



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S CHINA, NIGERIA, CYPRUS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Xi Jinping of China on the 74th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the President and the friendly people of China. His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Bola Tinubu of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the President and the friendly Nigerian people. His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Nikos Christodoulides of the Republic of Cyprus on his country's Independence Anniversary. — ONA

INSURANCE MANDATORY FOR ADVENTURE TOURISM



The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has launched a mandatory insurance policy for organisers of adventure tourism activities in accordance with the requirements of the decision No 124/2021 of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. The insurance policy provides insurance coverage for legal liability and financial consequences to adventure tourism organisers as a result of injury or damage to the client and third parties. **DETAILS ON P2**

WASHINGTON

US GOVT HOURS FROM SHUTDOWN

With the US government just hours from shutting down on Saturday, Republican Speaker Kevin McCarthy pitched a last-gasp stopgap measure to avoid a closure that would throw into doubt everything from access to national parks to Washington's massive support for Ukraine. The freeze of all but critical government services, set to start after midnight on Saturday.

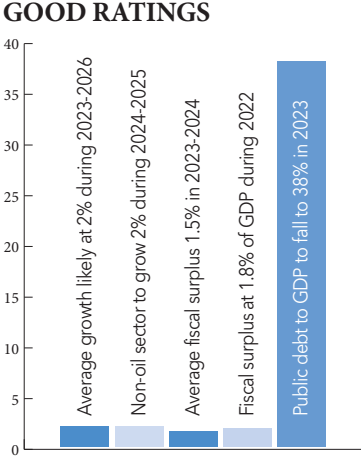
Deal for worldwide distribution of film

MUSCAT: DAL Productions announced that Warrior Films, in association with 180 Films and DAL Productions, has signed an agreement with LGI Media for the worldwide distribution of Warrior Films' first documentary **ARROWHEAD**. **ARROWHEAD** tells the incredible story of three women, one British and two Omani, who walked 758 km, the equivalent distance of London to Switzerland, over 28 days to become the first modern women to cross the vast stretch of barren waste in the heart of the Arabian desert, known as Rub' al Khali or The Empty Quarter. The three women had a clear objective: to challenge prejudices, break down stereotypes and to deliver a message to the world that we are "better together" regardless of culture, gender or identity differences. **DETAILS ON P5**

S&P upgrades Oman's rating

MUSCAT: International credit rating agency, Standard & Poor's (S&P), on Saturday released its credit rating report for the Sultanate of Oman, which upgraded the credit rating to "BB+" with a stable outlook. This was a result of the improved resilience of the Omani economy to external financial shocks and the government's actions to improve financial and economic indicators, reduce the state's public indebtedness and continue to improve prospects for the oil sector. The agency said it expected economic growth at an average rate of about 2 per cent during 2023-2026 despite slowing real GDP growth during the current year as a result of the voluntary reduction in oil production after the Opec+ agreement, and the non-oil sector growth of about 2 per cent during 2024-2025. The agency noted a fiscal surplus of about 1.8 per cent of GDP during 2022 after almost 8 years of fiscal deficits, with an average fiscal surplus of 1.5 per cent expected to continue in 2023-2024. The agency stated that high oil prices would contribute to additional revenues and enable the government to continue its efforts to exploit these revenues towards reducing public debt, with the expectation that the public debt rate as a proportion of GDP would decline from about 40 per cent in 2022 to 38 per cent in 2023.

GOOD RATINGS



Category	Value
Average growth likely at 2% during 2023-2026	2%
Non-oil sector to grow 2% during 2024-2025	2%
Average fiscal surplus 1.5% in 2023-2024	1.5%
Fiscal surplus at 1.8% of GDP during 2022	1.8%
Public debt to GDP to fall to 38% in 2023	38%



OQ Gas Networks SAOG
(under transformation)

Subscription Open

Initial Public Offering of 2,122,005,720 Offer Shares

Category I Offer (Institutional Category)
Subscription Price Range:
Bzs 131 to Bzs 140 per Offer Share

Category II Offer (Individuals' Category)
Subscription Price:
Discounted Maximum Price of Bzs 126 per Offer Share, calculated as the Maximum Price of Bzs 140 less a discount of 10 per cent.

Category I Offer Period:
26 September 2023 to 9 October 2023

Category II Offer Period:
26 September 2023 to 5 October 2023

QR Code

OQ Group

Issue Manager

Joint Global Coordinators

Collection Agents

This announcement has not been reviewed or approved by the Omani Capital Market Authority or any regulatory authority elsewhere and the information contained in it does not constitute a public offering of securities or solicitation of any offer to buy securities for the purpose of Omani law, including Commercial Companies Law (Royal Decree 19/2015), Securities Law (Royal Decree 45/2022), CMA Executive Regulations (CMA Decision 01/2020) or Regulations for Public Joint Stock Companies (Decision No. 20/2021) which can only be done through a prospectus approved by and registered with the Omani Capital Market Authority. This announcement does not, therefore, constitute a prospectus and should not be considered a prospectus for the public offering of securities in the Sultanate of Oman.



PATEK PHILIPPE
GENEVE

BEGIN YOUR OWN TRADITION

YOU NEVER ACTUALLY OWN A PATEK PHILIPPE.

YOU MERELY TAKE CARE OF IT FOR THE NEXT GENERATION.



PERPETUAL CALENDAR REF. 5320G

Patek Philippe Boutique

at

القرم
Al-Qurum

MUSCAT · 22009991

Omar bin Mubarak al Omrani from the Ministry of Information said: "The Ministry of Information's stall contains 50 publications that explore the various aspects of the Sultanate of Oman. He said there is a large turnout of visitors at the Oman pavilion in general and at the Ministry of Information's stall in particular."



OHRC SHOWCASES ITS ACHIEVEMENTS AT THE PALACE OF NATIONS

UN OFFICIALS PRAISE THE WORK OF OMAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

GENEVA: To highlight its role in promoting human rights in Oman, the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) conducted several events at the Palace of Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

The events saw the presentation by the OHRC of a working paper on the Commission and its working mechanisms and the achievements it made in the human rights field over the past years in addition to an open debate and answering the attendees' questions.

Moreover, the OHRC held an exhibition that displayed its 15-year march. A number of films and legal publications were displayed on display screens that were installed at selected spots within the Palace of Nations in Geneva. Books and publications containing annual reports and specialised books about the society segments most worthy of care, were distributed, as well.

In addition, the Commission's delegation met many officials at the UN and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. During these events, the committee clarified the efforts that are being made in the Sultanate of Oman to ensure more workers' rights and protection. It also explained the mechanisms and means taken to combat human trafficking and protect the society segments most worthy of care.

A LEGAL EVENT

The OHRC began its events with a speech delivered by Shaikh Abdullah bin Shuwain al Hosni, OHRC Chairman, in which he said: "The aim of these events is to celebrate 15 years of continuous achievements of the OHRC since its foundation in 2008. The events coincided with the UN' celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Paris Principles."

The chairman of the OHRC pointed out that Oman had recently issued the Social Protection Law which reinforced the efforts made at the social level. Also issued was the amended Labour Law which contains new articles aimed at providing more protection for workers. Both laws as well as other steps taken by the government of the Sultanate of Oman would foster efforts aimed to ensure a greater protection of human rights.

AN INTRODUCTORY FILM

An introductory film was screened which talked about the Commission and its working mechanisms, specialisations, programmes, its role in raising awareness about human rights, and communication with regional and international organisations and its membership in various relevant committees.

Shatha bint Abdulmajeed al Zadjalayah, Director of the Department of Organizations and International Relations at OHRC, made a presentation in which she explained that the Commission's new system stipulates that it be composed



The OHRC delegation with Václav Bálek, President of the Human Rights Council.



Shaikh Abdullah bin Shuwain al Hosni, OHRC Chairman, with Nada al Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights.



Shaikh Abdullah bin Shuwain al Hosni, OHRC Chairman, presents memento to Václav Bálek, President of the Human Rights Council.



OHRC expo at the Palace of the Nations in Geneva



OHRC's digital expo at the Palace of the Nations in Geneva.

of human rights stakeholders and persons with experience in the field in addition to representatives of relevant government bodies. The aim is to achieve the principle of pluralism in the formation of the Commission set forth by the Paris Principles regulating the work of national committees.

The presentation explained

that among the powers assigned to the OHRC are devising a national human rights strategy, monitoring violations, receiving complaints, conducting field visits to examine human rights incidents and raising public awareness through organising conferences, courses and seminars. Besides, the Commission cooperates with

international bodies concerned with human rights, prepares reports and participates in meetings at the regional and international levels.

Al Zadjalayah concluded her lecture by clarifying that the OHRC has fulfilled all of the required conditions in accordance with the Paris Principles and it is currently in

the process of submitting its file to the international accreditation committee of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) to re-accredit the Commission at A classification.

Afterwards, the floor was opened for discussion with the audience and the delegation members answered all questions

raised by the attendees regarding the human rights situation in the Sultanate of Oman as well questions relating to the OHRC, its powers and responsibilities.

THE EXHIBITION

OHRC held an accompanying exhibition at the Palace of Nations in Geneva that highlighted the Commission's march over the past 15 years and explained part of its work and achievements. The exhibition also explained the role of the committee in submitting parallel reports of government reports to the committees of international treaty, its participation in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the United Nations, its interaction with international organisations and committees and the most prominent programmes it conducted over the past years.

A meeting with the President of the Human Rights Council

The OHRC and the accompanying delegation met Václav Bálek, President of the Human Rights Council. The Chairman explained the role of the Commission, its efforts at international levels, its participation in submitting parallel reports of government reports and attending the discussions conducted by the Human Rights Council. The President of the Human Rights Council praised OHRC role in improving human rights and the developments in the new OHRC law.

A MEETING WITH THE DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER

The OHRC delegation also met Nada al Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. The meeting was held in the presence of Muhammad al Nsour, Head of the Middle East and North Africa Department at the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Chairman of the OHRC presented a summary of the most prominent legislative and legal developments related to human rights in Oman. Al Nashif praised the role of the OHRC at various levels, its efforts in raising awareness and education about human rights, and the steps that were taken with regard to the Commission's specialisations and working system. She expressed her appreciation for the efforts made in developing the working mechanisms to serve human rights, including those related to workers rights and protection and the establishment of the General Federation of Oman Workers, (GFW).

Al Nashif stated that the High Commission is on its way to strengthen the Commission's training centre in Doha as well as activate its mechanisms to create more space for developing the capabilities of national competencies in the GCC countries in human rights.

At the end of the event, the OHRC highlighted the achievements and efforts taking place in the field of human rights in Oman under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.



BE AWARE OF RISKS



IF YOUR EYE IS
ITCHING, BURNING,
IRRITATED OR RED,
REMOVE YOUR LENSES
AND CONTACT
YOUR EYE CARE
PROFESSIONAL



REMOVE
YOUR LENSES
BEFORE
REMOVING
MAKE-UP



WHEN PLAYING
SPORTS, WEAR
SAFETY GOGGLES

ALWAYS HAVE
A PRESCRIPTION
FOR ANY LENSES
YOU WEAR



NEVER WEAR
SOMEONE ELSE'S
LENSES



DO NOT WEAR YOUR
LENSES FOR LONGER THAN
PRESCRIBED. DO NOT
SLEEP IN LENSES
UNLESS THEY ARE
PRESCRIBED
TO BE USED
THAT WAY



NEVER EXPOSE
YOUR CONTACT
LENSES TO
ANY KIND OF
WATER OR
SALIVA



RUB, RINSE, CLEAN
AND DISINFECT YOUR
CONTACT LENSES
WITH THE PRODUCTS
AND SOLUTIONS
RECOMMENDED BY
YOUR EYE CARE
PROFESSIONAL



WASH YOUR
HANDS
BEFORE
CLEANING OR
INSERTING
LENSES

AHMED
AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT. 30

CONTACT LENSES save us the hassles of wearing a pair of glasses. They can be better for sports activities, because they don't break as frames and the lenses of glasses can. In some cases, contact lenses improve the quality of vision in comparison to eyeglasses, especially for a child who is very nearsighted.

But contact lenses should be used safely, responsibly, and only under the supervision of your eye care professional. It may result in eye infection or even blindness in some cases.

Contact lenses are transparent plastic lenses placed directly on the cornea of the eye for either therapeutic or cosmetic purposes.

Dr Talal al Busaidi said contact lenses often cause acute corneal inflammation. He said he has treated 3 patients in one week, all under the age of 30. He added that contact lenses should be treated like any medicinal product, and their sale by non-specialists should be prohibited. He also emphasised the need to prohibit the import of lenses that do not comply with international standards.

Dr Laila Mohammed, ophthalmologist, warned against the improper use of contact lenses or the use of cheap, low-quality contact lenses. She said of late there has been an increase in the number of optical lens companies, many of which offer poor quality lenses. This can lead to serious infections in the cornea of the eye and may alter its shape.

Dr Laila advised using high-quality lenses after consulting with an eye specialist first. She explained that contact lenses are divided into two types; soft and hard lenses. These can be used daily, weekly, monthly. Then there are cosmetic contact lenses that only change the iris colour.

According to Dr Laila, the users should not clean contact lenses with tap water. They should use the sterilised solution sold at pharmacies for cleaning. She also advised against wearing contact lenses for more than 10 hours a day.

One must also wash hands thoroughly before touching the lenses. S/he must keep nails short to avoid scratching the cornea while placing the contact lenses on the cornea to avoid the risks of eye injury. Users

must also avoid someone else's lenses. Women must wear contact lenses before applying make-up to minimise contamination. Contact lenses should never be worn if redness or discharge occurs in the eye. Patients using contact lenses should consistently use moisturising drops to prevent dry eyes.

Yousef al Muqbali, a parent, urged youths against purchasing lenses from non-medical outlets.

He said before buying lenses one should be aware about the proper usage and potential risks associated with these medical products.



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Ministry commemorates Prophet’s birthday in Sur

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) commemorated the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (May Peace Be Upon Him) last week in the Wilayat of Sur with prayers, Mawlid and special sermons.

The event was under the auspices of Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim Al Sunaidi, Member of the State Council, in the presence of Dr Wa’il bin Saif bin Salim al Harrasi, Under-Secretary of the MoARA in Sur last week.

The Prophet’s birthday, also known as Mawlid Al-Nabawi, is traditionally commemorated by Muslims on the 12th of Rabee Al Awwal, the third month of the Islamic Hijri year, because it is regarded as a pivotal event that commemorates the life and legacy of the most important figure in the Islamic faith.

Speaking to the Observer, Mirza Yawar Baig, Master Trainer at the Middlebury Language Schools Islamic Society of Western Massachusetts in West Springfield, Massachusetts, United States, said that prophet has always been an example for all times with his immaculate lifestyle and values that he was adhered to and he is the perfect example for how one can create transformational



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change in a society.

“The life of Muhammad (SAS) is one of the best documented in history. He is still important today because in a period of 23 years, he took his people from being the most oppressed in their community to being its leaders and role models. And he did that without lies, corruption, violence, or bloodshed setting an everlasting model of societal transformation,” Dr Mirza said.

Alphonse de Lamartine, in his book, ‘History of Turkey’ says, “If greatness of purpose, smallness of means and astonishing results are the three criteria of a human genius, who could dare compare any great man in history with Muhammad?”

The changes that Muhammad (SAS) brought about were ideological, ethical, and moral, and they changed not only the lives but also the structure, laws, morals, and behaviour of Arab society.

“These changes in people’s values led to changes in priorities, which changed behaviour and society. As they say, it all begins at the top, in the mind. All change must begin with us internally; our world view, our aspirations, our definition of success, and right and wrong must all change, if we want to change our circumstances,” says Mirza who is also the founder and president of Yawar Baig and Associates and a visiting professor of many universities in three continents.

Deal signed for worldwide distribution of film on Rub’ al Khali expedition

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

DAL Productions announced that Warrior Films, in association with 180 Films and DAL Productions, has signed an agreement with LGI Media for the worldwide distribution of Warrior Films’ first documentary ARROWHEAD.

ARROWHEAD tells the incredible story of three women, one British and two Omani, who walked 758 kilometres, the equivalent distance of London to Switzerland, over 28 days to become the first modern women to cross the vast stretch of barren waste in the heart of the Arabian Desert, known as Rub’ al Khali or The Empty Quarter.

The three women had a clear objective: to challenge prejudices, break down stereotypes and to deliver a message to the world that we are “better together” regardless of culture, gender or identity differences.

Warrior Films’ Janey McGill, Co-Director and Expedition Lead, said “I believe I can speak for us all when I say, the expedition was profoundly influential on our lives in unexpected ways, and we hope this film will inspire others to face their own challenges and prejudices head on, in their own unique way.”

180 Films’ Matthew Millan, Co-Director and



ARROWHEAD tells the incredible story of three women, one British and two Omani, who walked 758 kilometres, the equivalent distance of London to Switzerland, over 28 days to become the first modern women to cross Rub’ al Khali or The Empty Quarter

Cinematographer, commented “It is an exceedingly rare thing to have a once-in-a-lifetime project fall into your lap. ARROWHEAD is both monumental in its expanse, and intimate in its scope.”

Co-Producers Lynn and David Coleman for DAL Productions added “We knew that this was an incredible story and an important message for women around the world.”

Story Consultant on ARROWHEAD, Oscar winner Doug Blush, simply describes the documentary as “Epic”.

Nha-Uyen for LGI Media said “LGI Media is thrilled to partner with DAL and Warrior Films to bring Arrowhead to an international audience. Set against the stunning backdrop

of the Arabian desert, this beautifully filmed documentary is both poignant and inspiring in its story. Their ground-breaking journey, personal struggles and bond formed along the way will resonate with audiences around the world. Its female empowerment at its best!”

The Producers group were invaluable in facilitating and navigating the narrative to bring this outstanding documentary to a worldwide audience. This highly knowledgeable group also comprised: film-maker and educator Erik Amin; former Discovery commissioner and Woodcut Media executive Adam Jacobs; film-maker, photographer and author Michael Kirtley; and Alistair Audsley, founder and president of 1968 Studios.

Ministry of Education launches PDO Renewable Energy Award

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

The Ministry of Education, with the support of PDO, launched the sixth edition of the PDO Renewable Energy Award, which comes under the title “Zero Carbon Neutrality” for school students in grades 7 to 12.

The award aims to increase awareness among school students to recognise the importance of using renewable energy in daily life as an alternative to fossil fuels, innovating new ways to reduce carbon emissions that are harmful to the environment, and developing students’ abilities in the skill and technical aspects.

Accompanying the launch of the award was the launch of the promotional film for the award and its promotional posters in Arabic and English, which encourage students to interact and participate. It was also accompanied by the launch of the registration link for students wishing to participate according to the conditions required by the award. Alongside the award also was the announcement of the training programmes accompanying the award, which include providing training sessions and workshops provided remotely by experts



The award aims to increase awareness among school students to recognise the importance of using renewable energy under the title ‘Zero Carbon Neutrality.’

and specialists to promote the award and clarify aspects of the participating student. The award goes through four stages, starting with the announcement of the award, then the initial screening of the candidate ideas, and the initial evaluation stage from which the teams will be qualified for the final evaluation. The final evaluation and announcing the winners will be during the Oman Sustainability Week, which will be held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center during the period April 28 to May 2, 2024.

The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the private

sector, continues to provide qualitative programmes that serve students’ learning and develop their abilities in applied innovative aspects. The award was launched during the academic year 2017/2018, and since then, it has worked to enhance the trend towards the possibility of using renewable energy sources in aspects of daily life and came up with ideas that could be employed and even produced in and outside the school, which is the ultimate goal for which the award came, as each of its courses is devoted to a specific topic.

رؤية عمان 2040

مستقبلنا يبدأ الآن

Moving Forward with Confidence

Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtaining of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
343/2023	Establishing a water therapy unit at the Al-Wafa Center for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in the Wilayat of Al-Buraimi	Companies specialized in the field of building contracting and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the first degree				
347/2023	Supplying air conditioners to supply the Ministry's stores	Companies specialized in the field of supply services for electrical, mechanical, and industrial machinery and equipment and spare parts, registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third, or fourth degree	Thursday 19-10-2023 02:00 PM	Thursday 9-11-2023 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On **Sunday 1/10/2023**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. **(24402200)**.

“ The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry”

www.mosd.gov.om



Elon Musk views the Rio Grande river during a visit to Eagle Pass, Texas, US as seen from Piedras Negras, Mexico. – Reuters

Musk slams German funded migrants rescue Med operations

BERLIN: Billionaire Elon Musk on Saturday waded into German politics at a time of a heated debate on immigration across Europe, saying Berlin-funded migrant rescue operations in the Mediterranean could be seen as an “invasion” of Italy.

As the German foreign ministry hit back, he intensified his criticisms, saying that “if a government in a democracy goes against the will of the people, it should be voted out.” Berlin is locked a row with Italy over the NGO sea operations, with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on Friday demanding that charity ships disembark the rescued migrants in their own countries.

Musk shared a post on X by a user identified as “Radio Genoa” that blasted German NGO operations in the Mediterranean and expressed hope that “AfD wins the elections to stop this

European suicide”.

The foreign ministry prompted the social media platform’s boss to sharpen his criticism, writing in another post early on Saturday: “Frankly, I doubt that a majority of the German public supports this.

Meloni recently wrote a letter of complaint to German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to express her “amazement” about Berlin funding charities helping irregular migrants in her country.

The projects were “for the support on land in Italy of people rescued at sea and an NGO project for sea-rescue operations”.

At a press conference this week following talks with her Italian counterpart, Germany’s Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock defended Berlin’s backing of rescue missions.

— AFP

Nagorno-Karabakh empties as Armenia says 100,000 have fled

KORNIDZOR: The flood of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh dwindled to a trickle on Saturday as Armenia said nearly the entire population of the breakaway territory had already fled since Azerbaijan seized back control.

At the Kornidzor crossing into Armenia, only several ambulances arrive as border guards said they were waiting for a final few buses.

In the nearest town of Goris, hundreds of exhausted refugees waited amongst their baggage in the central square for the government to offer accommodation.

Azerbaijan’s lightning military takeover of the ethnic Armenian enclave last week sparked a sudden exodus that has rewritten the centuries-old ethnic makeup of the disputed region.

Armenia said on Saturday that over 100,000 people from an estimated population of 120,000 had fled since the breakaway region saw its decades-long fight against Azerbaijani rule end in sudden defeat.

Artak Beglaryan, a former separatist official, said that according to unofficial information “the last groups” of Nagorno-Karabakh residents were on their way to Armenia on Saturday.

“At most a few hundred persons remain, most of whom are officials, emergency services employees, volunteers, some persons with special needs,” he wrote on social media.



Refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh region arrive in the border village of Kornidzor, Armenia. – Reuters

The United Nations says it will send a mission to Nagorno-Karabakh to assess humanitarian needs, the first time the international body has had access to the region in about 30 years

The United Nations has said it will send a mission to Nagorno-Karabakh, mainly to assess humanitarian needs, the first time the international body has had access to the region in about 30 years.

Armenia has asked the

UN’s highest court to take urgent measures to protect the enclave’s inhabitants, the court announced on Friday.

Yerevan urged the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to ensure that Azerbaijan does not move to displace the remaining ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies announced an emergency appeal for \$22 million to help the refugees.

The region’s supporters and pro-Russians staged six days of anti-government protests that they interrupted this week to help Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan focus on

helping the refugees.

But they intend to hold another big and disruptive rally on Saturday aimed at punishing Pashinyan for deciding not to help separatist forces fight Azerbaijan.

Moscow has deployed peacekeepers in the region that were meant to police a truce ending a 2020 war in which Baku clawed back some of the lands it lost to the separatists in the 1990s. Pashinyan called Yerevan’s current alliances “ineffective” and urged parliament in next week’s session to ratify a document that would make Armenia a member of the International Criminal Court. — AFP

Slovaks choose between pro-Russian Fico and pro-Western liberals

BRATISLAVA: Slovaks were voting on Saturday in a parliamentary election closely fought between former leftist Prime Minister Robert Fico, who wants to end military aid for neighbouring Ukraine, and pro-Western liberals.

Final opinion polls showed the two parties neck and neck, with the winner expected to get the first chance to try to form a government to replace the caretaker administration running the country of 5.5 million since May.

Voting ends at 20.00 GMT. Exit polls are due to be released after polls close, and results will become available within several

hours. A government led by Fico would mean Slovakia joining Hungary in challenging the European Union’s consensus on support for Ukraine, just as the bloc looks to keep unity in opposing Russia’s attack.

It would also bolster a group of eastern ex-Communist states with governments publicly hostile to liberalism. They also include Poland’s ruling nationalist PiS party, which also faces an election next month, though it remains pro-Ukrainian.

A Progressive Slovakia (PS) government would stay the course on foreign policy, maintaining the country’s strong backing for Ukraine and



Michal Simecka, leader of the Progressive Slovakia party, casts his vote at a polling station during the country’s early parliamentary election in Bratislava, Slovakia. – Reuters

following a liberal line within the EU on issues.

“It is now up to the voters,” PS leader Michal Simecka, who is also a European Parliament vice-chairman, said after casting his vote in the capital, Bratislava.

Fico posted a video on Facebook of him casting his vote accompanied by his mother, saying he hoped “common sense” would triumph in the election “so they don’t drag us into adventures, whether its migration or military”. Neither Fico’s SMER-SSD (Direction-Slovak Social Democracy) nor the PS is expected to win a majority, meaning the future government is likely to depend on results for

over half a dozen smaller parties, from libertarians to far-right extremists.

The moderate-left Hlas (Voice) of Peter Pellegrini, an ex-SMER-SSD member and prime minister in 2018-2020, is seen coming third and may be the kingmaker. He has kept his options open but said this week his party was closer to Fico.

Fico has ridden on dissatisfaction with a bickering centre-right coalition whose government collapsed last year, triggering the election six months early, and concern about a rise in the number of migrants passing through Slovakia en route to Western Europe. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

HARARE

4 killed, 5 trapped after gold mine collapse

Four miners were killed and five more feared buried after a shaft in a Zimbabwean gold mine collapsed, the miners federation said on Saturday.

The accident occurred in Chegutu, about 120 kilometres west of the capital Harare, at the Bay Horse Mine.

“Four dead bodies have been retrieved so far and five are still trapped,” Henrietta Rushwaya said, president of the Zimbabwe Miners Federation.

She said that 21 people had



been rescued from the collapsed mine.

Earlier reports from ZBC had suggested that as many as 18 people could be buried underground. — AFP

TRIPOLI

Libya flights to Italy resume after 10 years

A Rome-bound aircraft departed on Saturday from Libya’s capital, restarting flights to Italy after a nearly decade-long suspension due to an EU ban, authorities in Tripoli said.

The European Union in 2014 halted flights operated by Libyan airlines and banned them from entering member states’ airspace.

Saturday’s flight took off from Tripoli’s Mitiga airport. It was operated by Libya-based Medsky Airways, which offers a twice-weekly direct connection to the



Italian capital.

Restarting flights is “part of intensive government efforts to lift the European ban on Libyan civil aviation”, said Libya’s UN-recognised government. — AFP

VATICAN CITY

Pope appoints 21 highest ranks cardinals

Pope Francis on Saturday elevated 21 clergymen from distant corners of the world to the rank of cardinal, saying diversity was indispensable to the future of the Catholic Church.

“The College of Cardinals is called to resemble a symphony orchestra, representing the harmony and synodality of the Church,” said Francis, seated under a canopy before the gathered cardinals on the steps of St Peter’s Basilica.

The choice of the new



cardinals, who include diplomats, close advisers and administrators, is closely watched as an indication of the priorities and position of the Church. — AFP

Right wing tanks stopgap bill in House, pushing government towards a shutdown



Carl Hulse

The writer is chief Washington correspondent



Katie Edmondson

The writer is a reporter in the Washington bureau of NYT covering Congress



Kayla Guo

The writer is a reporter in the Washington bureau covering Congress

Hard-line conservatives on Friday tanked House Speaker Kevin McCarthy’s long-shot bid to pass legislation to avert a government shutdown, in an extraordinary display of defiance that made it clear that Congress would almost certainly miss a midnight deadline on Saturday to keep federal funding flowing.

It appeared evident even before the vote that the stopgap bill was bound to fail, as several hard-right Republicans had declared that they would not back a temporary spending bill, known as a continuing resolution, under any circumstances. And the measure — which would slash spending and impose severe immigration restrictions — never had a chance of preventing a shutdown, since it was regarded as a nonstarter in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

But McCarthy, bracing for political blowback for a government closure, had scheduled it anyway in hopes of showing he was trying to avoid the crisis. And the decision by right-wing lawmakers to effectively blow up his one final effort to seize some political leverage in the shutdown fight dealt the speaker a stinging defeat while leaving politically vulnerable Republicans fuming.

The size of the group of defectors was striking, reflecting both McCarthy’s weak hold on his conference and the influence of the far right in the House. The bill failed by a vote of 232-198, with 21 Republicans joining all Democrats to oppose it.

From the moment the vote opened, the defections immediately began piling up and continued apace, exceeding even pessimistic predictions as more mainstream Republicans, particularly those from politically competitive districts won by President Joe Biden, glumly watched the tally.

“Every time we vote for a continuing resolution, we make no changes in policy or spending,” said Rep Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., who led the charge against McCarthy’s funding plan. “It’s a vote to continue the status quo.”

Biden condemned the blowup, as the White House dispatched his top budget official to brief reporters about the economic and national security risks of a shutdown.

“If the House fails to fulfil its most basic function, it fails to fund the government by tomorrow, it will have failed all our troops,” Biden said, speaking at Fort Myer in Arlington, Virginia, where he was attending Gen Charles Q Brown’s ascent to chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “Our service members will keep upholding their oath, showing up for work, standing sentinel around the world, keeping our country secure, but they won’t get paid. It’s a disgrace.”

The defeat in the House sent Republicans back to the drawing board with little more than 24 hours remaining before the shutdown deadline. McCarthy, R-Calif, told reporters he had “other ideas” on how to keep government funding flowing and that he would keep working to “make sure we solve this problem.” House leaders alerted lawmakers that more votes were expected on Saturday.

But the loss also made clear that McCarthy faces almost impossible odds of getting a stopgap funding bill through with votes from his own party alone, and that the simplest way to avert a shutdown would be for him to work with Democrats on a compromise measure. His detractors have warned that would prompt a move to oust him from the speakership.



House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif) speaks at a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington.

House GOP leaders emerged from a more than two-hour, closed-door meeting held after the vote without a clear path forward to avert a shutdown.

Much of the discussion centred on adjusting the same strategy that delivered McCarthy his defeat earlier in the day: trying to entice conservatives to vote for stopgap-funding legislation by promising that it would give lawmakers more time to pass individual spending bills — their stated goal.

The defeat in the House sent Republicans back to the drawing board with little more than 24 hours remaining before the shutdown deadline

With a shutdown just a day away, House Republicans retired for the evening without a clear idea of what, if anything, they would be asked to support on the floor on Saturday. A bare-bones, 14-day stopgap bill emerged as one possibility for Republicans, although it was far from clear if it could pass.

The measure put to a vote on Friday would keep the government open for 30 days and during that period

impose drastic cuts — in many cases as much as 29 per cent — to government programmes, except for funding for veterans, homeland security and disaster response. It did not include any military or humanitarian aid for Ukraine, and it directed the homeland security secretary to resume “all activities related to the construction of the border wall” at the southern border that were in place under then-president Donald Trump.

After the failed vote, Rep Hakeem Jeffries, DNY, the Democratic leader, blamed the funding impasse on an ongoing Republican “civil war” and McCarthy’s decision to abandon a spending deal struck with Biden this year. He said the only way forward is for McCarthy to put on the floor the bipartisan stopgap bill under consideration in the Senate.

“It’s not that complicated,” Jeffries said. The defeat also left the House in an exceedingly weak position to negotiate with the Senate, which is moving ahead with its own, bipartisan short-term funding plan that could see a vote as soon as this weekend. That bill would continue spending at current levels for six weeks and provide \$6 billion in aid to Ukraine and \$6 billion for natural disaster relief at home.

“The speaker has spent weeks catering to the hard right, and now he finds himself in the exact same position he’s been in since the beginning,” said Sen Chuck Schumer, DNY, the majority leader.

Forget about living to 100. Let’s live healthier instead



Dave A Chokshi

The writer is an American physician and the first health commissioner of Asian descent

The drones have begun to make a difference in one corner of a stagnant war, soldiers, commanders and pilots said in interviews, because their different materials and variable frequencies can evade enemy jamming systems. That has allowed them to venture farther in searches for enemy artillery positions and multimillion-dollar air defence systems, all while risking aircraft worth only a few thousand dollars apiece.

Along one of their two main Ukrainian lines of advance

in the south, they say, the Russian army has been forced to move its howitzers out of range of Ukraine’s guns, as drone pilots have adapted well enough to regularly evade Russian electronic jamming systems that had been spotting them reliably earlier in the war.

The fighting has come down to small steps with high stakes for Ukraine as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy sought on a visit to the United States to dispel the sense of stalemate and shore up diplomatic and military backing for a longer fight. With sufficient modern weapons, the tide will turn more swiftly on the battlefield, Zelenskyy has argued.

In the months since the Ukrainian counteroffensive began in June, Ukraine’s push to drive a wedge through Russian forces in the south has been a grueling, bloody infantry fight, with advances sometimes measured in yards. In most aspects, Russia holds an advantage in firepower, while also benefiting from fighting from well-prepared defences.

But starting in the summer, a flurry of tweaks to drone designs and radio frequencies began to allow Ukrainian pilots, who had initially lost dozens of drones in the opening weeks of a counteroffensive in the south, to send their drones far beyond the front line — drifting high above farm fields and villages — in search of Russian artillery pieces, tanks and other targets, even as those same



Americans are less obsessed with adding years to their lives and more focused on making their existing years richer and healthier

targets hunt the Ukrainians. “Oh, a missile flew past,” one drone pilot said calmly after a plume of white smoke appeared only yards from the drone he was piloting during a flight last week. “It means we flew over something interesting.” The pilot, who asked to be identified only by his nickname, Hacker, for security reasons, and other members of his unit would later review the drone’s video for clues to what the air defences were protecting — possibly a Russian artillery position, a jamming station or a garrison. So many small drones are flying now along one section of the front line that Ukraine’s military coordinates the flights with a dispatcher, akin to air traffic control. “If the Russians get close, we will see them,” said Lt Ashot Arutunian, the commander of the drone reconnaissance unit.

After 19 months of fighting, the war has settled into mostly static but bloody back-and-forth battles. Most recently, the Ukrainian military has been fighting to deepen and widen two bulges pushed into Russian defences in the country’s south, and to advance on the outskirts of the eastern city of Bakhmut. Zelenskyy has publicly ruminated on the counteroffensive’s flaws, saying his country waited too long for Western armoured vehicles, a delay that allowed Russian forces to entrench and lay minefields.

Once a bipolar



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

People with mental health problems often face multiple challenges in their lives, not only because of the symptoms they experience but by how people around them treat them.

Ranging from being called attention seeker to being taken advantage of and treated like a second-class citizen. As one patient explained “Once you have a mental illness you seize to exist as an individual and the illness takes over. So it’s the depression talking, or you are paranoid when you express an opinion and the others don’t like it.

“A person with anxiety once told me that when she disagrees with her family she gets told, “Go to your room and take your pills.” It’s like for them am a mentally unstable person who can’t have her own opinions.

Sometimes the stigma is expressed by the general public and health workers who are supposed to understand people with mental illness and advocate for them. This can be seen when doctors and nurses discuss patients during their clinical meetings and use terms such as “a 25-year-old schizophrenic or thirty years bipolar or even.

Sixty years old demented patients.”

Sometimes this is done without intentions or because of a lack of understanding of the exact meaning of the words. Therefore I make a point of correcting my colleagues not to say schizophrenic but a person with schizophrenia or a person with bipolar or dementia accordingly.

One of the most debilitating illnesses is bipolar disorder when a person suffers from severe mood swings alternating between depression and overactivity.

These changes make people around the patient suffer as they try to understand their erratic behaviour, which makes them irritable and angry at times and impulsive making decisions that they would not make when they are well.

Some people with bipolar have difficulty adjusting to changes in their daily routine so going on a holiday for example would trigger a manic episode where they become overexcited, spend lots of money buying things they don’t really need, or become irritable over minor things. They don’t feel the need to sleep which aggravates the situation.

Some patients get to the point of having abnormal

‘ONE OF THE MOST DEBILITATING ILLNESSES IS BIPOLAR DISORDER WHEN A PERSON SUFFERS FROM SEVERE MOOD SWINGS ALTERNATING BETWEEN DEPRESSION AND OVERACTIVITY

beliefs about having special powers, talking to God, and healing others. They over speed and may get into accidents, they also get into fights or trouble with the authorities because of their irrational behaviours and beliefs. The patient’s family suffers as well and some end up asking for divorce because they can no longer cope with the overwhelming behaviour.

Young children feel traumatised when dealing with a parent who can become verbally and physically abusive or exhibit embarrassing behaviours in public.

Some spouses or children feel guilty when they bring their loved one for hospital admission against their will and often feel manipulated by the patient to take them back home despite the doctor’s advice which makes the situation worse.

Therefore, it is essential to spend enough time with the person and the family explaining the nature of the condition and how to spot early changes. It is also important to remind them that the person does not mean to be difficult or cause problems, but they are simply unwell and need care and understanding even if it may sound against their wishes.

Nobel Peace Prize could honour women, activists

BY GWLADYS FOUCHÉ, ILZE FILKS

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy and Russian dissident Alexei Navalny are among favourites for this year’s Nobel Peace Prize, but experts say campaigners for women, Indigenous peoples or the environment could well steal the stage.

Given past form, the Norwegian Nobel Committee is also capable of a complete surprise in the October 6 announcement. Though bookmakers have Zelenskiy as a top candidate to join the illustrious list of laureates from Nelson Mandela to Martin Luther King, Nobel specialists believe that as a wartime leader, the Ukrainian president is unlikely to be named.

The imprisoned Navalny’s chances are lessened because Russian dissidents won last year and the year before. A third bookmakers’ favourite is jailed Uyghur activist Ilham Tohti, though that would infuriate China. When jailed dissident Liu Xiaobo won the peace prize, Beijing froze diplomatic relations with Oslo for six years.

Henrik Urdal, director of the Peace Research Institute Oslo, said in a year marking the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the committee may decide to shine a light on the contribution of activists to peace.

A prize to Tohti or another activist in China would be a welcome focus on Beijing’s increasingly authoritarian rule, he said.

Urdal also cited Iran’s Narges Mohammadi, who campaigns for women’s rights and against the death penalty and is currently in jail; Afghanistan’s Mahbouba Seraj who, despite a ban from the ruling Taliban, continues to campaign for girls’ rights to education and other women’s rights and remains in Kabul.

“I think perhaps the most likely candidates would be human rights defenders,” he said.

Thousands of people can propose names, including former laureates, members of parliaments and university professors of history or law. Nominations are secret for 50 years but those who nominate can choose to reveal their choices.

Last year’s prize, seen by many as a rebuke to Russian President Vladimir Putin, went to jailed Belarusian activist Ales Bialiatski, Russian rights group Memorial and Ukraine’s Center for Civil Liberties.

The Nobel body may also want to spotlight climate change, a topic the committee last addressed in 2007 in its award to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and former US Vice President Al Gore. — **Reuters**

Russian forces left this city a year ago. The scars remain



Valerie Hopkins

The writer is a correspondent covering Russia & Ukraine



Dzvinka Pinchuk

The writer is a photographer, local producer and translator

More than a year after her mother died, Alla Kotliarova buried her for the third — and she hopes final — time.

There was no priest, no tearful neighbours, no ceremonial procession to the cemetery sitting among thin pine trees at the end of town. But there was at least some measure of closure for Kotliarova, 62, who laid her mother, Tamara Kotliarova, to rest in the family plot.

No official cause of death was listed, though her mother had long grappled with diabetes, but Kotliarova is convinced that the stress of the Russian attack and occupation hastened her demise.

“If it weren’t for this war, she wouldn’t have died,” said Kotliarova as she wiped tears from her eyes with a small handkerchief and placed flowers and snacks on the sandy funeral mound.

“But now she can finally rest in peace in her rightful place.”

The elder Kotliarova was first buried in her courtyard by her relatives, then reburied during the Russian occupation in an improvised graveyard on the edge of a forest. Once Izium was retaken, the forest graveyard and the 440 bodies buried there, including hers, were dug up by Ukrainian authorities for DNA analysis and autopsies, which in some cases took months.

The final burial ceremony was emblematic of the many ways in which the people of Izium, in northeastern Ukraine, are still struggling to overcome the devastation of Russian occupation, which lasted from March to September 2022. Although Ukrainian authorities have vowed to rebuild ravaged cities, a recent visit to Izium showed that the fallout from Russian brutality still feels fresh, as if it could have happened last week.

The deputy mayor, Volodymyr Matsokin, said Izium was among the most bombed cities in Ukraine, citing what he said were statistics from the country’s National Security and Defense Council. He was sitting in a



War crimes investigators examine the ruins of a residential building where almost 50 people had been sheltering when an airplane bombed it, in Izium, Ukraine.

temporary office because City Hall is still in ruins, though the flowers on the square out front were well tended.

“Eighty per cent of multistory buildings and non-residential buildings are damaged, along with 30 per cent of private buildings,” he said.

As a gateway to the Donbas region, Izium held outside military importance. It was badly destroyed even before Russian forces took it,

ALTHOUGH UKRAINIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE VOWED TO REBUILD RAVAGED CITIES, A RECENT VISIT TO IZIUM SHOWED THAT THE FALLOUT FROM RUSSIAN BRUTALITY STILL FEELS FRESH

leaving residents without electricity, water, internet or food for months. The months under occupation deepened the hardships.

The destruction left surrounding villages empty and dozens of residences in the city reduced to rubble. Many of the ones still habitable lack basic services. Schools are in disrepair. Most

stalls in the market remain shuttered.

In addition, mistrust among the community grew. Numerous signs are spray-painted with messages asking people to call the SBU, the Ukrainian security services, with any information about collaborators.

The fraction of its prewar population of about 40,000 who have returned are struggling to repair the homes, lives and social bonds broken by the war.

“My son is very tired and very, very nervous,” said Iryna Zhukova, 45, who worked at a bread factory in the city before it was destroyed. “Any loud sound, and he’s already running to the basement.”

During the occupation, she and her husband and children sheltered in a basement for 2 1/2 months, she said, and it took an emotional toll on them, especially the children. They are unnerved by loud sounds, she said, and still experiencing trauma from those 10 weeks in the basement.

But while they survived, other family members did not, perishing in a different basement during an aerial bomb attack in March 2022. Her brother and his wife, their three children and two of the children’s grandparents were all killed.

— **The New York Times**

The forgotten syllabus... workplace skills

WHETHER from college or university, we can rarely be certain that graduates will enter the workforce and workplace fully prepared. They will be enthusiastic, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, full of dreams, with good intentions, and certainly, uncertain.

Even in this enlightened age of employee voice, of legislated respect and tolerance, equality, and diversity, however, these graduates are still embarking on a journey of discovery, as much of themselves as anything, so I've looked at what skills and knowledge they may need to make their journey less intimidating.

Of course, first things first. Ben Franklin once said, "For every minute spent organising, you earn another hour." Dress, and present yourself entirely appropriately attired for your work. Most employers will have a 'dress code.' Don't flaunt it! And arrange transport that gets you to work, not only on-time, but early. It is an expectation that you will always be on time, so don't be tardy, and don't think about leaving early either. On the wider spectrum, they will need to be organised, to have personal goals and objectives, but to individually take responsibility for their learning and development, which means they must use their initiative, ask questions, and seek assistance when unsure, or uncertain.

Communicate with those around you professionally and in a manner that is appropriate to your position. You will be gradually assimilated into the environment at a pace of the employer's making, so don't push too hard for praise or recognition, as the reality of most work environments is that you must 'do your time,' and if you are good enough progression will occur. Be a good listener, which you can't do while you're talking! And when asked for your opinions, be clear and concise. Communication is not only a life skill, but an even more essential work skill. Communication, whether positive or negative, is either



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

The writer is a media consultant

a growing or healing experience that has value far beyond what it appears to embrace.

Collaborate effectively, professionally and emotionally within the diverse nationalities, personalities, and work environments, and learn to work effectively as part of a team, often being pushed beyond your 'comfort zone.' It will show you have drive and the determination to succeed. Your personality may be who, and what, you are, yet it is through your behaviour that others will recognise and evaluate you. Learn to adapt and persevere. Things will not always 'go to plan.' Pick yourself up and go again, with greater determination. Take pride in your work, be ready for criticism, as it will surely come, and deal with it professionally, and a collaborative truth is that you cannot play a symphony alone.

Whether personally or professionally, be ready to reflect on each task, and each day at work, until it becomes something you do of habit. That way, critique, and feedback can be better, more effectively taken on board. You must be compassionate and constructive in both giving, and taking performance feedback. Be strong, even brave in the moment, because no workplace is ever going to be all you wanted it to be, or all you expected, but with resilience, both it, and you, will be better than you ever imagined. Reflection is something that, if we move forward without it, we are in danger of perpetuating an erroneous assumption that can be harmful to your professional progress.

Show respect to your management, colleagues, customers, and yes... even the cleaners and support staff. Why? Well, you should anyway, as a humanitarian and one of the fortunate to have had greater opportunities, but also you never know who's watching, or who sees you, in a moment of kindness and compassion, of strength and resilience, or remarkably indicative of your positive qualities. Every moment, of every day, should be seen as an opportunity... don't waste it!

COMMUNICATE WITH THOSE AROUND YOU PROFESSIONALLY AND IN A MANNER THAT IS APPROPRIATE TO YOUR POSITION

THE HARVEST MOON



The last supermoon of the year, also known as the Harvest Moon is seen rising on top of the Atomium monument in Brussels on Friday night. The moon is at the nearest point in its orbit of Earth during the full moon. It will also be the year's fourth and final Supermoon. – AFP

Indonesian families face grief year after stadium crush

EKO WIDIANTO
AND MARCHIO GORBIANO

Holding buckets of water, Cholifatul Nur sprinkles flowers planted at her young son's grave and wipes clean the stone slab where a scarf of his favourite team is draped a year after his death at an Indonesian football stadium.

Fifteen-year-old Jovan Farellino was one of 135 people killed after a match in the East Javan city of Malang, with many dying from suffocation or being trampled in one of the deadliest disasters in the sport's history.

Wearing all black, Nur speaks of the grief and intimidation she has faced in her fight for justice alongside other relatives of the dead. They blame police who fired tear gas into stands packed with Arema FC fans, causing a panicked rush for small exits. "Jovan was everything for me. He was my only child," she said. She rushed to the stadium just before midnight after hearing about the unfolding tragedy, knowing her son had attended, only the third time he had done so.

When she arrived, she found his lifeless body at the VIP gate where his friends had moved him.

"Suddenly he perished in that way. I

can't accept that," she said.

The tear gas shot into stands after a post-match pitch invasion was deemed the official cause of the deaths, but families say authorities have not been held appropriately responsible for their actions at Kanjuruhan Stadium.

Several prison sentences have been handed to three police officers for negligence, ranging from one to two-and-a-half years. Two of them were acquitted earlier this year, to families' dismay, but the Supreme Court has since overturned that decision.

A judge also earlier ruled police had not shot tear gas into stands – rather it was carried by the wind. But that account was disputed by witnesses and challenged by video footage. Fifa, football's world governing body, bans the use of tear gas in stadiums. Seven families, including Nur's, pursued legal action seeking compensation of around 62 billion rupiah (\$4 million), according to Imam Hidayat, a lawyer representing them. But a local court rejected that bid.

The tragedy stoked the ire of Indonesians against the country's police, who critics have long accused of using excessive

violence to quell unrest as well as intimidation to silence detractors.

After criticising authorities during police questioning, Nur says men in black clothing nearly hit her on a motorbike. She also caught people taking photographs of her home. Nur says police officers even told her they could help her nephew join the force.

"I don't want that. The child I lost came from my own womb," she said.

"I want the death sentence (for the officers). It's fair, a life for a life." Rini Hanifah lost her 20-year-

old son, Agus Riansyah, in the stadium crush after he had asked for her permission to attend the match. She allowed Agus to go but refused to let him take two younger siblings because, even with away fans banned, it was a heated derby against fierce rivals Persebaya Surabaya. The mother, who says she is seeing a psychiatrist to deal with the grief, claims she was also offered the opportunity for her other children to join the police force.

"They told me if my children wanted to become police officers,

it would be easy," she said.

East Java police did not respond to an AFP request for comment.

Indonesian football association executive committee member Srya Sinulingga said officials have "made various changes, both reactive to events and proactive" including improved stadium safety measures. But many believe the police have not.

"It was a sham. It felt like a puppet show," she said.

"Please, restore our trust, so that we believe again that in Indonesia there is justice."

Survivors recounted the horrors they witnessed and the trauma they still face a year later.

Dayangga Sola Gratia, a 23-year-old water park worker in Malang, is on medication to help her deal with what she saw. "Since then, I never look at football, I don't even look at notifications (about it). I immediately erase them," she said. She feels anger towards the people she says have not been held accountable.

"Let them feel what we felt at the time. Let's swap," she said.

"After this (sentence) they are free, they can still gather with their family, but can those who were left behind?" — AFP



This picture shows Cholifatul Noor reacting as she sits beside the grave of her only child Jovan Farellino in Malang, East Java. – AFP

sport

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Dr Khamis Al Jabri, Oman Sail CEO and Dr Marwan Al Juma, Oman Olympic Committee Board Member reviving Omani champions at Muscat international Airport.

Al Hadi and Al Kindi arrive home with Oman’s first-ever Asian Games silver medal

MUSCAT: Oman Sail’s 49er team of Musab al Hadi and Walid al Kindi have arrived home following their historic first ever silver medal at the Asian Games for the Sultanate of Oman. Among those receiving the champions at Muscat International Airport are Oman Sail CEO, Dr Khamis al Jabri and Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, Oman Olympic Committee Board Member. Musab and Walid sailed excellently throughout last week and kept their composure in the final intense races to take silver. This achievement means the team has secured automatic qualification to the Asian Qualification Regatta in Chon Buri, Thailand, in December where they will look to confirm their place at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

Their remarkable achievement follows a 13-year drought in Asian Games success journey, which began in 1986 at the Seoul Asian Games when Mohammed al Malki sprinted his way to a bronze medal

in the 400-metre race, marking a significant milestone. Fast forward to the 1990 Beijing Asian Games, Al Malki once again proved his resolve, this time securing a gold medal in the same 400-metre race. In 1998, during the Bangkok Asian Games, the team’s quartet made the nation proud by clinching a bronze medal in the 4x100m relay quartet. More recently, in the 2010 Guangzhou, Oman added another bronze medal to its collection through Barakat al Harthy’s exceptional performance in the 4x100m relay quartet’s.

Speaking about the impact of this historic achievement, Dr Khamis al Jabri said, “Winning this medal stands as a testament to the remarkable collective efforts of the Oman Sail team, underscoring years of experience and meticulous planning to earn international recognition. We take immense pride in the outstanding achievement by Musab al Hadi and Walid al Kindi in this



Musab al Hadi and Walid al Kindi

Olympic class, and we eagerly anticipate further triumphs in upcoming championships and Olympic qualifiers. Our heartfelt gratitude extends to the entire technical and support team for their commitment, dedication and collaborative spirit in securing this international honour for our beloved nation.”

Hashim al Rashdi, Head

Coach at Oman Sail, commented, “This accomplishment is the fruit of intense preparation and continuous training preceding the tournament, culminating in the team’s unwavering focus and outstanding performance throughout the event. It posed a significant test for our players against the top professionals from across the Asian continent.”

Al Rashdi added, “This achievement adds to Oman’s sports legacy and stands as a formidable addition to the records, marking the culmination of years of effort and rigorous training by our sailors. We take immense pride in their achievements on this continental stage.”

Musab al Hadi expressed his feeling as he arrives to Muscat International Airport, “Our emotions are beyond words as a team, and we collectively share immense pride in what we have accomplished amidst intense competition against the finest professionals in the 49er class at the Asian level. Throughout the competitions, we aimed to pursue points, prioritised high-performance, meticulous planning, and maintained unwavering morale to make our mark in Omani sports, representing our nation with honour and pride.”

Walid al Kindi remarked, “Our journey in sailing spans

years, and one of the key factors behind our success is continuous development, unceasing training and fostering synergy among team members. We have also sought to harness international expertise whenever the opportunity arose in international and regional competitions. We wholeheartedly dedicated our skills, and we achieved our objectives. I am immensely proud of our accomplishments, hoping that this milestone serves as inspiration for all athletes in the Sultanate of Oman, demonstrating that winning medals is not an insurmountable feat but an attainable goal through relentless effort and meticulous planning.”

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



Dhofar V Al Shabab match at Al Saada Stadium in the sixth week of Omantel League

Al Shabab clinch victory against Dhofar

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

The newcomers Al Shabab earned three valuable points with Khalid al Buraiki’s goal in the dying minutes to snatch a crucial 2-1 victory over hosts Dhofar on Friday. The win took the Barka-based team to sixth place with eight points while Dhofar remained at their seventh position after Al Shabab in the table order of the league.

At Al Saada Stadium in the sixth week of Omantel League, Al Shabab took a 1-0 lead when Hatim al Hamhami sent a strong ball from outside the box to score in style in the

eightth minute. Later, the hosts put pressure on Al Shabab’s goalkeeper Abdul Malik al Badi to find the equaliser in the first half. But Hussain al Shahri’s movements did not succeed as he missed many scoring attempts.

The first half finished with Al Shabab leading at 1-0.

ANOTHER GOAL

The scenario was different in the second half as the visitors continued their efforts for another goal to increase their chances to confirm the triumph. Emerson from Al Shabab was very close to scoring another goal but Dhofar’s defenders

blocked him at the right time to deny the attempt.

Dhofar’s men dominated the field in the middle of the second half as they went in search of the equaliser. An own goal by Al Shabab’s defender Sami al Ajmi after intercepting a cross from Awadh al Shahri in the 73rd minute made the score 1-1. The goal encouraged the hosts’ players to put more pressure for another goal as Sultan al Marzooqi’s opportunity was saved by Al Shabab goalie. In the additional time at 93rd minute, Khalid al Buraiki scored the winning goal after receiving a cross from a corner to deliver a significant victory to his team.

Zhang fights back to win Asian Games tennis gold

HANGZHOU: Zhang Zhizhen fought back to become the first Chinese men's singles tennis champion at the Asian Games since 1994 with victory over Japan's Yosuke Watanuki on Saturday in Hangzhou.

It caps a strong few months for Zhang, who was the first man from China to beat a top-five player last month when he defeated Casper Ruud to reach the last 32 at the US Open.

The 26-year-old from Shanghai also reached the same stage at this year's French Open and he carried on that form to defeat Watanuki 6-4, 7-6 (9/7) in the Hangzhou final.

"In the first set I told myself to calm down because I was rushing too much," said Zhang.

"And in the second set, to be patient, keep going, keep going all the time and try to find some chances."

In front of a roaring home crowd, the 60th-ranked Zhang made a slow start and fell 4-1 behind in the first set after being broken twice by 77th-ranked Watanuki. But he won the next five games to take the first set, then held his serve for 4-3 in a pivotal seventh game in the second.

The pair continued to slug it



China's Zhang Zhizhen reacts during his men's singles final match against Japan's Yosuke Watanuki. — Reuters

out into a tiebreak, before Zhang converted his third match point and hurled away his racquet in celebration.

India's Rohan Bopanna, a former Grand Slam mixed doubles champion, added to his collection of titles at the age of 43.

Along with Rutuja Bhosale, they defeated Taiwan's Liang En-shuo and Huang Tsung-hao after a super-tiebreak, 2-6, 6-3, 10-4, for mixed doubles gold.

Chan Hao-ching and Chang Yung-jan won gold in the women's doubles by beating fellow Taiwanese pair Lee Ya-hsuan and Liang 6-4, 6-3. — AFP

JABEUR WINS FIFTH WTA TITLE WITH DEMOLITION IN NINGBO FINAL



SHANGHAI: Ons Jabeur won the fifth WTA title of her career with an emphatic victory over surprise-package Diana Shnaider in the final of the Ningbo Open in China on Saturday. The seventh-ranked Tunisian demolished the unseeded Shnaider 6-2, 6-1 for her first hardcourt title. Top seed Jabeur took a last-minute wildcard into the tournament and it took her all the way to the final. The Moscow-born 19-year-old Shnaider, who is 85th in the world, had enjoyed a dream run to her first WTA final. She defeated two-times Grand Slam champion Petra Kvitova on the way to the championship match. But she wilted in the face of Jabeur's superior power and precision, and her title dream was snuffed out in just 78 minutes. — AFP

'Villain' Obiena wins Asian Games Men's Pole Vault gold

HANGZHOU: Philippines pole vaulter EJ Obiena cruised to gold in an Asian Games record on Saturday —and then said he missed not having record-breaker Armand Duplantis to compete against.

Obiena has been one of Swedish world record-holder Duplantis's closest rivals this year, finishing second behind him at last month's world championships in Budapest.

And no one could come close to Obiena in Hangzhou as he took gold in 5.90m —25cm clear of his nearest challengers.

Duplantis has dominated pole vault in recent years and improved his world record to 6.23m earlier this month at the Diamond League finals.

Obiena said competing against him "brings out the best in me".

"It doesn't mean it's easier to win —it's easier to compete when he's



Philippines' Ernest John Obiena celebrates with the Philippines flag after winning the Men's Pole Vault Final. — Reuters

there," he said.

"It doesn't make it easier when he's not here, it's just different."

Obiena said being able to dominate like Duplantis gave him a taste of "what he feels most of the time".

Watkins hat-trick inspires Villa to rampant win over Brighton

BIRMINGHAM: A hat-trick from England striker Ollie Watkins fired Aston Villa to a sensational 6-1 thrashing of high-flying Brighton and Hove Albion in the Premier League on Saturday.

Brighton travelled to the Midlands having only lost once all season, but they were put to the sword by a rampant Villa side in the first half, with a Watkins double and Pervis Estupinan own goal catapulting the hosts into a 3-0 lead by half time.

Substitute Ansu Fati's first goal since signing on loan from Barcelona early in the second half gave the visitors some hope, but Watkins' third put the game to bed in the 65th minute, and all in front England manager Gareth Southgate.

"It is nice when he (Southgate) is here but I want to perform and score every game," Watkins told TNT Sports.

"There have been a few times this season when I have been disappointed and there is always a chance to put it right. I am going to enjoy it.

Jacob Ramsey and Douglas Luiz added to the humiliation with two late goals to crown another fine victory for Villa, who move up to fourth in the Premier League standings on 15 points, level with Brighton in third.

"Collectively, we were second to none," Watkins said.

Brighton came into Saturday's early kick off having convincingly got the better of Manchester United in their last Premier League away match, continuing to draw plaudits under coach Roberto de Zerbi.

CLOSE RANGE

However, they were simply no match for another of the Premier League's in-form sides at Villa Park, as Villa raced into an early lead through Watkins, who finished well from close range.

Villa then capitalised on a poor error from Joel Veltman to create another opening for Watkins, with the former Brentford hitman



cutting onto his right foot before firing home.

Things went from bad to worse for Brighton as Moussa Diaby's shot was turned into his own net by Estupinan, leaving the visitors

shellshocked after 26 minutes.

Fati's finish at the far post threatened to ruffle Villa feathers, but Watkins became the first player to score two hat-tricks in all competitions in a season for Villa

since Andy Gray in 1976-77 with another well-taken goal. Brighton capitulated late on, eventually shipping six goals in a single top-flight match for the first time in their history. — Reuters

GCC GEARS UP FOR ULTIMATE AUTOMOTIVE FESTIVAL

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

MUSCAT: Automotive sports lovers in the GCC region are in an ushered mood as the region is thumping towards the first of its kind motor sports to be held in Qatar.

Qatar Tourism, in collaboration with the Geneva International Motor Show (GIMS), is set to ignite the automotive passion of the region with the inaugural edition of GIMS Qatar, scheduled to run from October 5 to 14, 2023, according to the organisers.

Accordingly, the inaugural GIMS Qatar will be showcasing the latest innovations from the auto industry, besides over 10 world premieres and more than 20 regional premieres, an event that the sporty Arab world is eagerly looking forward.

Spanning over 10,000 m2 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC), the exhibition will host 31 renowned automotive brands, including Toyota, Lexus, Porsche, Volkswagen, Lamborghini, BMW, KIA, Audi, McLaren, Mercedes-Benz, Vinfast, Chery and much more.

Speaking to the Observer, Saad Bin Ali al Kharji, Deputy Chairman of the Tourism, said, "GIMS Qatar is setting the stage for what promises to be the most prestigious and influential automotive experience in the Middle East. Welcoming the world to the ultimate automotive festival is a testament to our dedication to creating unforgettable experiences for residents and visitors. Hosting large-scale, globally recognised events such as GIMS Qatar exemplifies our commitment to our strategic vision of becoming the fastest-growing destination in the Middle East by 2030," Al Kharji adds.

"We are extremely pleased to welcome a prestigious line-up of exhibitors to the inaugural edition of the Geneva International Motor Show Qatar. For over a century, GIMS has been at the forefront showcasing automotive innovations and technology. Today, GIMS is excited to expand its legacy in the middle east, venturing for the first-time outside Geneva, by partnering exclusively with a dynamic and progressive country like Qatar", adds Sandro Mesquita, CEO of GIMS.

from someone else."

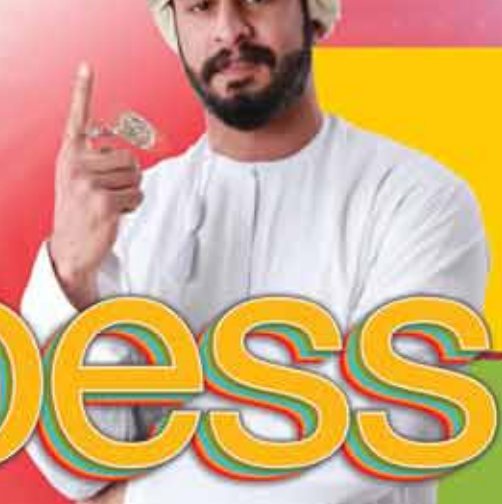
China still had plenty to celebrate on the second night of athletics action, with Xie Zhenye and Ge Manqi giving the country a 100m sprint double.

Xie powered home to take the men's title in 9.97sec, ahead of Thailand's Puripol Boonson on 10.02 and Malaysia's Muhammad Azeem Mohd Fahmi on 10.11.

The 30-year-old Xie claimed the first Asian Games individual gold of his career, having been part of China's title-winning 4x100m relay team in 2014.

He was also part of the China team that won bronze at the Tokyo Olympics two years ago. China's Su Bingtian, who reached the 100m final at the Tokyo Games, skipped the Asian Games to focus on his preparations for next year's Paris Olympics. —AFP






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Credit granted by Oman’s banking sector rises 5.3%



Credit granted to private sector reaches RO 20.2 billion by July-end.

MUSCAT: An analysis of traditional commercial banking activities during the period (July 2022-July 2023) indicates continued credit growth in the Sultanate of Oman, where the total credit balance granted by banks registered an increase of 5.3 per cent, while for credit granted to the private sector it increased by 5.2 per cent, reaching RO 20.2 billion by end of July 2023.

The report by the Central Bank of Oman indicated that the total investments of traditional commercial banks in securities saw a decline of 4.6 per cent, reaching about RO 4.4 billion by end of July 2023.

Investment in government development bonds fell by 10.4 per cent, compared with the same period last year to RO 1.9 billion.

Investments in foreign securities, saw an 89.5 per cent increase, reaching RO 1.2 billion, by end of July 2023.

On the other side of the budget — liabilities — the total deposits of traditional commercial banks recorded a rise of 3.4 per cent to RO 22.2 billion by end of July 2023.

Of the total deposits, the Government’s deposits with commercial banks increased by 7 per cent, reaching about RO 5.3 billion, while the deposits of public sector institutions decreased by 9.7 per cent to about RO 1.6 billion during the same period.

Private sector deposits rose by 4.2 per cent to RO 14.9 billion in July 2023, accounting for 67 per cent of traditional commercial banks’ total deposits. — ONA

S&P upgrades Oman’s credit rating to BB+ with stable outlook

MUSCAT: International credit rating agency, Standard & Poor’s (S&P), released yesterday its credit rating report for the Sultanate of Oman, which upgraded the credit rating to “BB +” with a stable outlook.

This was a result of the improved resilience of the Omani economy to external financial shocks and the Government’s actions to improve financial and economic indicators, reduce the State’s public indebtedness and continue to improve prospects for the oil sector.

The agency said it expected economic growth at an average rate of about 2 per cent during 2023-2026 despite slowing real GDP growth during the current year as a result of the voluntary reduction in oil production after the Opec+ agreement, and the non-oil sector growth of about 2 per cent during 2024-2025.

The Agency noted a fiscal surplus of about 1.8 per cent of GDP during 2022 after almost eight years of fiscal deficits, with an average fiscal surplus of 1.5 per cent expected to continue in 2023-2024.

The Agency stated that high oil prices would contribute to additional revenues and enable the Government to continue its efforts to exploit these revenues towards reducing public debt, with the expectation that the



A port in Oman is seen in this illustration image.

THE AGENCY NOTED A FISCAL SURPLUS OF ABOUT 1.8 PER CENT OF GDP DURING 2022 AFTER ALMOST EIGHT YEARS OF FISCAL DEFICITS, WITH AN AVERAGE FISCAL SURPLUS OF 1.5 PER CENT EXPECTED TO CONTINUE IN 2023-2024.

public debt rate as a proportion of GDP would decline from about 40 per cent in 2022 to 38 per cent in 2023.

S&P said it expects Brent crude prices to average around \$83 per barrel in 2023 and \$85 per barrel in 2024 and

subsequent years.

The agency confirmed that the Sultanate of Oman’s credit rating could rise should the Government continue to reduce the State’s external debt, which would lead to a reduction in the cost of servicing public debt.

The Agency commended the remarkable progress made by the Government towards strengthening the principle of transparency and disclosure, including the publication of periodic data on Oman’s gross domestic product (GDP) and international investment status.

The Agency added that the actions taken by the Government of Oman within the framework of the regulation and governance of State companies yield tangible results in terms of operational efficiency and enhanced financial performance of these companies.

Recently, Fitch Credit Ratings has upgraded the Sultanate of Oman’s credit rating to “BB +” with a stable outlook as a result of the government’s tangible efforts to further control public spending and exploit additional oil revenues to reduce the state’s public indebtedness and manage the lending portfolio. — ONA

Oman tourism sector total revenues reach RO 1.9 billion

MUSCAT: Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, confirmed that the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman is witnessing steady growth in all fields, expressing his hope that the tourism sector’s contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) will reach 2.75 per cent during the next two years, compared to 2.4 per cent by the end of 2022.

Al Mahrouqi said the contribution of the Omani tourism sector to the gross domestic product amounted to RO 1.07 billion in 2022 out of total revenues amounting to RO 1.90 billion in the same year. The number of tourists is also constantly rising, both from domestic tourism and the tourist flow from outside the Sultanate of Oman.

He also added that there is an intensive plan to promote all tourism components, and the financial tools and resources that will be employed in this aspect in the coming year have been approved, through qualitative international events



A general view of a 5-star hotel in Oman.

that will represent milestones in the promotional plan, most notably the announcement of the Sultanate of Oman as the official partner of the largest international exhibitions in the industry —

the Berlin Travel and Tourism Exchange 2024.

Al Mahrouqi pointed out that the targeted investment volume during the comprehensive tourism development plan (2021-

2025) is RO 3 billion.

There are some challenges facing some investors with regard to financing aspects or some challenges related to existing coalitions, stressing that the



Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is closely monitoring it and looks at the possibilities and appropriate solutions to these challenges through a programme that is being worked on during this period in cooperation and coordination with the sector’s partners.

There are tourism projects that will be opened during the coming period in the governorates of Oman, and that there is a huge and diversified investment programme that includes all governorates, as this programme is currently being managed and entering into the negotiation

phase with a number of investors at the internal and external levels.

With regard to the implementation of tourism development schemes in the governorates, the Minister emphasised that the Ministry focuses on integrated tourism schemes, aimed at developing some promising tourism destinations in line with various sectors and national programmes to guide investment and promotional efforts towards maximising the use of such schemes, serving as integrated destinations for tourists, maximising business opportunities and creating jobs.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is working on a special programme for the labour market in the tourism sector in direct cooperation with the National Employment Programme, to achieve a number of objectives related to job resettlement, training and the creation of professional standards for tourism sector jobs, including an initiative to qualify a number of Omanis to assume the posts of general managers of four and five-star hotels. — ONA

Milano's water heaters make waves in Oman

MUSCAT: The onset of winter in Oman and its surrounding regions heralds the necessity for warm, comforting showers- a remedy to the biting cold.

To cater to this need, Milano by Danube emerges as a beacon, offering comprehensive home solutions, specifically with their extensive range of high-quality water heaters. The company's heaters are available in various sizes, fit for both vertical and horizontal installations, ranging from 10 to 100 litres, ensuring a suitable option for every household.

Milano's products boast a 5-star rating for energy consumption and are certified by the Emirates Authority for Standardisation and Metrology. These water heaters are not only priced below standard market rates but also come with a seven-year unconditional replacement guarantee and



Anis Sajan, Vice Chairman of Danube Group.

a two-year guarantee on the thermostatic element, showcasing the company's confidence in its products and providing excellent value for money.

Quality is paramount in Milano's water heaters. Every element within the heaters is crafted from top-tier materials, including the thermostatic element made of 316L stainless

steel, which is glass lined and enamel coated, guaranteeing longevity.

The introduction of Dry Block Technology enables contractors to test the products without a water supply, ensuring that the element's life is not compromised during tests. Furthermore, the magnesium anode is 27 per cent larger than the standard,

enhancing the resistance of the glass-lined inner tank.

The meticulous construction, including a special PU foam layer, not only augments insulation quality but also facilitates optimal energy savings for consumers, distinguishing Milano's products as eco-friendly and energy-efficient. These heaters ensure quick heating and prolonged retention of warmth, allowing a reduction in energy consumption by up to 15 per cent compared to other market products.

In the past three years, Milano has impressively captured 50 per cent of the water heater market. "When I initiated the water heater division, I was optimistic about its success. Our uncompromising commitment to quality and safety has enabled us to achieve this feat," comments Anis Sajan, Vice Chairman, Danube Group.

Most importantly, the

availability of huge stocks of Milano's water heaters in sizes 30, 50, 80 and 100 litres in vertical and horizontal models builds confidence of traders to invest in Milano heaters. He emphasised the mutual benefits shared with their dealers, resulting in a harmonious business relationship.

Milano's commitment to delivering products that epitomise energy saving, eco-friendliness, durability, and affordability has positioned them as a trustworthy brand in home solutions.

Their water heaters are not just appliances but a testament to innovative, consumer-centric, and sustainable living solutions, making them a favoured choice among the residents of Oman. In the pursuit of combatting the winter blues, Milano by Danube stands as a reliable companion, ensuring warmth and comfort in every home.

Sohar International receives leadership in sustainable community development award

MUSCAT: Committed to fostering human development, Sohar International has been recently presented with the 'Leadership in Sustainable Community Development' title at the Alam Al Iktisaad Awards 2023. This prestigious award not only adds to the growing roster of achievements garnered by the bank, affirming its preeminent position in the domain of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), but also stands as a testament to the far-reaching impact the institution has on Oman and its people. The Bank's community impact programmes, driven by a clear purpose, are carefully designed to prioritise human development.

Mohamed bin Mahfoodh al Ardhi, Chairman of Sohar International, emphasised this focus when commenting on the award stating, "At Sohar International, our purpose-driven and strategic CSR initiatives are geared towards advancing human development in alignment with Oman Vision 2040. We are committed to empowering, educating, and elevating the communities and societies we serve."

While Sohar International has a strong reputation for advocating ethical business practices, our CSR programmes have consistently generated a positive and enduring impact on Oman's social fabric. Receiving the 'Leadership in Sustainable Community Development' award underscores the significant strides that Sohar International has taken in advancing this noble endeavour. We remain dedicated to forging a path towards a sustainable, resilient, and prosperous community through our human-centric approach to development."

The award ceremony, which took place on September 20, 2023, at Sheraton Oman Hotel, was graced by the presence of HH Sayyid Melek bin Shihab al Said as the Chief Guest. The illustrious event served as a confluence for key decision-makers who are at the helm of steering the nation's business and economic trajectory. Apart from felicitating top-performing companies in Oman for their achievements during the



Sohar International representative receiving the award.

last financial year, the ceremony also presented special awards for exceptional initiatives. In attendance at the event were revered business leaders, top-tier executives, and government representatives spanning a spectrum of industries.

It is important to note that Sohar International's CSR efforts go beyond philanthropy to promote holistic human development and progress. Guided by this principle, the bank has initiated projects aimed at empowering youth with future-ready skills, promoting inclusivity for individuals with disabilities, and enhancing the local healthcare system.

Sohar International's outstanding dedication to fostering human development is exemplified through various initiatives, including the Tomohi Training Programme and its support for platforms and initiatives that share a common focus, such as Injaz Oman. Moreover, this organisation has played a pivotal role in supporting many charitable associations, aiding them in developing their members, enhancing their capabilities and skills, and preparing them for the workplace.

My Perfumes Select wins emerging perfume brand of the year award

MUSCAT: A young and dynamic, premium perfume brand — My Perfumes Select — is proud to announce its recent award-win, as the 'Emerging Perfume Brand of the Year' at the Alam Al Iktisaad Awards.

A young brand, My Perfumes Select is born out of My Perfumes, which has a 30-year legacy in the perfume industry. My Perfumes Select is well known for curating high quality Extrait De Parfum (perfumes crafted from high concentration of perfume absolutes), crafted from the most exquisite and precious fragrance ingredients sourced from around the world.

This commitment to excellence ensures an opulently richer quality, exceptional sillage, and impressive longevity, setting the brand apart from others in the market. As an innovation, the brand also curates a unique range of non-alcoholic perfumes for



My Perfumes Select representative receives the award.

connoisseurs, and high-quality bukhoo crafted from pure oils.

Mustafa Firoz, Managing Director of My Perfumes Group, stated, "We are honoured to receive the 'Emerging Perfume Brand of the Year' Award. This award is a testament to the passion and dedication of the entire My Perfumes Select team, who work tirelessly to create exceptional experiences for our customers; and reflects our relentless efforts to create a premium brand that is not just steeped in tradition but also embodies a fresh and contemporary spirit."

MCBS introduces 'We Are Oman' series

MUSCAT: In alignment with the efforts to support Oman Vision 2040 goals, the national educational programme "We are Oman" was launched by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research & Innovation at the Modern College of Business and Science (MCBS).

The programme is designed for higher education students with the aim of providing future skills and entrepreneurship to keep pace with scientific and technical development.

In addition, it aspires to boosting Omani identity and pride in national achievements, and fostering responsible, and positive citizenship to help instil values like culture, science, learning, citizenship, and identity preservation in the Omani youth.

As part of Modern College of Business and Science's vision, and in line with the nation's aspirations, the college continues



The lecture series aspires to boosting Omani identity and pride in national achievements.

to be a leading institution in the region by facilitating learning, skills, innovation, and technology to better serve society in the twenty-first century.

From this standpoint, the Department of General Education

at MCBS organised the first of a series of events under the name of, "Omani History: A Tool to Understand the Past, and Plan for The Future."

A lecture was presented by Khamis bin Rashid al Adawi, an

Omani scholar, researcher, and writer.

Al Adawi presented on the MCBS campus, with members of the faculty, staff, and students among the attendees, many of whom posed interesting

questions that demonstrated their interest in the subject.

The lecture sought to enhance the principle of identity and belonging among students by examining Omani history, which includes many values that new generations can benefit from and which can contribute to solving many of the problems of contemporary life.

Dr Moosa al Kindi, Dean of MCBS shared, "It gives us great pleasure, as one of Oman's pioneering higher education institutions to embrace and encourage intellectually inspiring lectures in order to engage students and provide them a platform to appreciate the importance of their identity and history."

At MCBS we welcome many more scholars and like-minded individuals as Al Adawi to connect with the future cornerstone of Oman."

OETC holds 5-year annual transmission capability statement awareness session



OETC main office in Muscat

MUSCAT: Recently, the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) organised an awareness session on '5-Year Annual Transmission Capability Statement'.

This statement is issued by the company every 5 years after obtaining the required approvals from the Authority of Public Services Regulation.

The awareness session was conducted on the Microsoft Teams platform and attended by students from various related specialisations including Sultan Qaboos University, University of Technology and Applied Sciences, A' Sharqiya University, Sohar University, University of Nizwa, Dhofar University, Muscat University, Arab Open University, and National University of Science and Technology.

The workshop aims to update the participants about the developments within OETC and the sector.

Additionally, it aims to introduce the students to the company's and sector's operations, projects and plans to equip them with the required knowledge and increase their competency to work in the field.

This awareness session comes as part of OETC's efforts to increase awareness and knowledge about the transmission capability statement amongst community. This is done to introduce everyone to the company's strategic plans and objectives to build up a 400kV electricity infrastructure, increasing the electricity's grid reliability across the Sultanate of Oman.

The OETC's 5-year plans for developing the Oman's electricity grid through the high voltages including 400kV, 220kV and 132kV were showcased during the session.

Furthermore, the team discussed the electricity transmission's systems that are connected to the main grid including the north of Oman, along with the electricity grid in Musandam and Dhofar governorates.

The session also provided an insight into the most important projects and electricity connection demands, especially those coming from the renewable energy generation stations in Manah and Al Duqm.

The Planning and Design team explained the futuristic projects which will be executed in the upcoming years to enhance and empower the electricity grid sustainability and consistency responding to the rapid developments in all sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.



Oman-Etihad Rail project to unlock major construction opportunities

Civil structure: Tunnels, viaducts, marshalling yards, freight depots and special embankments to be built as part of Oman package

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 30

A potential bonanza in civil construction subcontracts awaits construction firms in the Sultanate of Oman when a keenly anticipated award for the implementation of the Abu Dhabi-Suhar rail link is announced sometime in the first half of 2024.

Those opportunities will be linked to the construction of, among other works, tunnels, viaducts, culverts, wadi crossings, sand mitigation measures, roads and highway diversions, utility diversions, line side civil works and rail track work as well.

A prequalification tender floated by the Oman Etihad Rail Co LLC (OER) — a joint venture of Oman Rail and Etihad Rail — has attracted significant interest from reputable international and regional rail contractors. A number of Oman-based players have registered their interest as well, in partnership with international players.

With the Oman component representing 163 kilometres of the entire 303km-long Abu Dhabi-Suhar rail link, a significant proportion of construction activities is expected to fall within the Sultanate of Oman.

Also envisioned for construction as part of the Oman civil package — spanning the link from Hafeet on the Oman-UAE border to Suhar — are a number



Cargo flows between Sohar Port and the UAE are expected to surge when the 303km Oman-Etihad Rail Network is operational in about five years.

of key facilities. They include a freight facility and marshalling yard at Sohar Port, a passenger station at Suhar City, a rail depot at Suhar, maintenance facilities, a second marshalling yard, and a freight facility at Hafeet.

Given the topography of the alignment through which the rail line will traverse on the Oman side, at least two major tunnels of approximately 1.7km and 1.6km respectively, are proposed to be built as part of the project.

Furthermore, scores of viaducts spanning a total distance of 21 kilometres and ranging in height from 10 to over 20 metres, will be built.

Divided into a total of three packages (one in the UAE and two within Oman), the successful contractor will be required to undertake the Design Development and Detailed Design of the rail project, along

with preparatory and civil works encompassing the required earthworks, rail track formation and sub-ballast.

Also covered in the awardee's scope is a broad array of civil structures, such as tunnelling, special embankments and ditches for windblown sand mitigation zones, drainage basins culverts and channels, railway embankment erosion and scour protection, roads and approaches to overbridges, and signage.

Rail track related activities include a mix of direct fixation ballasted track and slab track for running rail; guard rail consisting of joints and separation blocks; special track work consisting of crossovers, turnouts, passing loop, pocket tracks, sidings, lead tracks, tail track, junctions, crossings, depot storage tracks; track equipment consisting of rails sleepers and fasteners; cable

containment facilities throughout the link; and track drainage.

Interested bidders must also demonstrate proven experience in the execution of, among other things, railway under-bridges, overbridges, pipeline and other utilities crossings, camel bridges, noise barriers, tunnels (bored and cut & cover) and fencing.

When operational in about five years, the Oman-Etihad Rail Project will ignite a new wave of trade, investment, tourism and economic ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

Designed for both passenger and freight traffic, the project is also anticipated to herald the revival of Oman's national rail project, as well as spur the development of metros and rail-based zero-carbon transportation networks in upcoming 'Smart Cities' and urban schemes.

MCD launches 'Oman Stocks' app

MUSCAT: Muscat Clearing and Depository (MCD) Company, in partnership with the Muscat Stock Exchange, launched the 'Oman Stocks' app in its first phase in Oman.

This will allow equity investors to access the services provided by the company and the exchange from one place, and also allow parents with an investor number to open an account for their children.

The first phase provides new investor account opening services for Omanis and residents of the Sultanate of Oman, non-resident and legal investors, non-resident foreign investors and minors who have not reached legal age.

The application also provides an investor update feature for pre-registered company.

The Oman Stocks app is now available in both Android and iOS systems, which everyone can download and start using.

Mohammed bin Said al Abri, Chief Executive Officer of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company, said the application of "Oman Stocks" is a qualitative shift in equity investment in the Sultanate of Oman. It is the first reference for investors' equity transactions. It also serves as the basis for investment.

He added in a statement to the Oman News Agency (ONA) that the initial step was to open a new investor's account. Bearing in mind that all steps — you open an



account or any other service — are simplified and smooth to make it easier to use by everyone.

The company is also working with the Muscat Stock Exchange to add many services and data of interest to the investor that we hope to finalise during the coming period, such as the service of attending the meeting of public associations, viewing the trading reports and dividends distributed, selling and buying shares without the need to deal directly with brokers, and many more.

Amima bint Salem al Maashariyah, Head of Shareholders Department at MCD and Supervisor, explained that the idea of the application came in partnership with Muscat Stock Exchange to keep pace with the steady growth and increasing demand for applications in order to encourage investment in Muscat Stock Exchange and to be present with all categories inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman with ease.

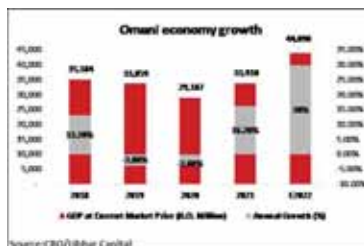
She added the 'Oman Stocks' application is linked with the Mala'a Centre of the Central Bank of Oman, which allows verifying the investor's bank data without the need to fill in the data manually. — ONA

MSX30 Index ends week higher by 0.03%

MUSCAT: The MSX 30 Index closed the past week at 4,676.84 points, up by 1.288 points and 0.03% higher from the previous trading session, which stood at 4,678.13 points. All major sector indices increased, the Sharia index increased by 0.48%, the Financial Index by 0.74%, The Services Index by 2.08% & the Industrial Index decreased by -0.35%.

National Life Insurance announced the successful introduction of its new brand name and the approval of the Extraordinary General Meeting to amend the trade name from "National Life & General Insurance Company SAOG" which has been rebranded as "Liva Group SAOG" and its wholly owned subsidiary "Al Ahlia Insurance SAOC" which has been rebranded as "Liva Insurance SAOC".

Following the required regulatory and Board of Directors approvals from both entities and in line with their previously disclosed strategy, Liva Group will transfer its entire insurance portfolio in Oman from Liva Group to Liva Insurance, thereby combining the strength of both entities into one operating entity, effective from October 15, 2023.



Fitch Ratings upgraded Oman's credit rating to BB+ on Monday from BB, on the back of a decline in the Gulf state's debt-to-GDP ratio and more disciplined government spending, plus higher oil prices, the agency said in a statement.

"The upgrade reflects the use of high oil revenues to pay down debt and spread its maturity, spending restraint reducing external risks, and an increase in Fitch's oil price forecast," Fitch said. Gross debt fell to about 40% of GDP in 2022 from around 60% the previous year and Fitch projects this to be at 36% of GDP in 2023, before stabilising at around 35% in 2024 and 2025.

In a sign of robust economic growth and growing demand for bank loans, bank credit growth in Oman jumped to 8.7% in the first seven months of 2023, compared to the below five % credit growth recorded in 2022, according to the Central Bank of Oman data.

(Courtesy: U-Capital)

Omani trade delegation signs strategic partnerships with US companies



Creative Thinking and @comtedirect sign an MoU in New York City.

WASHINGTON: At the conclusion of its visit to the United States of America, the Omani trade delegation signed several strategic partnerships with American companies that would contribute to achieving sustainable economic development that is in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 as part of economic diversification efforts.

In Houston, agreement was signed between ARDIC and STUP LLC in the agricultural field, aimed at strengthening trade and bilateral relations between the two countries, and contributing to the possibility of improving access to diverse and high-quality agricultural products (agriculture and sustainability products and services).

A partnership agreement was also signed in New York City between Asas Majan Development and Investment Company and the American 'Molly Cobb' company to

establish the first factory in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to manufacture grinding balls.

For its part, Oman's Creative Thinking, which specialises in telecommunications and technical services in New York City, has signed a strategic partnership agreement with Netside, a global leader in distributing value added to the telecommunications network and digital infrastructure industry specialising in distribution, logistics, technical engineering and product design.

Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Faroojyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, confirmed that the visit complements the tireless efforts between the two friendly countries to explore and follow up on trade and industrial cooperation and investment



Representatives of Asas Majan Development and Investment and the American firm 'Molly Cobb' sign an agreement.

partnership opportunities in the promising sectors, noting that the opportunities are favourable for companies and investors in the two friendly countries to increase investment volume, diversify import and export sources and facilitate the smooth movement of goods and products.

The two sides continued to seek to harmonise common objectives and orientations towards achieving partnership and integration, increasing Oman-United States investments and leveraging the benefits and incentives of the two countries to achieve integration into the various targeted investments in the target sectors.

A number of officials, representatives of the government sector, and a number of Omani companies and businessmen participated in the visit, entitled 'Invest in Oman'. The Ministry of

Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion seeks to strengthen the trade relations of the Sultanate of Oman in cooperation with its partners, draw on regional and international experiences in the development of the Sultanate of Oman's investment system and complement the efforts of the two countries towards promoting trade and strategic economic partnerships.

The objectives of the visit were to increase intra-trade between the two friendly countries, as well as to strengthen trade, industrial and investment relations, diversify import and export sources and include holding bilateral meetings between businessmen and Omani investors with their counterparts on the American side, offer investment opportunities and follow up investors interested in investing in the Sultanate of Oman in the target sectors. — ONA

A quantum leap in performance: Bun 1.0 redefining development speed



STEFANO VIRGILLI
stefano@virgilli.com

The author is a member of the International Press Association.

In the fast-paced world of software development, achieving substantial leaps in performance is a rarity. However, Bun 1.0 has emerged as a revolutionary force, poised to usher in one of the most remarkable advancements in recent history.

This transformation is all about redefining the standards of speed and efficiency, setting a bold new benchmark that surpasses what was previously considered the status quo—something that only a few weeks ago seemed unimaginable.

This column might sounds too technical to some readers, but the business idea at the back of this innovation is a faster web experience for everyone.

A game-changer for the digital world

The digital realm has long been

governed by the need for speed and efficiency. Whether we're streaming content, navigating complex web applications, or processing data, every fraction of a second counts.

Bun 1.0 has emerged as a potential game-changer in this regard, with impressive statistics to back it up.

For instance, when running a simple "hello world" script, Bun takes a mere eight milliseconds, whereas Node.js requires 32 milliseconds. This is a fourfold improvement, and it's just the beginning. When dealing with TypeScript, the gap widens further. With Bun, the time to build and run TypeScript code is approximately 40 milliseconds, while using Node.js, it skyrockets to 350 milliseconds. This is a staggering 45 times slower than Bun.

A lifeline for startups and developers

For startups and tech developers, the advent of Bun 1.0 represents an enormous relief in terms of achieving code efficiency. Time is of the essence in the competitive tech industry, and Bun's ability to drastically reduce execution times can be a decisive factor in gaining a competitive edge.

With Bun 1.0, developers can write and test code more swiftly, allowing for rapid prototyping and faster product development cycles. This newfound efficiency has the potential to level the playing field and empower startups to compete with industry giants.

Furthermore, Bun goes beyond just speed. It offers a plugin API that lets developers define custom loaders, extending its capabilities.

This versatility is further exemplified by its support for various file operations, including reading and writing files. Bun's file operations are optimised for speed, outperforming Node.js significantly.

The browser engine difference

It's worth noting that Bun 1.0 operates on a different foundation than its predecessor, Node.js. While Node.js runs on the V8 JavaScript engine from Google Chrome, Bun 1.0 utilises the equivalent engine designed for Safari.

This strategic choice enhances Bun's compatibility and performance in web-based environments, ensuring a seamless transition for developers who are already well-versed in web development using Safari.

Bun: A new paradigm in JavaScript development

Bun is designed as a drop-in replacement for Node.js. It natively implements hundreds of Node.js and Web APIs, including fs, path, Buffer, and more.

The goal of Bun is to run most of the world's server-side JavaScript and provide tools to improve performance, reduce complexity, and multiply developer productivity.

In the dynamic realm of software development, Bun 1.0 is setting a new performance standard, and the possibilities it unlocks are nothing short of transformative.

As the Bun website aptly states, "Bun 1.0 is here, and we're just getting started." The horizon is bright, and the future of JavaScript and TypeScript development looks faster and more exciting than ever.

Is the Fed's negative capital a problem?



WILLEM H. BUITER

The author, a former chief economist at Citibank and former member of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England, is an independent economic adviser.

On August 30, 2023, the US Federal Reserve System's Consolidated Statement of Condition recorded total capital of \$42.72 billion.

This figure would have been negative but for the appearance of an \$87.15 billion negative liability, driven by minus \$95.12 billion in earnings remittances to be paid to the US Treasury.

But make no mistake: this negative liability (known as a deferred asset) is an accounting gimmick that allows the Fed to avoid having to report negative total capital (equity or net worth) on its balance sheet.

The Fed explains this deferred asset as follows: "The Federal Reserve Banks remit residual net earnings to the US Treasury after providing for the costs of operations, payment of dividends, and the amount necessary to maintain each Federal Reserve Bank's allotted surplus cap.

Positive amounts represent the estimated weekly remittances due to US Treasury.

Negative amounts represent the cumulative deferred asset position, which is incurred during a period when earnings are not sufficient to provide for the cost of operations, payment of dividends, and maintaining surplus.

The deferred asset is the amount of net earnings that the Federal Reserve Banks need to realise before remittances to the US Treasury resume."

Without this deferred asset, the total capital would have been minus \$52.40 billion, and the Fed would be in the same territory as the Czech National Bank, which has had negative equity for most of the past 20 years, as well as the central banks of Sweden, Chile, Israel, Mexico, and Australia – all of which reported negative equity at the end of 2022.

If central banks had to market their assets not only when they are sold but also when listing their available-for-sale and held-to-maturity portfolios, capital losses on long-dated securities and loans driven by the post-Covid rise in interest



A man cycles past the Federal Reserve Bank in Washington, DC. – Reuters

rates would put most advanced-economy central banks in the red.

But why doesn't the Fed just report negative capital? After all, there is no presumption that it will be equitably insolvent (unable to meet current and future contractual obligations).

Negative capital, sometimes referred to as balance-sheet insolvency, does not imply equitable or cash-flow insolvency, where one can no longer pay obligations as they fall due.

As long as the Fed does not have material net foreign-currency-denominated liabilities, it can always print its way out of insolvency troubles, because it holds a monopoly over the issuance of legal tender.

The amount of monetisation required to avoid equitable insolvency may, however, be incompatible with the inflation target.

Central-bank equitable (in) solvency should be considered not in terms of the conventional balance sheet – which lists only legal, contractual obligations as assets and liabilities – but of the comprehensive balance sheet or

intertemporal budget constraint.

The comprehensive balance sheet does not list the outstanding stock of central-bank monetary debt as a liability because it is a liability in name only.

While undoubtedly perceived as an asset by its holder, a given amount of central-bank currency is merely a claim only on that amount of central-bank currency. One asset and two liabilities are added.

The asset is the present discounted value (PDV) of current and future net seigniorage, meaning the issuance of central-bank money minus any interest paid on the outstanding stock of central-bank money.

The key liability is the PDV of current and future net remittances to the Treasury – the beneficial owner of the Federal Reserve System. The second liability is the PDV of the current and future costs of running the central bank. I take that as given, and I ignore the PDV of net non-interest payments to the private sector ("helicopter money," if monetised).

The Fed's "deferred asset"

allows it to set some (positive) benchmark for conventional equity. Any income losses or capital losses that would threaten to drive actual net worth below the threshold level are neutralised by a matching reduction in the PDV of net transfer payments from the central bank to the Treasury.

If the losses are large and persistent enough, this could result in a sequence of negative net transfer payments to the Treasury, or even a negative PDV of all current and future net remittances.

The alternative would be to increase current and/or future seigniorage, which would have implications for monetary policy and the Fed's ability to pursue its dual mandate of maximum employment and price stability. But the Fed has not entertained this option.

These kinds of negative net transfer payments from the central bank to the Treasury (when central-bank capital falls below some threshold level) are part of the relevant memorandum of understanding between the Bank of England and the His Majesty's Treasury.

But recapitalisation is not part of the legislative and regulatory framework that connects the Fed and the US Treasury.

The Fed's "deferred asset" construction assumes that it can set the PDV of net remittances to the Treasury at any level, negative as well as positive, even though that is clearly not the political reality in the United States.

The good news is that even without recapitalisation of the Fed by the Treasury, the losses and negative equity levels thus far have not called for additional monetary issuance of a magnitude that is inconsistent with the effective pursuit of the inflation target. The sums involved, around \$95 billion, are dwarfed by a balance sheet that still exceeds \$8 trillion.

Nonetheless, it makes sense for the US to introduce a British-style recapitalisation agreement between the Fed and the Treasury.

Doing so would ensure that, should losses continue to mount, the Fed will not have to choose between avoiding equitable insolvency and effectively abandoning its inflation target.

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OMAN DAILY

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Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
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Salalah Office

Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suham Office

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MUSIC
Red Hot Chili Peppers' singer Anthony Kiedis performs during the Global Citizen Festival at Central Park in New York City. — AFP



BOLLYWOOD
Bollywood actress Sonam Kapoor attends an event announcing the new edition of the 'Mumbai Film Festival' in Mumbai. — AFP



SHOW
Swiss Creative director Kevin Germanier acknowledges the audience at the end of the Germanier's show during the Paris Fashion. — AFP



FASHION
Thai singer, actor and model Mile Phakphum Romsaithong poses during a photocall ahead of the Christian Dior fashion show as part of the Paris Fashion Week Womenswear Spring/Summer 2024. — AFP



WOMENSWEAR
A model presents a creation for Germanier during the Paris Fashion Week Womenswear Spring/Summer 2024 in Paris. — AFP

art & life

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Sparkling memories of Jewel of Muscat

KHALID ABDUL MALIK

It is thirteen years since the Jewel of Muscat made its epic voyage across the Indian Ocean, following the ancient trade route east from Oman to Singapore. The dhow, which was built along the lines of a ninth-century shipwreck of an Arab sewn-plank boat excavated off the Indonesian island of Belitung, made its triumphant entry into Singapore in July 2010 after almost five months at sea. During its voyage it survived raging storms, broken masts and sweltering calms. The anniversary is an occasion to recount vivid memories of those who participated in the "big adventure". "To be the first Omani captain to command a sewn-plank boat after around 1,200 years was just incredible!" said Saleh al Jabri, a former sailor with the Omani Royal Navy. "It was a great challenge to sail for the first time such a vessel because nobody knew how it would behave."



Al Jabri said he was hesitant when he was asked to command the ship. "I went to visit the ship and it was such a beauty! I just could not drop the offer." The risks and incidents during the voyage were many, but it was worth the adventure, Al Jabri said. "One of our masts cracked in a storm between India and Sri Lanka and we sailed through the edge of Cyclone Laila in the Bay of Bengal," he said. "I think that we sailed a few times close to death." "The food was also very bad. We ate plenty of qaseh

(dried sardines) and dates, had 1.5 litres of drinkable water per person per day and washed only with sea water," Al Jabri recalled. The construction of a replica of the ancient dhow was a joint venture sponsored by Oman and Singapore, which hired Tom Vosmer, an Australian maritime archaeologist, to direct the project. The project's site director, Luca Belfioretti, an Italian marine archaeologist, recounted how the project



developed. "We started building the ship in 2007 in Qantab, near Muscat," he said. Prior to construction, the 36-member team, including shipwrights, carpenters and maritime archaeologists, underwent extensive preparations. "Along with Tom Vosmer, we spent months making experiments on the ropes and looking for the same wood that was presumably used in

the construction of the shipwreck," Belfioretti said. The team worked 17 months to rediscover and put into practice the knowledge and techniques employed by ninth-century Arab shipbuilders. The boat was constructed from different types of wood from Africa, India and Oman. The sail, made of doum palm leaves, was manufactured in Zanzibar, Belfioretti said. The bottom of the vessel was coated with a mixture of goat fat and hydrated lime to protect the wood from sea worms and to make it easier to remove barnacles and algae. The ship was built without a single nail as planks were stitched together with 130 kilometres of coconut-fibre rope through 37,000 holes. The shipwrights used traditional hand tools, including saws, adzes, chisels and hammers. Several months after its launch to test seaworthiness, the Jewel of Muscat's epic voyage began on February 16, 2010. In the first leg of the journey, the ship covered 2,800

kilometres in 27 days travelling from Muscat to Cochin, India. It was the longest part of the trip and completed without incident. "We had time to become familiar with a unique ship that was sailing for the first time ever because pre-launch sea trials are never enough," said Alessandro Ghidoni, the Italian technical director. The second leg from Cochin to Galle, Sri Lanka, took nine days, but it was the most dangerous. "On the fourth day, we saw a storm coming towards us but it passed without touching the boat and we thought we were safe. But the weird thing is that it came back and suddenly there was chaos," Ghidoni said. "We managed to bring down the first sail quickly but it took us very long to bring the second one down amid extremely strong wind. Then there was a huge crack in the mast and we had to wait helplessly for hours in the middle of the big waves." In Sri Lanka, the crew replaced the two masts with the same type of wood. "I drove 5,000 kilometres in three weeks to find two teak trees in the jungles of Sri Lanka to replace the masts," recalled Belfioretti. "I even came eye to eye with a king cobra in the forest while I was looking for the timber. I was scared to death." In the third leg, from Galle to George Town, Malaysia, the ship sailed along the edge of Cyclone Laila, reaching a top speed of around 11 knots during a 50-knot squall. The three-day fourth leg, taking the crew from George Town to Port Klang, also in Malaysia, was the shortest and calmest. However, the final leg was very stressful as the Jewel of Muscat encountered adverse currents, contrary winds and maritime traffic carrying contraband through the Strait of Malacca over the nine-day journey. "It was a nightmare. With constant rain, opposite winds and front current, it was just impossible to control the boat," Ghidoni remembered with a shiver. "There was a big risk of being hit by these massive cargo boats sailing without lights under the cover of darkness." However, the Jewel of Muscat did not fail its crew. "For nearly five months, this ship has been our kitchen and our cradle. Our lives have depended upon her, in the most adverse weather conditions. She has surprised and perplexed us on many occasions. But she has proven loyal and true, exceeding our expectations," Al Jabri wrote in his memoirs after reaching Singapore.



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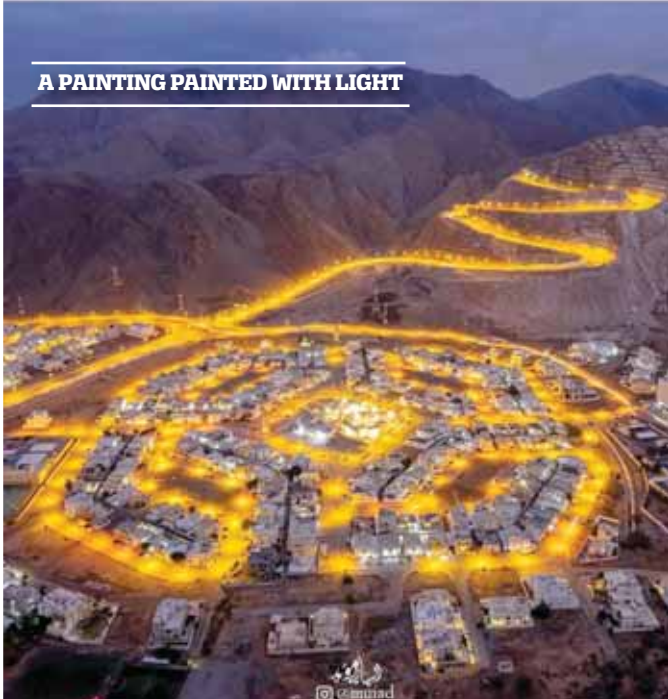


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At Paris opera ballet's gala: Chanel and contemporary dance

THE PALAIS GARNIER might have been designed for an extravagant party, its wide stairs created to be bedecked with flowers, its sumptuous gilded framework and ornate statues a perfect backdrop for posing in couture. On Thursday night, the Paris Opera Ballet opened its season with the traditional accouterments of its annual gala: rivers of exquisite outfits, teetering heels, Botoxed foreheads.

It has been only nine years since the Paris Opera Ballet held its first benefit gala, a strange American-style novelty, perhaps perceived as slightly vulgar for a largely state-subsidised organisation. But that gala in 2015, planned by Benjamin Millepied at the start of his short tenure as company director, tapped into the glamour of the Paris Opera in the collective imagination, the possibility for maximum visibility among elite patrons and synergy with luxury brands. (This year, Rolex and Chanel were the lead sponsors.)

It's anybody's guess what Thursday's high-paying audience made of the programme, which included two new works, by Marion Motin and Xie Xin, as well as a piece d'occasion by company dancer Nicolas Paul, and Crystal Pite's "The Seasons Canon." One black-tied representative might have summed it up: "Un peu boring, non?" he said to his companion as he exited.

Since December, the Paris Opera Ballet has been run by José Martinez, who took over six months after the surprise resignation of Aurélie Dupont. He has inherited her programming for this season, and in a programme note, he discreetly suggests he might go in a different direction, developing "a choreographic vocabulary using the pointe shoe."

Dupont wasn't particularly keen on using the pointe shoe, as evidenced by the commissioned work

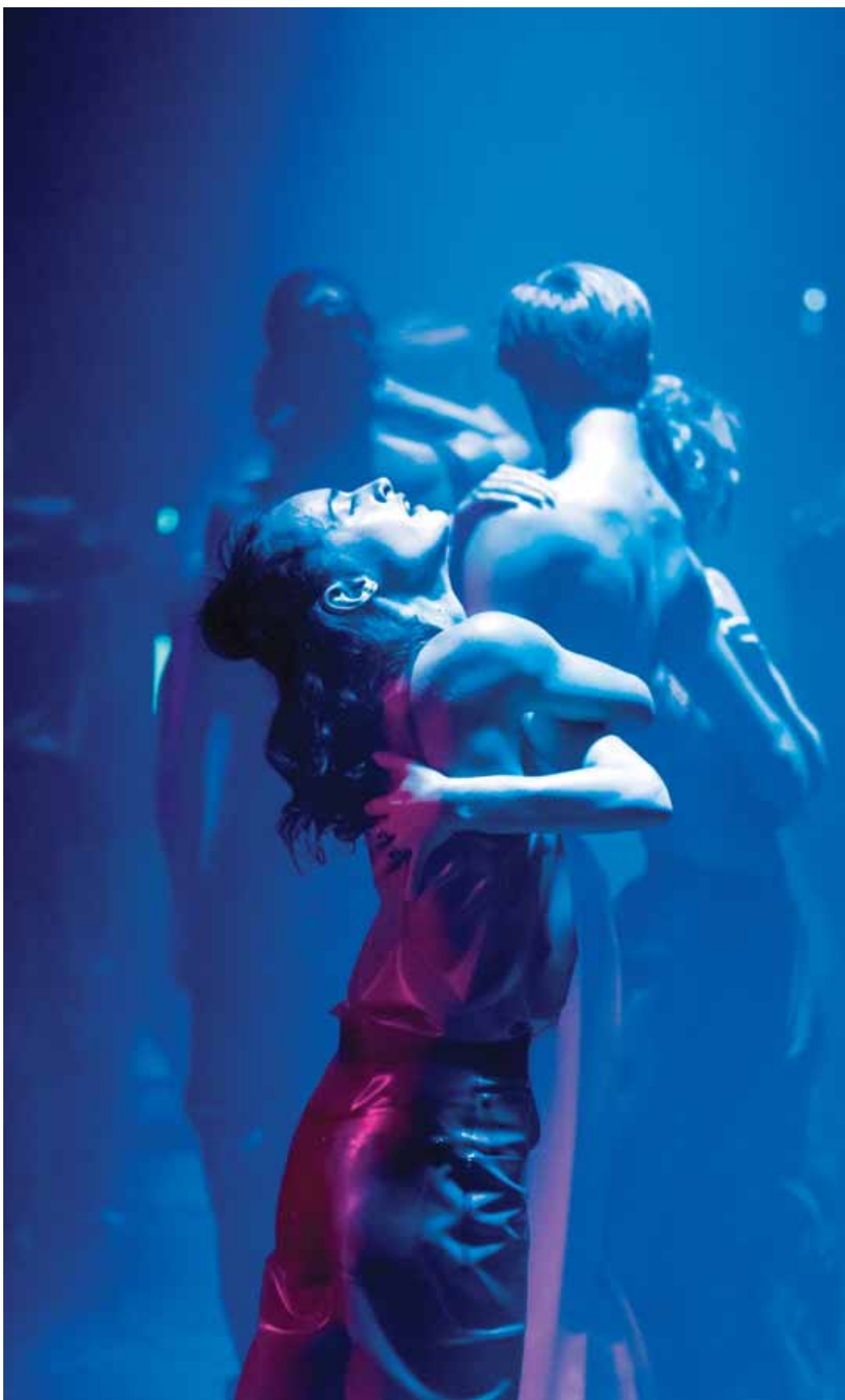
on this programme. Motin comes from the world of hip-hop, Xie from contemporary dance; both are intent on having the dancers develop new physical vocabularies rather than exploit ballet technique. But you have to admire the boldness of Dupont's gala programme statement: three living female choreographers, one of whom is the first Chinese dance-maker to create a work here.

Pointe shoes (and tutus) were much in evidence in the opening *Defilé du Ballet*, a 25-minute ceremonial presentation of the company and the school to Hector Berlioz's "Marche des Troyens" — a perfect illustration of Paris Opera Ballet's hierarchical grandeur.

Beginning with the youngest pupil at the school and ending with the most senior of the company's étoiles, or star dancers, the *Defilé* was also the farewell of étoile Émilie Cozette. Breaking with customary formality at the end, she took a solo bow and got hugs from fellow étoiles.

Then came Paul's "Singularités Plurielles," a commission from Martinez featuring Amandine Albisson, Valentine Colasante and Hannah O'Neill. This brief trio, to a string and piano quintet by André Caplet, featured pointe shoes but not a great deal of vocabulary as the women, wearing chic, short pink dresses by Chanel, crossed and uncrossed their legs on chairs. Later, they changed into chic suits — perhaps a commentary on male-female identity, perhaps just a chance for more Chanel costuming.

In their own ways, the next two commissions were equally conventional. In "The Last Call," Motin, who has worked with Christine and the Queens, offers a contemporary "Jeune Homme et la Mort." It opens with a phone ringing in a call box on an empty stage. A man in jeans (Alexandre Boccara) walks on to



answer it. The caller is Death (Axel Ibot), sporting black latex.

Then follows a not-unenjoyable 25 minutes in which rubber-clad angels initiate the man into their group, while Death dances along. It is essentially a long music video, without the edits and with really good dancers. There is smoke and cigarette smoking; hard-driving music by Micka Luna; lots of low-to-the-ground, hip-thrusting bodies pumping in unison; and a jazzy nightclub scene with shades of Bob Fosse. The costumes (by Arthur Avellano) were sexy, the dancers seemed to have fun and Death did not appear to triumph. At the end, Boccara strolled offstage.

Xie's "Horizon" was a complete contrast, a meandering, nebulous work that had nine dancers curving with soft, fluid swirls through a landscape of waist-high billowing mist. The imagery evokes nature, life and death — the dancers keep disappearing into the fog, then reemerging — and the movement quality is interesting. Xie works against ballet's pulled-up positions and tensions of line and extension, so that the dancers appear part of a greater flow of motion, subject to breath and gravity.

But the piece is wildly dull, set to anodyne music by Sylvian Wang that alternately evokes soothing sounds at a high-end spa and film-score mood setting. Nothing is helped by lighting (by Gao Jie) that goes from dark to extremely dark, or the mist that masks (at least from the stalls) a good portion of the dancers' bodies.

After all of this, I liked Pite's "The Seasons Canon" a lot more than at its 2016 premiere. The piece, for 54 dancers, expertly forms and dissolves huge groupings with acute musicality and undeniable theatricality. You could feel the audience's relief in the wild applause. Culture done. On to dinner! — **AFP**

CULTURE

British Museum launches appeal to recover missing items

THE BRITISH MUSEUM on Tuesday launched a webpage describing the types of items believed to have been stolen from its collection, calling on the public to help recover the missing artefacts.

One of the British capital's biggest tourist draws, the museum is best known for housing the Rosetta Stone and the Parthenon Marbles.

An estimated 2,000 items are believed to have disappeared from its vast collection, museum chairman



George Osborne has said.

On the webpage, the museum shared images of items that are still in its collection but are similar to those missing.

The museum said the "vast majority" of the missing items, mainly gems and jewellery, were from the department of Greece and Rome.

The images include a gold Roman bracelet, an inscribed finger-ring and a blue glass intaglio with a helmeted figure killing a four-headed snake with a double-axe.

The central London museum said it will not be sharing full details of the missing items on the advice of recovery specialists. It encouraged



those who think they "may be, or have been, in possession of items from the British Museum" to get in touch.

Separately, the museum also confirmed "60 items have now been returned, with a further 300 identified and due to be returned imminently".

The museum said in

August it had dismissed a staff member and alerted the police after items were found to be "missing, stolen or damaged".

Museum director Hartwig Fischer resigned shortly after, admitting the institution did not act "as it should have" on warnings that items had disappeared—**AFP**



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TRAVEL

The Friend Trip: Fun Without the Friction

WHOEVER SAID A friend is a friend forever has clearly never experienced a group trip that has devolved into a maelstrom of conflicting plans and bickering over restaurant bills. Travelling with your besties can be tricky. Here are some ways to do it without anyone getting unfriended.

INVITE WITH CARE

“First and foremost, you cannot travel with everybody. All your friends are not travel friends,” advises N’dea Irvin-Choy, a 27-year-old Los Angeles-based travel influencer, on her popular TikTok account. She suggests picking travel partners who share similar interests, and deciding ahead of time what kind of a trip you will be taking — relaxation, partying, adventure. “The last thing you want is for your friends to be giving each other the silent treatment on a non-refundable excursion somewhere on a beautiful tropical island,” she explained in an email.

POLL, BRAINSTORM, THEN BOOK

You can get the ball rolling by asking your friends where they want to go and what they want to do using services such as Doodle, Google Forms and Troupe. Some people prefer to use familiar spreadsheet programs such as Microsoft Excel or

Google Sheets to organise the plan and share it with friends. Others prefer to use apps such as Hoku, MiTravel and Plan Harmony that allow group members to collaborate in the planning process with photos, maps and more. And creating an Airbnb wish list lets friends suggest lodging options for the whole group to see. Once you’re in booking mode, Mobili provides a way to see each group member’s travel bookings at once, a tool that is especially useful for larger groups.

For sorting out flight arrangements, Robert Driscoll, who owns the travel agency VentureOut, swears by Triplt. After making your bookings, you can forward your confirmation emails to the app, which puts them all together on one timeline. Others in the group can then collaborate with the same trip by adding their own bookings to create a group itinerary. “It’s basically a chronological compilation of all your arrangements: flights, accommodations, car rentals, restaurants, activities, tours,” he said.

COMMIT CASH UPFRONT

When one participant on a friend trip suddenly drops out, it can throw financing for the whole trip into disarray. Hedge against those money wrenches by setting a firm deadline

for a monetary commitment. When people put down real money, whether for lodging or activities, they’re more likely to follow through.

TRADE OFF THE CAPTAIN’S HAT

Use a classic schoolteacher’s trick to keep everyone engaged and share the planning burden: Schedule a rotating group leader to take ownership of each day’s activities. This person will be responsible for making that day’s restaurant and tour reservations, or simply keeping everyone on schedule. Ask each friend to share a personal desire for the trip — for example, a tour of a museum or an afternoon at the beach — and assign that person to lead the group on the day of that activity. By making everyone the driver, everyone also gets the chance at some point to sit back and be a passenger.

AUTOMATE THE MONEY FLOW

Tracking expenses for a whole group can expose a lot of pain points. Differing price sensitivities and priorities make things complicated enough, and that’s before you get into the challenges of pricing couples versus singles, people who join late or stay longer, or charges in multiple currencies. “I have seen so many friendships dissolve because resentment builds when one person suspects other friends are taking advantage of her financially, or not pulling their weight,” said friendship coach Danielle Bayard Jackson, who is based in Tampa, Florida.

Apps can help make complicated calculations easy and transparent, even while the trip is still under way. Jackson said she liked TravelSpend, which automatically converts currencies, and Splitwise, which integrates with Venmo, to

“help groups manage everyone’s tabs so there’s no confusion about who owes what.” For divvying up restaurant bills, Irvin-Choy said she recommended the app Tab, which uses a picture of the receipt to track each diner’s responsibility.

AVOID THE ‘TRAVEL AMOEBA’

Groups can easily become what Dina Vaccari, a Seattle-based traveler, calls the travel amoeba: “an excruciatingly slow-moving blob of people that doesn’t really get anywhere.” There are countless situations where the group may end up stalled — when one member runs back to grab a lost hat or needs to use the bathroom or stop at an ATM. Decide as a group ahead of time that it’s OK not to wait and set a time and a place to meet up again. Or use the location-sharing feature of apps such as WhatsApp, so that stragglers can catch up on their own schedules and the rest of the group is free to keep exploring. — **NYT**