmet believes that Oman has the potential to become a major tourist destination during the khareef season. He urged the government to invest in promoting the country to tourists from new markets.

"Oman has the potential to be the next Antalya," Mehmet said. "We just need to take the necessary steps to make it happen."

In addition to the challenges of marketing Oman to new tourists, hoteliers are also facing challenges in meeting the expectations of European tourists.

"Europeans have different expectations than tourists from other countries," Mehmet said. "They want a higher level of service and amenities." As a result, hotels in Oman are having to invest in upgrading their facilities and training their staff to meet the demands of European tourists.

"It's not easy," Mehmet said. "But we're committed to providing the best possible experience for our guests."

Despite the challenges, Mehmet is optimistic about the future of tourism in Oman. He believes that the country has the potential to become a major tourist destination for people from all over the world.

"Oman is a beautiful country with a lot to offer tourists," Mehmet said. "I'm confident that we will see continued growth in tourism in the years to come."

Port of Salalah on track to achieve general cargo target of 20 MT

CONRAD PRABBU
MUSCAT, AUG 13

A remarkable 26 per cent jump in general cargo volumes handled by the Port of Salalah during the first half of this year positions it strongly to achieve its full-year throughput target of 20 million tonnes.

The General Cargo Terminal (GCT) at the port, overlooking the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean beyond, handled 11.215 million tonnes of bulk and dry cargoes during the first half of 2023, versus 8.896 million tonnes during H1 2022, entailing an increase of 26 per cent.

Major commodities handled



included limestone, gypsum, cement, methanol and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), which were primarily exported to markets in the Middle East, East Africa and the Indian sub-continent.

"With an ambitious target of 20 million tonnes by end 2023 (a

growth of 10 per cent YoY), the General Cargo business is off to a good start in the first half of 2023 with volume exceeding the Year-to-Date target by +12 per cent," said Braik bin Musallam al Amri, Chairman - Salalah Port Services Co SAOG.

"The main contributions come from dry bulk and liquid bulk. The dry bulk performance is driven by strong demand in key markets in India and other Asian countries," the official stated in the Director's Report on the hub's performance for the first half of the year.

Container throughput, on the other hand, dipped 11 per cent to 1.999 million TEUs during H1 2023, down from 2.241 million TEUs a year earlier.

Commenting on the outlook for the port's Container business, the Chairman noted: "In the container segment for Salalah, the targets for 2023 for transshipment has been set at -14 per cent compared to 2022 due to the

capacity constraints coming out of the Container Terminal upgrade.

Looking at the first half, the overall gate volume has increased by 3 per cent over same period of 2022 whereas the laden gate volume increased by 8 per cent. We expect this trend to continue in the second half of 2023 for gate volume," he added.

Port of Salalah reported a consolidated net profit for H1 2023 of RO 2.363 million, as compared to a profit of RO 1.418 million for the corresponding period of 2022. Consolidated EBITDA was recorded at RO 8.028 million during H1 2023, as compared to RO 6.598 million during same period last year.

The essential guide to building a rock-solid startup team



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As-Salaam-Alaikum. Are you standing on the precipice of entrepreneurial glory, wondering how to take that pivotal leap? Are you curious about the elements

that separate successful startups from those that dissolve into oblivion? Is it the novelty of the product? Or is it the accuracy of market timing?

While these aspects undeniably carry weight, one key component propels startups on a trajectory towards success – the team.

The entrepreneurial journey resembles traversing an intricate labyrinth. Here, the team serves as the dependable compass guiding the venture through unexpected twists, ensuring it arrives at the destination.

Building a robust startup team, one that aligns with your vision, complements your competencies, and echoes your passion, is a formidable challenge, yet a crucial one.

But how do you go about

gathering this ideal ensemble?

Here are some critical insights to help you on your journey:

- 1. Align vision and values:** To build a rock-solid team, ensure every member shares the company's envisioned future and upholds the core values. This unity in vision and ethos morphs a group of individuals into a formidable force that can thrust your startup towards success.
- 2. Complementary skill sets:** Self-awareness is a vital entrepreneurial trait. You must acknowledge that wearing all hats is neither possible nor beneficial. Identify your strengths and areas of improvement, and bring on board members whose abilities fill these gaps.

The amalgamation of diverse skills, experiences, and viewpoints

can significantly enhance problem-solving and decision-making within the startup.

- 3. Foster a culture of open communication:** A team's strength lies in its bonds, and these bonds are formed and fortified through open and transparent communication.
- Encourage team members to voice their ideas, concerns, and feedback. It imbues a sense of ownership, creating an environment conducive to well-informed, collective decision-making.
- 4. Prioritise team development:** Recognise and value your team as your startup's most significant asset. Allocate time and resources towards their development. As they refine their skills, it not only elevates their performance

but also communicates that you appreciate their contributions, thereby boosting their morale and commitment.

- 5. Embrace diversity:** Diversity is the fertile soil in which the seeds of innovation sprout.
- A heterogeneous team in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, or background offers a multitude of perspectives that can birth groundbreaking solutions.
- Embrace this diversity and witness your startup's creative potential thrive. Building a rock-solid startup team is not an event, but a process—a continuous cycle of searching, nurturing, and evolving.
- As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "The hand of Allah is with the community." This wisdom

signifies the immense potential of a coordinated team operating in harmony.

However, a great team is only one piece of the entrepreneurial puzzle. Once you've assembled your dream team, the next monumental challenge is product development.

In the subsequent article, 'Navigating the Challenges of Product Development', we'll delve deep into this critical aspect. How do you mold your innovative concept into a market-fit, tangible product?

But let's pause here and reflect, how are you preparing to build your dream team? And what are the key traits you're looking for in your team members? Anticipate an enlightening exploration in the next piece. Ma'as salama!