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OMAN'S STARTUP ECOSYSTEM VALUED AT \$301 MILLION



P18

UNIQUE DELIGHTS OF DHOFAR'S SPRING SEASON



P12

ALCARAZ SURGES INTO LAST EIGHT



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO KING OF ESWATINI

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Mswati III of Eswatini, on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his best sentiments to King Mswati III, wishing him good health and happiness and the friendly people of Eswatini further progress and prosperity. — ONA

CRUDE PRICE AT \$89.21 A BARREL

Oman oil price for November delivery on Tuesday reached \$89.21, comprising a decline by 20 cents from the price of Monday, which stood at \$89.41. The average price of Oman oil for September delivery has stabilised at \$80.54 per barrel, thus \$5.76 per barrel higher than August delivery. The price of Brent oil rose above \$90 per barrel for the first time since November on Tuesday as Saudi Arabia and Russia announced they were extending their respective production and export cuts. Russia it would extend its oil export cuts of 300,000 barrels per day until the end of the year. The international benchmark rose 1.4 per cent to reach \$90.24 while West Texas Intermediate, the main US futures contract, jumped 1.9 per cent to \$87.16.



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New framework for patient engagement to be launched

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Public safety is a major safety concern and the Sultanate of Oman will launch the guidelines and framework for Patient Engagement on September 18. Internationally, all the countries work hand in hand to have standards that provide better patient safety. In Oman, this journey began in 2016 with a patient-friendly WHO framework and was implemented in 28 government and private hospitals. According to Dr Qamra al Sariri, Director-General, Quality Assurance Centre, Ministry of Health, 15 hospitals are now certified patient-safe, 'friendly hospitals' in Oman. "We have many standards aimed at reducing the harm in the system. We have implemented in these hospitals around 130 standards ranging between provision of care, leadership, medication safety and so on. So we are guaranteeing a safe environment while providing medical care," she said. The era of patient safety has evolved since the Covid pandemic. "This year, you will see in our theme that we are moving towards patient empowerment and engagement. We want to empower and engage our clients in the services and provide better quality of care and reach higher satisfaction," she pointed out. September is National Patient Safety Month, and the Ministry of Health has lined up many activities until the end of the month. These activities are related to patient safety. The international society celebrates Global Patient Safety Day on September 17 every year. "Every year, we come up with different themes. All the countries this year will be focusing on patient engagement. Previously, we had patients' rights; now, we want them to be engaged when we are giving them the treatment," she noted. The framework and guidelines will be launched during the Oman Health Exhibition and Conference organised by Connect under the auspices of the Ministry of Health.

Oman 8th in world in date cultivation with 9m trees

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

The Sultanate of Oman has emerged as a global leader in date production, ranking eighth worldwide and second in the Gulf region after Saudi Arabia with over 9 million date palm trees spanning over approximately 62,000 acres. The country boasts an impressive date yield of up to 51 kg per palm tree, exceeding the global average of 40 kg. In 2022, Oman's date production reached a staggering 377,066 tonnes. The National Centre for Statistics and Information reports that the top four governorates in terms of date production quantity are Al Dakhiliyah Governorate (90,200 tonnes), followed by North Al Batinah (57,923 tonnes), South Al Batinah (54,715 tonnes), and North Al Sharqiyah (52,586 tonnes). Haitham bin Badr al Khanjari, Nakheel specialist at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said that Omanis consume



Omanis consume more than 60 kg of dates annually.

more than 60 kg of dates annually, thanks to the unique characteristics and benefits of dates and the extended wet season which lasts from the end of April till the first half of November in certain regions due to geographical diversity. **MODEL FARMS** Al Khanjari emphasised the ministry's commitment to supporting

farmers and enhancing the agricultural sector by establishing model farms and providing date palm seedlings. As of now, over 25,000 date palm seedlings have been planted across various governorates in Oman, benefiting more than 140 farmers. In the realm of date palm cultivation, Al Khanjari mentioned the introduction of over 80 local and international date palm varieties in the country with a special focus on preserving traditional Omani varieties. Regarding agricultural technology, the ministry through the Directorate-General of Agricultural and Animal Research, has implemented innovative approaches. These include a groundbreaking technique of pollination using liquid pollen suspension which serves as a cost-effective and efficient alternative to manual pollination. Drones are also now employed in date palm germination operations and pest control.



OMANI TRAIL RUNNING CHAMPIONS SHINE

Omani trail running champions, Hamad al Harthy, Hamdan al Khatri, Mohammed al Shizawi, and Issa al Abri, etched their names in history as they conquered the arduous challenges of the 2023 UTMB Mont Blanc. These trailblazers embarked on a journey that encapsulated the essence of grit and determination, leaving an indelible mark on the world of trail running. **DETAILS ON P3**

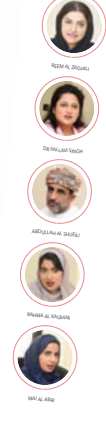
INSIDE



IN OMAN, DIVORCE CASES SURGED BY 20 PER CENT IN 2022, REACHING 4,160 CASES COMPARED TO 3,467 CASES IN THE PREVIOUS YEAR. THIS DRAMATIC INCREASE HAS RAISED THE URGENT NEED FOR A DEEPER EXAMINATION OF THE UNDERLYING CAUSES AND POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES.



THE PAIN OF DIVORCE IS HARD ON CHILDREN



WOMEN'S RIGHTS



WOMEN'S RIGHTS

SPOTLIGHT

P4

A hidden oasis of tranquillity and adventure

NAHLAA AL MAAMARI
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

The White Valley Sands in the Wilayat of Barka, nestled in Al Batinah Governorate, is a hidden gem awaiting discovery. Located just an hour's drive from the bustling city of Muscat, this enchanting valley is cocooned by glistening white sands. As you set foot on this captivating landscape, the entire valley unfurls before you like a scene from a dream. It is a place where the tranquillity is so profound that it can take you by surprise, providing an extraordinary sanctuary for relaxation and quality time with loved ones. Here, one can escape from the relentless urban clamour and temporarily break free from the tedium of daily routines. However, it's during the winter season that the White Valley Sands truly come to



life, becoming a magnet for visitors seeking resplendent experiences. The sunsets here are nothing short of breathtaking, casting a spell that enchants all who witness them. The natural beauty of the surroundings offers exceptional opportunities for photography, capturing moments that seem almost otherworldly. Beyond its picturesque sunsets and serene ambiance, the valley offers more delights. The sandy dunes provide a natural amphitheatre for spectators to revel in car exhibitions, where powerful engines roar and sleek machines dazzle the onlookers. Moreover, the topography of the valley lends itself perfectly to adrenaline-pumping activities such as buggy racing and high-speed car driving. It's a haven for adventure seekers, offering thrilling options like dune buggy rides, sandboarding, and the chance to camp beneath the starry desert sky.



Revamped law for persons with disabilities awaits final nod

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 5

In a remarkable step towards promoting inclusivity and upholding the rights of individuals with disabilities, the Ministry of Social Development has announced that a comprehensive revamp of the Persons with Disabilities Law has been completed.

The revelation was made by Minister of Social Development, Dr Laila al Najar, in exclusive remarks to the Observer on the sidelines of the recent GCC forum on disability rights held in Salalah earlier this week.

The revamped legislation has been meticulously tailored to align with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), a global framework that champions equal participation and rights for individuals with disabilities.

Through rigorous collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, the Ministry of Social Development ensured that



Pact signed to establish lab for disabled

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development on Tuesday signed an agreement with Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest) for the establishment of a laboratory for developing services and programmes in favour of persons with disabilities. The agreement was signed at the ministry's premises by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, and Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Balushi, CEO of Ominvest Group. Dr Laila said that the programme embodies the existing partnership between the Ministry of Social Development and private sector institutions. She added that the establishment of such laboratories enhances the integration of efforts with partners in the disability service sector and complements previous efforts. – ONA

the law adheres to the highest standards of international human rights principles.

At present, the law is undergoing its final review within the Legal

Committee of the Council of Ministers, the last critical step before it proceeds to the Council of Oman for formal approval. Dr Laila expressed her

confidence that the law will soon come into effect, underscoring its role as a comprehensive and effective tool in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities within Oman.

She also emphasised the law's resonance with the government's unwavering commitment to the CRPD and its vision for a more inclusive society.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Oman's upgraded Persons with Disabilities Law will represent a major stride toward advancing the rights of individuals with disabilities, championing the government's steadfast commitment to creating a society where every citizen, regardless of their abilities, enjoys equal opportunities and full participation in all facets of life.

The new law will stand as a beacon of hope for the disability community not only in Oman but around the world, as it demonstrates the power of legislative change in driving positive societal transformation.

Authorities appeal for cooperation during smart meter installation



NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

An appeal has gone to owners and landlords of properties in the Wilayat of Al Seeb in Muscat Governorate ahead of the roll-out of new smart meters across the wilayat, among other parts of the capital city.

In the appeal, dated September 4, 2023, the Office of the Wali has urged property owners – residential, commercial, agricultural and industrial – to cooperate with staff of Nama Electric Distribution Company who will be visiting their premises to replace analog-based meters and

new smart meters that operate on an automatic reading system. Tens of thousands of smart meters have already been installed across the Sultanate of Oman as part of a nationwide rollout of these digital devices. Significant numbers of new consumers have been included in the coverage. Existing customer's outdated meters will be gradually replaced over the next three years, until 2025.

The shift to smart meter reading ensures a better experience for customers, with remote meter reading eliminating the need for field visits. This is achieved by connecting the meters to Nama Group's shared services platform using mobile phone SIM cards.

These smart meters give several benefits to both electricity companies and the local population. Smart meter reading is an important advancement since it eliminates the need for manual readings and field visits. This assures accurate invoicing and minimises mistakes, ensuring that residents only pay for the power they use. Smart meters provide real-time insights into energy consumption, allowing them to make educated decisions, cut expenses, and promote sustainability. Flexible pricing encourages off-peak consumption, which increases efficiency even more.

Furthermore, smart meters help identify theft, respond quickly to outages, and contribute to a better future by lowering emissions and promoting renewable energy integration. Eventually, the adoption of smart meters provides consumers with better energy management, cost savings, and a sustainable energy infrastructure.

"Please be informed and aware of the importance of cooperating with the implementing companies to facilitate their work so that the project can be completed as quickly as possible," the wali's office added in its letter.



IRG corruption session looks at asset recovery

VIENNA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by State Audit Institution (SAI), is participating in the 14th Resumed Session of the Implementation Review Group (IRG), the 17th Session of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on Asset Recovery and the 12th Open-ended Intergovernmental Experts meeting to enhance international cooperation under the UNCAC.

The meetings are organised by the United Nations (UN) Office on Drugs and Crime at the UN Office in Vienna during the period from

The topics include discussion of means for using information technology to implement the Convention and the non-binding guidelines in order to promote multilateral international cooperation

September 4 to 8, 2023.

The 14th session includes several key topics, the most important of which is the discussion of the review of the fourth and fifth chapters of the UNCAC pertaining to international cooperation and asset recovery.

The topics also include the discussion of the means for using information and communication

technology to implement the Convention and the non-binding guidelines in order to promote multilateral international cooperation to further prevent, identify, investigate and prosecute corruption in times of emergency, as well as responding to and recovery from crisis.

Good practices, experiences

and challenges related to the establishment of effective financial disclosure systems for concerned public officials, as well as good practices and challenges faced during the international asset recovery process will be also discussed during the session.

On the sidelines of the session, a training course will be held for focal points and government experts participating in the second session of the mechanism for the review of implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption. — ONA

Consultancy tender floated for new Al Jabal Al Akhdhar road

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has floated a tender for the implementation of the new alternative road to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar from Al Batinah South .

The bid is for the preparation of tender documents for the design and building of the road linking Al Jabal Al Akhdhar with South al Batinah.

Tender documents will be available for sale on September 17, with bids expected to be floated on October 15.

The scope for work includes evaluation of submitted financial and technical bids, providing clarification support to the bid enquires, preparing the contract document, and carrying value engineering exercises for the offers.

According to a top official at the MoTCIT, the road project is important as it will easily link prominent tourist sites with the rest of the country.

"Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is one of them as the place has so much potential. Presently, there is only one road to reach Al Jabal Al Akhdhar which is hard to navigate for smaller cars. So, the ministry is looking



into one or two alternatives where even smaller cars could travel with ease," he told the Observer.

Around 79,000 people visited Al Jabal Al Akhdhar during the first half of this year. According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the total number of visitors this year until the

end of June 2023 was about 79,034, which included 28,406 Omanis, and 3,848 Saudis. Due to its moderate summer and cold winter, the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar attracts a year-round turnout of visitors. It is also home to many agricultural crops like pomegranates, grapes, peaches, apricots, and roses.

Tender

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
10/2023/ PEIE/ HQ-10	DESIGN AND BUILD FOR THE INTERIOR PARTITIONS, DECORATION, FURNITURE AND ASSOCIATED MEP & FIT OUT WORKS FOR ALMAZUNAH FREE ZONE ADMINISTRATION AREA AT FACILITY BUILDING IN AL MAZUNAH FREE ZONE	17-09-2023	05-10-2023	Construction and Maintenance	Excellent, First, Second	50

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200.

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

@madaynoman

madayn.om

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Central bank governors holds meeting

SALALAH: The GCC Committee of Central Banks Governors held its 81st meeting in Salalah on Tuesday, as Oman is the current presidency country. The meeting was chaired by HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), with participation of Governors of GCC central banks and the GCC Secretary-General. During the meeting, a number of topics related to monetary and financial developments in the GCC states were discussed, in addition to issues related to supervision and surveillance of the banking sector, payment systems, FinTech in the GCC banking sector and GCC Central Banks Digital Currency (CBDC).

MoTCIT continues inspection of buses

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 5



The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) is carrying out inspections on school transportation in various governorates as part of its efforts to regulate the sector and determine the extent of operators' compliance with the rules.

Earlier, the ministry stressed the need for bus drivers to be fully prepared and adhere to security and safety requirements during the transportation of students and to register buses on the ministry's transportation platform.

They should follow the approved technical specifications for school transportation. The ministry warned that it will carry out periodical inspection campaigns on school transport buses and continuously throughout the academic year to ensure the safety of students by making sure they commute in a safe manner on buses equipped with advanced safety features.

ROP has issued guidelines for bus drivers to ensure the safe

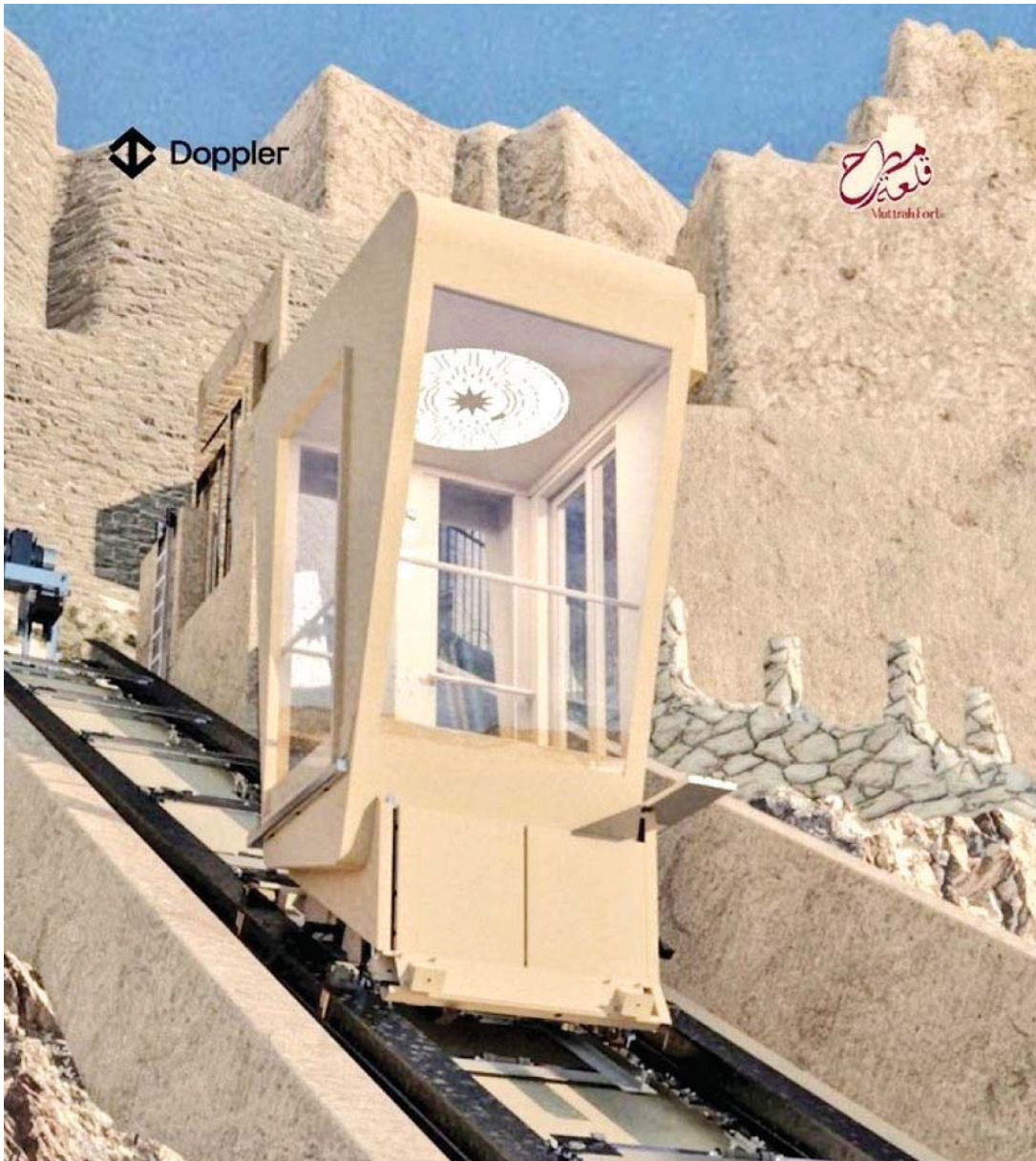
transportation of students. The instructions are significant because speeding, negligence, bad behaviour and not keeping a safe distance are among the main causes of traffic accidents in the country, according to the latest statistics.

According to ROP official, "The police have taken many measures in coordination with the Ministry of Education and in line with the Traffic Law and its executive regulations."

He said that all drivers of public and private school buses must be careful when approaching student gathering places and not move until after making sure that all students have crossed the streets.

"They should stop buses in their designated places, whether in front of schools or after work is completed," he said.

Soon, a customised elevator for Muttrah Fort visitors



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

The historic Muttrah Fort in Muscat will be soon equipped with a customised elevator for the benefit of visitors of all ages.

"We contracted with the most prominent companies to ensure quality for your convenience," the company managing the fort said in a statement on its official social media account.

The privately operated Muttrah and Nizwa forts are the most popular attractions among tourists in the country. In 2022, Muttrah Fort received 37,700 visitors compared to 8,112 in 2021 and 14,781 in 2020, while Nizwa Fort is the most popular attraction in the country with 193,194 visitors in 2022, compared to 55,636 in 2021 and 44,047 in 2020.

Muttrah Fort is a historic fort in the Wilayat of Muttrah in the Governorate of Muscat, overlooking the Port Sultan Qaboos, which would have made it quite an impregnable position to defend Muttrah from attacks while also allowing observation of the surrounding areas.

The fort is thought to have been built originally in 1507AD, only to be modified and upgraded with towers and stronger walls by the Portuguese during their occupation of Oman in the 1560s. Currently, a private enterprise manages the Muttrah Fort following an agreement signed with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

Haima Hospital reports two deaths from accident

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Accidents continue to be reported on the Salalah-Muscat road despite warnings, advisories, and preventive measures. On Tuesday morning, the emergency department at Haima Hospital reported that two persons lost their lives in a traffic accident while one person was said to be critical.

On Sunday morning, Haima Hospital received two patients

with light injuries following traffic accidents. Haima Hospital earlier said its emergency department team used all its available resources to handle the crisis situations arising out of traffic accidents.

While Al Wusta reported 85 accidents in 2022, it may be reported that 71 per cent (571,723) of total visitors to the Dhofar Governorate travelled by road this year.

According to safety experts, overspeeding is the primary cause

of traffic accidents and its severe human and material damage. Studies have found that reducing the speed by 10 km/h reduces the probability of accidents by 20 per cent, the number of injuries by 30 per cent, and deaths by 40 per cent.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has deployed special checkpoints and patrol teams on the roads leading to Dhofar Governorate. The Directorate General of Police Aviation will also support the

ROP efforts by providing flying ambulances in emergency cases such as traffic accidents that require urgent transportation of the injured.

ROP has advised all visitors to the Governorate of Dhofar to abide by the traffic laws and regulations and the speed limit to ensure their safety and that of others and to pay attention to the presence of stray animals, especially at night, and sands that may accumulate on roads near desert areas.

Omani trail running champions shine at the 2023 UTMB® Mont Blanc in France

Omani trail running champions, Hamed al Harthy, Hamdan al Khatri, Mohammed al Shizawi, and Issa al Abri, etched their names in history as they conquered the arduous challenges of the 2023 UTMB Mont Blanc.

These trailblazers embarked on a journey that encapsulated the essence of grit and determination, leaving an indelible mark on the world of trail running.

Hamed al Harthy, Hamdan al Khatri, and Mohammed al Shizawi undertook the daunting task of conquering the UTMB Mont Blanc distance, an awe-inspiring 171 KM of treacherous terrain, while Issa al Abri, a force to be reckoned with, ventured into the equally formidable CCC race, encompassing a staggering 100 KM of relentless trails.

Hamed al Harthy, speaking on behalf of the group, emphasised the profound honour they felt in representing Oman on the global stage of the UTMB Mont Blanc.

Completing the UTMB race



wasn't just a personal achievement for Hamed; it was a triumphant moment for Oman's trail running community. Expressing deep pride in his accomplishment, Hamed al Harthy stated, "Finishing the UTMB reflects the strong commitment of Oman's trail runners. This shared accomplishment underscores the resilience and dedication of our athletes on the international trail running platform."

Commenting on the tough side of the race, he said, "My UTMB journey proved incredibly demanding. I often refer to this race as 'the mother of all trail races!' The high altitude and harsh cold weather present formidable obstacles, especially given the extensive climbs involved. The final kilometres posed an immense challenge, requiring a concerted focus on nutrition to persevere."

Hamdan al Khatri faced a setback due to a recent injury prior to the race, yet his unwavering spirit stood strong. He withdrew at 11:41:51 at Lac Combal, acknowledging, "My

objective was to gain experience and up-skill while maintaining a steady pace without pushing beyond my limits. It's a point I had to call it off, but the experience has been a profound learning curve and I look forward to the next challenge."

The Omani team's performance was underscored as they crossed the finish line with resounding determination. Hamed al Harthy finished the 171 KM race in 46:12:01, securing a commendable 26th rank within his category. Mohammed al Shizawi completed the demanding course in 44:11:10. Meanwhile, Issa al Abri crossed the finish line of the CCC race with a time of 21:45:17.

The journey of the athletes was accentuated by the unwavering support of the Himam Trail Run Race team, who provided crucial planning and technical assistance. Their collaboration with athletes like Ahmed al Fahdi, Ali al Balushi, and Sultan al Shereiqi exemplifies the collective spirit of teamwork in propelling these trail runners to their finest potential.

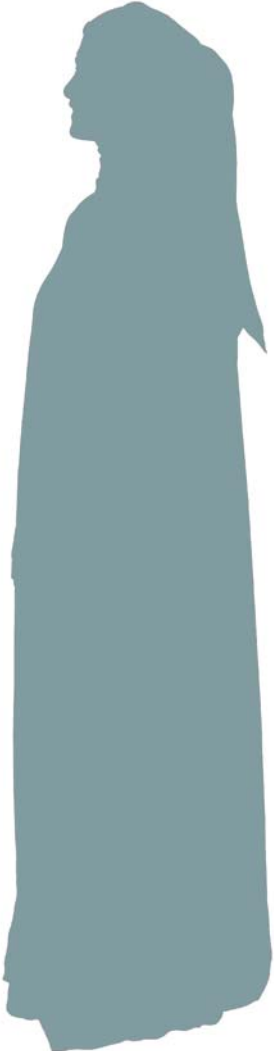
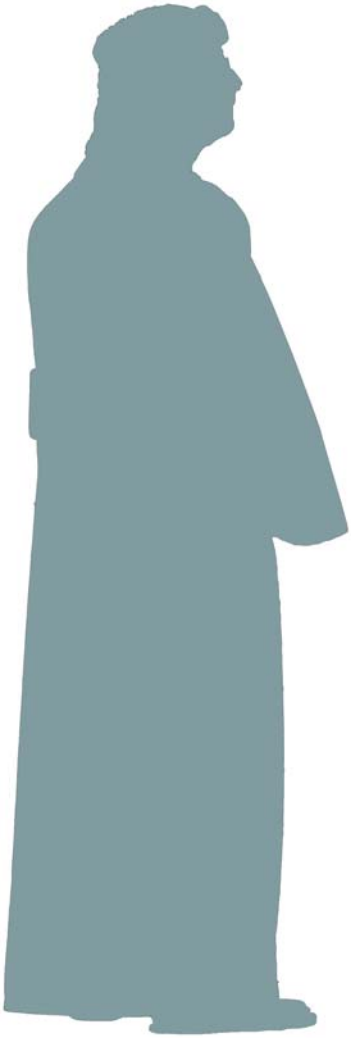


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THE PAIN OF DIVORCE IS HARD ON CHILDREN



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The impact of divorce on children can be profound and long-lasting, particularly during their formative years when their personalities are taking shape. This was a central topic of discussion during Observer's monthly Round Table Discussion on Monday, where an expert panel gathered to shed light on this concerning issue.

In Oman, divorce cases surged by 8 per cent in 2022, reaching 4,160 cases compared to 3,837 cases in the previous year. This dramatic increase has raised the urgent need for a deeper examination of this trend's root causes and potential consequences.

Studies highlight that parental divorce or separation significantly increases children and adolescents' risk of adjustment problems. These problems include academic difficulties, lower grades, dropout rates, disruptive behaviours, substance use issues and depression.

Abdullah al Shueili, the Editor-in-Chief of Oman Observer, emphasised the significance of this increase in divorce rates within a closely-knit society like Oman. He attributed this trend to the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to global job losses and societal changes.

One of the most poignant consequences of divorce is the identity crisis children face from broken marriages. They often lack the presence of one or both parents, which can have a profound impact on their developing personalities and characters.

The panel, comprising Advocate Reem al Zadjali, Dr Pallavi Singh, a dentist and head of operations, and Rahma al Kalbani, a journalist with Oman Daily, moderated by Ahmed al Kaabi, delved into the reasons behind the rising divorce rates in Oman and explored the elements of successful marriages.

Lawyer Reem al Zadjali identified several contributing factors to divorces, including rapid modernisation, urbanisation influenced by social media, and women's increasing financial independence. She noted that social media also played a role in extramarital relationships,



REEM AL ZADJALI



DR PALLAVI SINGH



ABDULLAH AL SHUEILI



RAHMA AL KALBANI



MAI AL ABRI

contributing to the trend. Dr Pallavi Singh emphasised that toxic relationships and incompatibility often lead to divorce. She highlighted the importance of communication and interdependence in a healthy relationship, cautioning against unrealistic expectations and excessive interference from family and friends. Omani law allows engaged couples an "engagement period" to get to know each other and evaluate their compatibility, aiming to prevent culture shocks after marriage.

Journalist Rahma al Kalbani emphasised that marriage should be a choice, not an obligation forced upon individuals. She advocated for personal freedom in choosing life partners. Mai al Abri, a journalist with Oman Observer, pointed out the changing perception of women in society. Women often endured silently in the past, but now they are more empowered and independent. She stressed that mutual respect is the key to successful relationships. The discussion also touched on the distinction between arranged and love marriages. Dr Pallavi suggested that many love marriages face challenges because family members often do not intervene, assuming the couple will resolve issues independently. Without experienced guidance, this can lead to divorce, highlighting the importance of support and communication in all types of marriages.



Regional airlines make strong come back

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Middle East-based airlines, have made steady progress and passenger traffic recovery has been strong for them with 31.4 per cent year-o-year in the second quarter of 2023, a figure at par with the pre-Covid days, according to a report published by the IATA.

The report titled 'IATA Air Transport Chartbook — Q2 2023' that reviewed the industry passenger, cargo and financial performance, furthers that in terms of RPKs (Revenue Passenger Kilometres), the Middle Eastern carriers have outperformed the global recovery which reached 93.7 per cent (within 6.3 per cent) of pre-covid levels for the quarter, a figure that gives a boost to retinal tourism.

The regional airlines saw their RPKs reach within 0.9 per cent of their Q2 2019 levels, a rate that the global airlines umbrella forecasted earlier as the regional carriers would make faster recovery in the post-Covid era.

This review that covered the business cycle, sustainability and energy transition, passenger and cargo traffic, airline financial performance, and regional outlook, concludes that since most of the passenger traffic for the Middle East is international, total RPKs followed similar growth trends and recovery rates as international RPKs.

"In terms of ticket sales, the region has outperformed the global average and continues to



trend upward, indicating sustained passenger demand. Local holiday shifts in the region caused some fluctuations but the overall trend remains positive," the report said.

The report further details that the timing of the holy month of Ramadhan has played a key role in origin-destination (O-D) passenger traffic in Q2-2023 compared to 2019.

The origin-destination (O-D) passenger traffic in Q2 2023 also made a solid recovery in comparison to pre-covid periods.

Passenger traffic growth generally varied among the countries in the region, with the strongest performances and while some led the passenger traffic growth, other countries also exhibited subdued growth in the second quarter compared to the previous period.

The report further gives indication that the airlines in the middle east will cover up their

losses due to the pandemic in 2023 itself, based on the latest findings of the IATA quarterly Business Confidence survey.

However, the financial performance continues to be led by the North American carriers, which are expected to post a net profit in excess of USD 10 billion in 2023.

Middle East and Europe airlines are also likely to be profitable in 2023, with other regions continuing to show an improved financial performance, moving towards a return to profitability, the 'IATA Air Transport Chartbook — Q2 2023' pointed out.

Cargo activity for Middle East airlines decreased in the second quarter of 2023 by 3.1 per cent compared to the same period last year. This was still an improvement relative to the 8.1 per cent YoY drop in the first quarter of 2023. Compared to 2019, second quarter cargo activity was flat.



Workshop looks at education, future skills among Omani youth

DUQM: The Department of Culture, Sports and Youth in Al Wusta Governorate on Tuesday organised a specialised workshop on the National Youth Strategy.

The workshop, which was attended by 50 young people, kept pace with the approach

of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth to respond to the aspirations of specialised Omani youth interested in the fields of education, future skills, community engagement, economic empowerment, health, physical activity and environment.

The workshop saw the participation of government departments associated with the youth sector.

The participants considered the formation of the strategy's steering committee and a team of active youth experts from all governorates of Oman. — ONA



Tender Announcement

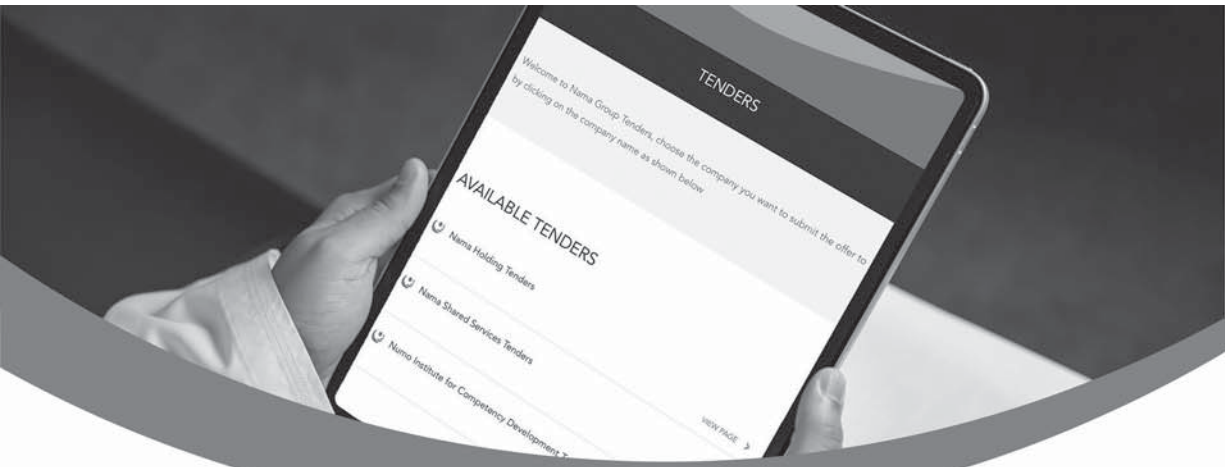
Tender Number	T-19-2023
Tender Name	Call-Off Agreement for Supply of A30 and A60 Heavy Duty External Doors for MWASALAT Vessel.
Project Summary	MWASALAT invites proposals from qualified suppliers for A30 and A60 Heavy Duty External Doors, as per the details and terms specified in the tender documents.
Tender Fee	NIL
Grade & Specialty	Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Marine sector.
Start date for tender document distribution	Wednesday, 06th September 2023
Last date for tender document submission	Tuesday, 12th September 2023

The Tender documents may be shared by email during official working hours between 9:00A.M - 2:00 P.M.
Tenderers are requested to share commercial registration (CR) & business card through email tenders@mwasalat.om and tender number as the subject of email. Tender Document shall be shared by email
The submission Date / Time shall be on or before the deadline specified in the above table.
Participants should submit their offers in the tender box located in the head-quarter National Ferries Company LLC (MWASALAT) at Ghala, Muscat (Jabal Shams Building 5th floor), Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected.
MWASALAT
Head Quarter, Ghala Tel: 1551
P.O.Box: 911 , Al Khuwair, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman

"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tenders:

Tender Number	T-28-2023 (Re-tender)
Tender Name	Oracle Licenses & Technical Support Services for MWASALAT ERP Systems - SCM & Financials
Project Summary	MWASALAT invites proposals from Oracle certified Partners in Oman for the renewal of Licenses, subscriptions and Technical Support for MWASALAT ERP Systems - SCM & Financials, as per the details stipulated in the tender documents.
Tender Fee	NIL
Grade & Specialty	Oracle certified Partners in Oman
Start date for tender document distribution	Wednesday, 06th September 2023
Last date for tender document submission	Tuesday, 12th September 2023

For more information please send to: tenders@mwasalat.om



TENDER

Nama Shared Services LLC invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
NSS/2023/05	Supply and Implementation of EDRMS Hardware	12 September 2023	26 September 2023	100/- (Plus VAT amount: 105 OMR)

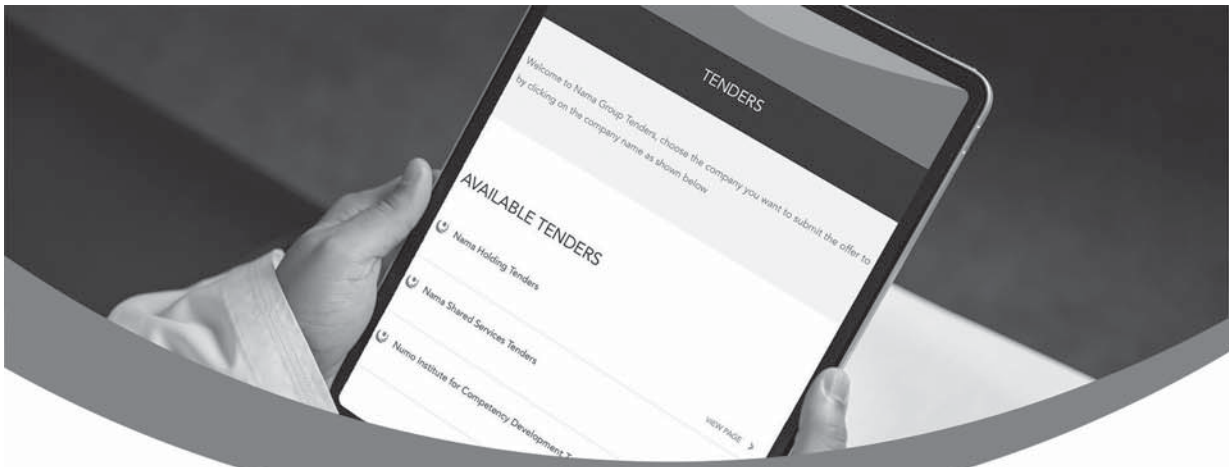
- Interested party may purchase the tender through the company website (www.nama.om). Supplier user guide is available to be downloaded on the same page.
- Payment of the tender fees to be done online through the link available on the website. The deposit should be made on the last day of purchasing before 12.00 p.m.
- Bids shall be submitted online through I-supplier portal before 01.00 pm, time of the Sultanate of Oman, on Tuesday 26th September 2023.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers. Bids that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered. The original hard copy of the bid bond should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception.
- NSS is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



Nama Holding
In Beach One Building, 3rd Floor (Units 305 & 307), Shatti Al Qurum
P.O Box 850, Post Code 116, Sultanate of Oman.
Phone Number: +968 24559200 / 211
E-Mail: Ibrahim.AlHinai@Holding.nama.om



TO ENSURE A SMOOTH OPERATION, UPDATE YOUR DETAILS



TENDER

Nama Shared Services LLC invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
NSS/2023/04	ORACLE METER DATA MANAGEMENT (MDM) MANAGED SUPPORT SERVICES FOR NAMA DISTRIBUTION COMPANIES	12 September 2023	26 September 2023	100/- (Plus VAT amount: 105 OMR)

- Interested party may purchase the tender through the company website (www.nama.om). Supplier user guide is available to be downloaded on the same page.
- The tender fees to be paid online through the link available on the website. The deposit should be made on the last day of purchasing before 12:00 p.m.
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‘WORLD LOSING RACE TO MEET CLIMATE GOALS’



COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber

NAIROBI: The world is losing the race to meet its climate change goals, the president of the upcoming COP28 summit said on Tuesday, as African leaders called for changes to what they say is an unfair international climate finance system.

The grim assessment by Sultan al Jaber, who will preside over the summit in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in late November, came three days before the United Nations publishes its first “global stocktake”, an assessment of how nations are doing in their efforts to tackle climate change.

“We are not delivering the results that we need in the time that we need them,” Jaber, who also heads the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, told delegates at the inaugural Africa Climate Summit in Kenya’s capital, Nairobi.

The summit, which opened on Monday, is focused on mobilising financing for Africa’s response to climate change.

While Africa is suffering from some of the most severe impacts of climate change, the continent only receives about 12 per cent of the financing it needs to cope, according to researchers.

Hundreds of millions of dollars of investments in sustainable development projects were announced on Monday, and on Tuesday Jaber announced the UAE was pledging \$4.5 billion dollars to develop 15 GW of clean power in Africa by 2030.

Africa currently has about 60 GW of installed renewables capacity. — **Reuters**

KIM, PUTIN PLAN TO DISCUSS ARMS SALES

WASHINGTON: Kim Jong Un, the leader of North Korea, plans to travel to Russia this month to meet with President Vladimir Putin to discuss the possibility of supplying Russia with more weaponry for its war in Ukraine and other military cooperation, according to American and allied officials.

In a rare foray from his country, Kim would travel from Pyongyang, North Korea’s capital, probably by armoured train, to Vladivostok, on the east coast of Russia, where he would meet with Putin, the officials said. Kim could possibly go to Moscow, though that is not certain.

Putin wants Kim to agree to send Russia artillery shells and anti-tank missiles, and Kim would like Russia to provide North Korea with advanced technology for satellites and nuclear-powered submarines, the officials said. Kim is also seeking food aid for his impoverished nation.

Both leaders would be on the campus of Far Eastern Federal University in Vladivostok to attend the Eastern Economic Forum, which is scheduled to run on Sunday to Sept. 13, according to the officials. Kim also plans to visit Pier 33, where naval ships from Russia’s Pacific fleet dock, they said. North Korea celebrates the anniversary of its founding on Saturday.

On Wednesday, the White House warned that Putin and Kim had exchanged letters discussing a possible arms deal, citing declassified intelligence. A White House spokesperson, John F. Kirby, said high-level talks on military cooperation between the two nations were “actively



Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un in Vladivostok, Russia, in 2019. — **Reuters**

advancing.” US officials declined to give more details on the state of personal ties between the leaders, who are considered adversaries of the United States.

The new information about a planned meeting between them goes far beyond the previous warning. The intelligence relating to the plans has not been declassified or downgraded by the United States, and the officials describing it were not authorised to discuss it. They declined to provide details on how spy agencies had collected the information.

While the White House declined to discuss the new intelligence, Adrienne Watson, a National Security Council spokesperson, acknowledged that the United States expected “leader-level diplomatic engagement” on the issue of arms sales to take place between Russia and North Korea, officially known as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

“We urge the DPRK to cease its arms negotiations with Russia and

abide by the public commitments that Pyongyang has made to not provide or sell arms to Russia,” she said in a statement after this story was published.

At other times since Russia began its full-scale attack of Ukraine, US officials have released declassified intelligence to try to dissuade North Korea, China and other countries from supplying Russia with weapons. US officials say White House warnings about planned transfers of North Korean artillery shells stopped previous cooperation between Pyongyang and Moscow.

The idea for the Russia visit came out of a trip by Sergei Shoigu, the Russian defence minister, to North Korea in July for Kim’s celebration of the 70th anniversary of the “victory” over South Korean and US Forces in the Korean War, officials said. (In reality, the three-year war halted in 1953 in a stalemate and armistice agreement, and the two Koreas are still officially at war.) — **The New York Times**

Israeli ban on Gaza exports deals economic blow

GAZA: Palestinians demanded on Tuesday that Israel lift a ban on exports from the Gaza Strip imposed over what Israel called an attempt to smuggle explosives, saying it would hit thousands of families and ruin precarious livelihoods in the blockaded enclave.

Israel said on Monday it was temporarily stopping commercial goods from leaving Gaza after inspectors found several kilogrammes of “high-quality explosives” in a shipment, hidden in the lining of clothes.

At the beachfront Al Bahar (The Sailor) restaurant and fish farm, owner Mohammad al Hajj said he used to export 20 tonnes of fish per week to Israel and the West Bank.

“The fish in fridges will decay if we can’t export it, and we will be forced to sell the fish of the farm at the lowest prices,” said Hajj, saying the jobs of 200 workers at his business were at risk unless the ban is lifted.

Around 2 million Palestinians live in the narrow Gaza Strip, the vast majority of them descendants of refugees who fled or were driven from what is now Israel at its founding in 1948.

Since the Hamas took power in the territory in 2007, it has suffered from the one of the world’s highest unemployment rates under a blockade of many goods imposed by Israel with Egyptian backing. It has also been severely damaged in four major wars and numerous other clashes between Hamas and Israel.

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said the Israeli decision “would increase the already existing tension because of continued Israeli blockade and aggression against our people”.

In Ramallah, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Palestinian economy minister Khaled Assaili demanded Israel cancel the ban which stops Gaza exports to Israel and the West Bank. — **Reuters**



Palestinian workers unload boxes of produce that were originally headed to Israel via the Kerem Shalom commercial border crossing, at a warehouse in Rafah in Gaza on Tuesday. — **AFP**

Europe to decide soon on restart of space launches

PARIS: European space officials said on Monday they face crucial timing decisions in the coming weeks on the return to flight of Europe’s flagship space launchers following a series of delays.

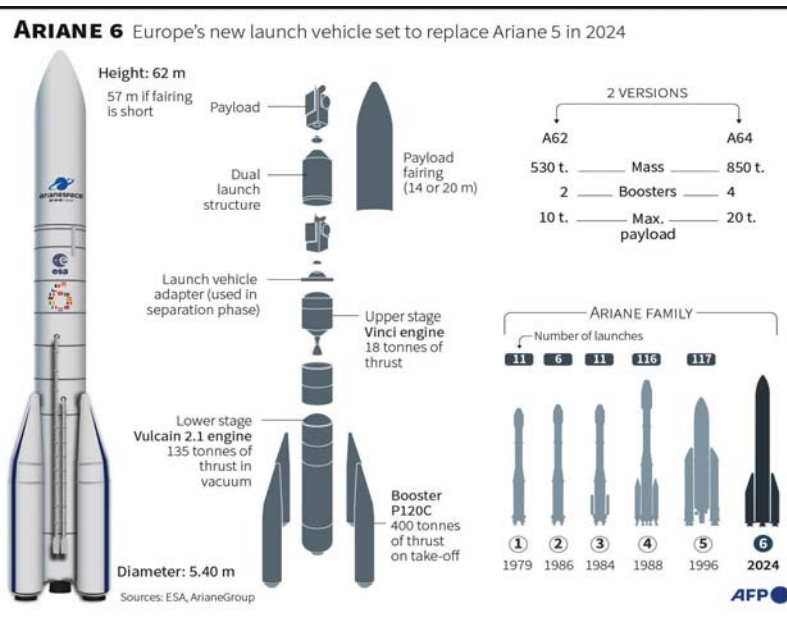
The inaugural launch of Europe’s new Ariane 6 launcher has been delayed until next year, while the failure of a test on the smaller Vega C has hampered chances of a return to service in 2023 for that rocket after it was grounded in December 2022. Europe’s third traditional path to space, the Russian Soyuz programme, was interrupted last year amid the breakdown in East-West relations following Russia’s

attack of Ukraine.

Those development have left Europe scrambling to close the gap in launch capability as competition heats up in the market for commercial launches, with the larger and modernised Ariane 6 designed to be more competitive against rivals led by Elon Musk’s SpaceX.

In a news conference, the European Space Agency said it plans to set a window for the first launch of the Ariane 6 in early October after completing a series of engine tests.

The next of these is due on Tuesday after efforts to light the



engine of the main section, at the launch site in French Guiana, were postponed on Aug 29. A separate test of the complex upper stage was carried out successfully in Germany on Friday. ESA Director General Josef Aschbacher declined to commit to a full launch in the first half of next year, but told reporters results so far pointed to a test debut “not too late” in 2024, followed by the first commercial mission about 6 months later.

Ariane 6 is being developed at a cost of 4 billion euros to succeed Ariane 5, which ended operations in July, leaving European nations with a vacuum in autonomous

access to space for the first time in more than four decades.

Italy’s Vega C was grounded in December 2022 after its second mission went wrong. Investigators blamed the launch failure on a faulty engine part and a fresh probe was launched in June after the failure of a ground test.

Aschbacher said the timing of Vega C’s return to operation would be set after the commission reports later this month.

The previous generation Vega rocket is meanwhile due to carry out its first launch since the 2022 grounding of its larger new sister model on Oct. 4. — **Reuters**

WASHINGTON

Lew named new US ambassador to Israel

US President Joe Biden on Tuesday announced former Treasury Secretary Jack Lew as his nominee for ambassador to Israel, the White House said in a statement.

Lew, if confirmed by the US Senate, will face a complicated political situation, as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pushes through a judicial overhaul opposed by many Israelis and the Biden administration.

He would succeed



Ambassador Tom Nides in the post.

In addition to Treasury secretary, Lew served under former President Barack Obama as White House chief of staff and deputy secretary of state for management and resources.

PARIS

‘France, Niger talk troops withdrawal’

France has started talks with some Niger army officials over withdrawing some troops from the African country following a coup in July, Le Monde reported on Tuesday.

At this stage, neither the number of French soldiers involved nor the timing of their departure have been decided, Le Monde said, citing several unidentified French sources close to the matter.

The talks are not being held with putsch leaders, but with



regular army officials with whom France has long cooperated, the newspaper said.

Following the coup, France, the former colonial power in Niger, said it would end military cooperation and cut all development aid to the country.

ISTANBUL

Türkiye, Greece herald ‘new era’ in ties

The top diplomats of historic rivals Türkiye and Greece on Tuesday hailed a “new era” in relations and vowed to intensify dialogue in the coming months.

The visit by Greek Foreign Minister Giorgos Gerapetritis to Ankara came with Türkiye seeking to improve its testy relations with Western allies two years into a deep economic crisis.

It follows a rare meeting between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Greek Prime



Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on the margins of the Nato summit in Vilnius in July.

Both leaders, coming off difficult election victories, then promised to build on the “positive momentum” of their brief talks.



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In brief

WASHINGTON



JILL COVID POSITIVE, PRESIDENT BIDEN TESTS NEGATIVE

US first lady Jill Biden has tested positive for Covid-19 just days before President Joe Biden, who tested negative for the virus, is due to travel to a Group of 20 summit in India, the White House said on Monday. Biden's 72-year-old wife, whose symptoms were described as mild, last had Covid in August of last year. The president, now 80, last tested positive in July 2022. "This evening, the First Lady tested positive for Covid-19," her communications director, Elizabeth Alexander, said in a statement. "She will remain at their home in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware." Biden flew back alone from Delaware on Monday evening.

WASHINGTON



EX-TRUMP ADVISER HEADS TO CONTEMPT TRIAL

Former president Donald Trump adviser Peter Navarro arrived at court on Tuesday for a trial on two misdemeanour counts of contempt of Congress, after refusing to testify or provide documents to the US congressional investigation of the 2021 attack on the Capitol. Navarro, a China hawk who advised Republican Trump on trade issues and also served on the White House Covid-19 task force, has pleaded not guilty to the charges. Jury selection will begin on Tuesday in the trial. It is unclear when opening statements will take place.

PARIS



FRENCH SCHOOLS REFUSE GIRLS WEARING ABAYA

French schools sent dozens of girls home for refusing to remove their abayas — an over-garment from the shoulders to the feet worn by Muslim women — on the first day of the school year, a government minister said on Tuesday. Defying a ban on the Muslim dress, nearly 300 girls showed up on Monday wearing an abaya, Gabriel Attal (pictured) said. Most agreed to change out of the dress, but 67 refused and were sent home, he said. The government announced last month it was banning the abaya in schools, saying it broke the rules on secularism in education that have already seen Muslim headscarves banned on the grounds they constitute a display of religious affiliation.

ASEAN leaders urge Myanmar junta to stop attacks on civilians

JAKARTA: Southeast Asian leaders strongly condemned violence and attacks on civilians in Myanmar, directly blaming the ruling junta, with host Indonesia saying at a summit on Tuesday there had been scant progress on an agreed peace plan.

Myanmar has been ravaged by deadly violence since the 2021 military coup deposed Aung San Suu Kyi's government and prompted a bloody crackdown on dissent.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) — long decried by critics as a toothless talking shop — met in the Indonesian capital Jakarta to seek a united voice on the crisis.

The leaders "urge the Myanmar Armed Forces in particular, and all related parties concerned in Myanmar to de-escalate violence and stop targeted attacks on civilians, houses and public facilities, such as schools, hospitals, markets," they said in a 19-point statement seen by AFP.

"We strongly condemned the continued acts of violence in Myanmar." Rights groups have accused the junta of air strikes on rebel strongholds and civilian infrastructure.

Diplomatic attempts to solve the crisis have been fruitless, with the junta ignoring the five-point peace plan agreed with ASEAN members two years ago



Philippine's President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Thailand's Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sarun Charoensuwan, Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Laos' Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone, Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Manet, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, and East Timor's Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao hold hands for a family photo before the start of the ASEAN Summit on Tuesday. — Reuters

as well as international criticism, and refusing to engage with its opponents.

An earlier draft statement seen by AFP — issued by Indonesia with input from all members and thrashed out over several difficult meetings between foreign ministers — had left its Myanmar section blank.

That illustrated the lack of consensus in the 10-member bloc

on dealing with a junta whose leaders remain banned from high-level ASEAN meetings.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo called for unity and cooperation "for peace and prosperity" in the region but his top diplomat said the peace process agreed with the junta to end the violence remained stuck.

"The conclusion is that there is no significant progress in the

implementation of the five-point consensus," Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi told reporters.

She also confirmed the Philippines would chair ASEAN instead of Myanmar in 2026, after Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said Manila was ready to step in to replace the junta rulers earlier on Tuesday.

Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun

confirmed it would be replaced as chair.

"Myanmar will skip ASEAN chairmanship in 2026," he said without giving further details.

Myanmar previously withdrew from the ASEAN chair in 2006 over a potential boycott by the United States, the European Union and other international powers. The chair went to the Philippines that year. Myanmar chaired the bloc in 2014 under Thein Sein, the country's first civilian head of state in more than 50 years.

Another regional diplomat said some ASEAN members were pushing for the junta to be re-invited to the meetings.

Beijing's actions in the South China Sea — which it claims almost in its entirety — were also to feature prominently in discussions, according to the earlier draft communique.

China released a new official map last week claiming sovereignty over the majority of the South China Sea, deepening the rift between Beijing and Southeast Asian countries over the waterway.

The map sparked sharp rebukes from countries around the region, including Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Leaders were to express concern about "land reclamations, activities, serious incidents" in the waterway, the draft communique said. — AFP

India astir over rumoured plans to change country's name



A security personnel stands guard in front of a G20 India summit hoarding in New Delhi on Tuesday. — AFP

NEW DELHI: India was buzzing with speculation on Tuesday over rumoured plans to scrap official usage of the country's English name, after a state-issued invite sent to world leaders referred to it as "Bharat".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has worked to remove lingering symbols of British rule from India's urban landscape, political institutions and history books, but its next move could be the biggest such action yet.

Modi himself typically refers to India as "Bharat", a word dating back to ancient Hindu scriptures written in Sanskrit, and one of two official names for the country under its constitution.

Members of his ruling party have previously campaigned against using the country's better-known moniker, India, which has its roots in Western antiquity and was imposed during the British conquest.

This weekend India hosts the G20 summit of world leaders, capped with a state dinner that invitation cards said would be hosted by the "President of Bharat".

The government has called a special session of parliament for later in the month while remaining tight-lipped about its legislative agenda.

But broadcaster News18 said unnamed government sources had told it that BJP lawmakers would put forward a special resolution to give precedence to the name "Bharat".

Rumours of the plan were enough to spark a mix of opposition lawmakers and enthusiastic support from other quarters. "I hope the government will not be so foolish as to completely dispense with 'India,'" Shashi Tharoor of the opposition Congress party said on X.

— AFP

Exodus begins at drenched Burning Man party in US desert

BLACK ROCK CITY: Thousands of revellers stuck in the mud for days at the Burning Man festival in the US state of Nevada were told they could finally trek home on Monday after torrential rain had prompted shelter-in-place orders.

With the sun shining on the colourful makeshift community of 70,000 people called Black Rock City, the roads opened on Monday afternoon, kicking off the official exit process known as the "Exodus." "Exodus operations have officially begun in Black Rock City," the festival said in a statement on its website. "The driving ban has been lifted." Organisers called on the estimated 64,000 remaining visitors to delay departing from the site — a dried-up lake bed in a remote patch of the Nevada desert — until Tuesday to avoid massive congestion on the way out.

As of early Tuesday morning, organisers said the wait time to leave was around eight hours, and reported an accident causing a road closure the previous night.

"If you can, please get a good night's sleep and leave later," the organisers wrote on social media.

Festival-goers had been stranded after torrential rains, described as two to three months' worth in the space of hours, came down on Friday night and Saturday, turning the venue into a murky quagmire.

So-called "Burners" wearing trademark outlandish outfits trudged through the thick, sticky mud with plastic bags as boots or with their bare feet.

Some left on foot, hiking for



Vehicles are seen departing the Burning Man festival in Black Rock City, Nevada, on Tuesday. — Reuters

hours in the middle of the night to make it to the nearest road and hitch a ride back to civilisation. The closest airport is a three-hour drive away in Reno.

The festival — for which tickets cost hundreds of dollars — culminates each year with the ceremonial burning of a 40-foot (12-metre) effigy. The main event was postponed until Monday evening, when local media reported it was marked by fireworks and explosions, to the whoops and cheers of a smaller-than-usual crowd.

For many attendees, the rain and mud were not enough to spoil the party.

David Packard from the city of South Portland in Maine said other campers let him and his friends into their trailers when it started pouring. "There was a brief double rainbow that provided us with a lot of energy," Packard said. "My feet are dry and I'm warm. So I'm happy." Packard also said

Burning Man gave him precious time with his brother.

"I had an amazing burn. I got to spend an amazing amount of quality time with my brother," he added. "It was nice to be very close and to get closer this week." But David Date, a participant, complained on Monday on CNN about people fleeing and leaving gear and trash behind — breaking the festival's core principle of "no-trace" sustainability.

"They're leaving their entire campsites behind, ditching their cars, their trash, their tents," Date said. "Everyone's got to stick it out." All events at the annual counterculture gathering were cancelled when rain tore down structures for dance parties, art installations and other entertainment.

Dozens of vehicles, mostly recreational motor homes, were stuck in the mud on the roads out, presenting a major logistical challenge. — AFP

Literacy for a world in transition

The development of a literate society forms the basis of a knowledge economy. Literacy enables people to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. After all, a literate society that talks and shares ideas is more creative and effective. It finally helps guide the nation towards development and peace.

Although the definitions of literacy vary across different cultures and contexts and limit the ability to read and write, or spell, listen and speak, they are constantly shifting as reading currently “incorporates complex visual and digital media as well as printed material”.

Miriam-Webster Dictionary defines literacy as “the quality or state of being literate: educated... able to read and write.” Unesco, however, defines it as the “ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts”.

Unesco celebrates September 8 every year as International Day of Literacy “... to remind the international community of the importance of literacy for individuals, communities and societies, and the need for intensified efforts towards more literate societies.” In other words, International Literacy Day refers to the eradication of illiteracy in every local community around the world.

Although progress has been made in improving literacy rates in the more than fifty years since the first International Literacy Day, illiteracy remains a global problem. Data from Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys show that many children around the world today are not equipped with foundational reading and numeracy skills that prepare them for the world beyond school.

There is a gender gap in the global literacy rate. Although literacy rates have generally increased worldwide for both men and women, males are on average more literate than females. As of 2020, about 90 per cent of men and a little over 83 per cent of women in the world were literate.

According to data from the Unesco Institute for Statistics, more than 86



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The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

THE NEW SCHOOL EDUCATION LAW NOT ONLY ENSURES THE RIGHT TO BASIC EDUCATION TO ALL, BUT ALSO GUARANTEES THE HIGHEST QUALITY OF EDUCATION AT ALL TIMES

per cent of the world’s population know how to read and write compared to 68 per cent in 1979. Despite this, worldwide at least 763 million adults still cannot read and write, two-thirds of them women, and 250 million children are failing to acquire basic literacy skills.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused the worst disruption to education in a century, 617 million children and teenagers had not reached minimum reading levels.

Literacy, whether it is through formal school education, is the first step of education. For preparing a new society education becomes an essential part and source. It imbibes confidence in a person not only for further learning but for entire life. It sows seeds of an “analytical viewpoint.” It leads to self-learning.

The Sultanate of Oman has long considered education as among the most essential pillars of sustainable development. The country’s leadership believes that quality education leads to greater prosperity and abundance, improved health, and promotion of equality in society.

Reports indicate that education will become an important driver of Oman’s GDP growth with its current share of 4.9 per cent projected to climb to 6.2 per cent by the end of the 10th Five-Year Plan which will end in 2025.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation ensures the promotion of the higher education system, such that it meets the requirements of sustainable development and achieves the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The New School Education Law, promulgated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in the second quarter of the current year not only ensures the right to primary education to all children in, but it also guarantees the highest quality of education at all times. It values the role of the upbringing of generations and underlines the need for developing the education line with the goals of the future.

Oman was listed by Unesco as one of the significant partners engaged in the Global Programme of Action on Education for Sustainable Development.

SPECTACULAR MURMURATIONS



Gulls fly in front of the moon as thousands of wading birds, including Knot and Oystercatcher, move onto dry sandbanks during the month’s highest tides at The Wash estuary, near Snettisham in Norfolk, Britain, on Tuesday. – Reuters

India’s quiet rise...

China’s sharp economic slowdown has raised alarm bells around the world. But it has also thrown into relief the rise of another demographic powerhouse next door. The Indian economy grew at an impressive 7.8 per cent annual rate in the second quarter of 2023, and the country recently reached an important milestone by becoming the first to land a spacecraft on the Moon’s potentially water-rich south pole. And, India’s ascent, unlike China’s, has not been accompanied by an increasingly assertive foreign policy or an appetite for other countries’ territory.

As India’s geopolitical, economic, and cultural clout grows, so does its global footprint. China’s “decline,” as some have begun to call the conclusion of the country’s four-decade-long economic boom, opens new opportunities for the Indian economy and other developing and emerging countries.

Earlier this year, India reached another milestone when its population officially surpassed that of China, which had been the world’s most populous country for more than 300 years. While China’s shrinking, rapidly aging population is likely to impede economic growth



Brahma Chellaney

The writer is Professor of Strategic Studies at the New Delhi-based Center for Policy Research and Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin

WHILE INDIA APPEARS STABLE AND RESURGENT UNDER MODI, ITS FUTURE WILL DEPEND ON ITS ABILITY TO MAINTAIN POLITICAL STABILITY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

and may curtail its geopolitical ambitions, India – one of the world’s youngest countries, with a median age of 28.2 – is poised to reap a huge demographic dividend.

But the driving force behind India’s emergence as a major global power is its rapid economic growth. While India’s GDP is still smaller than China’s, the country is currently the world’s fastest-growing major economy and is projected to account for 12.9 per cent of global growth over the next five years, surpassing the United States’ 11.3 per cent share.

In addition to fuelling a consumption boom, India’s youthful population is also driving innovation, as evidenced by the country’s world-class information economy and its recent moon landing, which the country managed to achieve despite a national space budget equivalent to roughly 6 per cent of what the US spends on space missions. Having already surpassed the United Kingdom, its former colonial ruler, India’s GDP is poised to overtake that of Japan and Germany to become the world’s third-largest economy by 2030, behind the

US and China.

Given its increasingly unstable neighbourhood, it should come as no surprise that India has the world’s third-largest defence budget. The deepening strategic alliance between China and Pakistan underscores India’s precarious position as the only country bordering two nuclear-armed revisionist states with expansionist ambitions. Moreover, for the past three years, India has been locked in a tense military standoff with China along its Himalayan border. Bilateral relations, marked by intermittent clashes

in the Tibet-Ladakh border region, are at their lowest point in decades.

By confronting China despite the risk of a full-scale war, India has challenged Chinese power in a way no other country has done in this century. But despite leaning towards forging closer ties with the West, India remains hesitant to enter into formal military alliances with Western countries.

Western powers are partly to blame. US President Joe Biden’s reluctance to comment on the Sino-Indian military standoff, let alone openly support India, has sent a clear signal that India is

responsible for its own defence. Given that the country’s future growth hinges on its ability to defend itself against external threats, India will likely step up its efforts to modernise its conventional armed forces and enhance its nuclear deterrence.

The escalating geopolitical rivalry between China and India could also impede efforts to unite the Global South and transform the BRICS group into a credible alternative to the G20 and G7. The BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) recently agreed to expand the group by adding six new members: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Ethiopia, Argentina, and Iran. Given the 11 members’ divergent interests, BRICS+ will likely find it even harder to reach consensus on any major issue.

Meanwhile, China’s economic slump could prompt President Xi Jinping to double down on his expansionist agenda. Biden recently characterised the stagnating Chinese economy as a “ticking time bomb,” warning that, “When bad folks have problems, they do bad things.” @Project Syndicate, 2023



India reached another milestone when its population officially surpassed that of China.

sport

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FUJI, Japan: Omani sports star Ahmad al Harthy makes a welcome return to race action just a few days from now, with his first ever visit to the legendary Fuji Speedway in Japan for round six of the FIA World Endurance Championship season.

With more than eight weeks having passed since FIA WEC went into a lengthy mid-year break, Al Harthy and the Oman Racing with TF Sport squad are relishing being back in action for the six-hour race this coming Sunday, September 10.

Before then, there will be the usual trio of free practice sessions ahead of qualifying – the latter getting underway on Saturday, September 9. All track time will be a vital experience for Al Harthy on his maiden visit to the spectacular Far East track, situated in the foothills of Mount Fuji, and the two-time GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup Pro-Am Champion can't wait to get started.

Fuji is renowned as one of global motorsport's most exciting challenges, and this coming weekend's FIA WEC encounter around the 4.5-kilometre (2.8-mile) circuit carries great importance too as the penultimate event of Al Harthy's debut campaign in World Endurance.

Coinciding with his maiden trip to Japan, round six is also where the Omani and team-mates Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood are hoping to return to the podium battle in the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS liveried No.25 Aston Martin Vantage GTE.

Having raced to excellent GTE Am podium finishes at Belgium's Spa-Francorchamps in April, third place, and in the crown jewel 24H Le Mans in France in June, a season-best runner-up placing, the squad rocketed into second in the GTE Am Championship points table.

Unfortunately, the most recent event



2023 FIA WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP GTE AM DRIVER STANDINGS:

3rd Ahmad al Harthy / Michael Dinan / Charlie Eastwood, 65pts

2023 FIA WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP GTE AM TEAM STANDINGS:

3rd Oman Racing with TF Sport, 65pts

at flat-out Italian track Monza in July was compromised for Oman Racing when a disparity in top speed between the Aston Martin and the rival Porsche and Ferrari entries prevented anything higher than a seventh place – despite some excellent driving.

With hopes the Balance of Performance gradings will be on a par with those Oman Racing had to work with at Spa and Le Mans, Al Harthy is as focused and committed as ever to delivering his absolute best at a true 'bucket list' track for any international racing driver. Going into the sixth event of the season, Al Harthy and Oman Racing are third in the respective championship standings.

Ahmad Al Harthy:

"It's been a long break from action, so I'm more excited than ever to be racing again at the weekend and especially with my first ever visit to Fuji. It's an incredible track, with so much history in global

motorsport, and it really is going to be a privilege to race there in FIA WEC. Even though we've not been racing for the past two months, the team has been busy working hard behind the scenes.

"Monza was a disappointment with the speed differential we experienced, especially off the back of two incredible weekends at Spa and Le Mans, so we really are hoping to be able to battle on a level footing again with our main rivals at Fuji. With only two races to go in our first season in FIA WEC, it's a very important time as we try and push for a top three championship finish."

The first free practice session at Fuji will take place at 11.00 local time on September 8, with session two following at 15.30. On September 9, the third practice will begin at 10.20 with GTE Am qualifying scheduled to start at 14.40. On September 10, the 6 Hours of Fuji will get underway at 11.00 (06.00 Oman time).

Red Warriors take on Palestine in friendly today

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

Oman national football team will face Palestine on Wednesday in a friendly match as part of the underway domestic camp in Muscat. The match will kick off at 6:45 pm at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The warm-up match will be vital for the coaching staff to assess the fitness and physical conditions besides technical prowess of the players. Head coach Branko Ivankovic and his team will look to execute several tactics and strategies employed in the recent training sessions at today's preparatory game.

The Palestine match will end the domestic camp which began on Friday and run for one week. The internal camp will be followed by a high-profile camp in the USA as the team delegation will travel on Friday morning. The external preparatory camp in USA will feature a tight friendly match against the USA team, ranked 11th in the world, in Minnesota, USA, on September 12. Both camps took place after



completion of three rounds of the top-tier league. Moreover, the camps in Muscat and Minnesota will act as crucial for the team's preparation for the preliminary Joint Qualification for the Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 besides the 2024 AFC Asian Cup which kicks off on January 12, 2024 in Qatar.

The 69-year-old coach is expected to give chances to most of the players to evaluate their

performances in the upcoming friendly matches. The Croatian coach will work on finding the suitable alternatives for striker Salah al Yahyaei who is currently suffering an injury and cannot attend the Palestine match alongside Motaz Saleh who will be away for the same reason. Moreover, the matches against Palestine and USA are expected to raise the level of players ahead of the key assignments.

VITAL GAME

Ivankovic affirmed in the press meet ahead of Palestine match on Wednesday that this game is vital for the team in the technical preparatory plan for the main forthcoming events. "There are few friendly matches and this fixture is very important for the team. This is the initial gathering for the team after the CAFA nations Cup in Uzbekistan. I am fully satisfied on the team despite

some injuries," he added.

Highlighting on the injury status of Salah al Yahyaei and Motaz Saleh, Branko said: "Salah will continue his recovery programme with the medical team while Motaz will return to his team. Defender Juma al Habsi also is injured and still the medical team is awaiting the scanning reports to decide on the injury situation," he clarified.

The coach stated that the new season has just started and the

players have joined their respective teams. "These injuries can happen specially after late joining of some players. It is not easy to call for new players in a short time due to the long process required for the travel arrangement and obtaining the visa," he concluded.

On the other hand, the head coach of Palestine team Mukram Dabdoob opined that Oman team is one of the consistent teams in Asia. "The friendly match against Oman will be a good chance for us to gear up for the upcoming events. I am looking to utilise it fully regarding the technical outcomes from this game," he added.

The Red Warriors' campaign in the joint qualifiers will begin in November. Oman, ranked 72nd in the world, will face Kyrgyz Republic, Malaysia, Chinese Taipei/Timor Leste in Group D of the joint qualifiers. The Red Warriors will launch their challenge at the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 finals in January 2024 at Group F which comprised Asian favourites Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Kyrgyzstan.

INDIA THRASH NEPAL TO REACH ASIA CUP SUPER 4

KANDY, Sri Lanka: Skipper Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill remained unbeaten as India hammered Nepal by 10 wickets in a rain-hit match to reach the Super Four stage of the Asia Cup on Monday.

Chasing a DLS revised target of 145 in 23 overs after a rain interruption, India eased home with 17 balls to spare in Pallekele.

Rohit finished 74 not out and Gill was unbeaten on 67.

Nepal were bowled out for 230 after Aasif Sheikh top-scored with 58.

The 50-over tournament, a tune-up for the upcoming ODI World Cup in India, has been affected by rain, forcing organisers to discuss a venue change for upcoming matches in Colombo.

India's opening match against Pakistan, who were the first team to move into the next round, was abandoned after just one innings.

In their second outing, India were 17-0 in 2.1 overs when heavy rain forced the players off the ground and the field was totally covered. Ground staff worked tirelessly to make the ground ready for play again.

Rohit and Gill came out roaring and hit a string of boundaries to reach their respective half-centuries and race to the target. Rohit smashed five sixes in his 59-ball knock.

"We can't really look too much into these two games, one was washed out, but luckily we got to bat in the first game and bowl in this one," man of the match Rohit said.

"We haven't been at our best, but a few guys are coming out after months out of the game. Once we move ahead in the Super Fours, there's no room for complacency."

'PROUD OF THEM'

Nepal, who are still finding their feet in international cricket and got ODI status in 2018, impressed with the bat as Sheikh's fifty helped the team to a respectable total.

Nepal lost their way after a strong start by Sheikh and Kushal Bhurtel (38) but the middle and lower-order fought back.

Number eight Sompal Kami smashed 48 before the innings ended after 48.2 overs. Spinner Ravindra Jadeja and fast bowler Mohammed Siraj took three wickets each for India.

"Our openers did a very good job for us. In the middle order we could have done better. We were maybe 30-40 short," Nepal skipper Rohit Paudel said.

"In the last 4-5 months our lower order has done a great job, we are very proud of them."

Rohit won the toss and elected to field first, but Bhurtel and Sheikh made quick runs with help from the Indian fielders, who dropped three catches in the first five overs. Shreyas Iyer dropped a regulation chance at slip, Virat Kohli spilled a sitter at short cover and wicketkeeper Ishan Kishan let the ball through his gloves.

Bhurtel smashed Siraj for four and a huge six from successive balls to keep up the charge and raise the noise among a group of Nepal fans at a largely empty ground. He smashed another six off Shardul Thakur, but fell caught behind to the next delivery.

Siraj sent back Sheikh soon after his fifty to dent the Nepal batting further, but after a rain delay Dipendra Singh Airee, who hit 29, and Kami put on 50 runs for the seventh wicket to frustrate the opposition bowlers. — AFP



Indian captain Rohit Sharma plays a shot during the Asia Cup 2023 ODI match against Nepal at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy. — AFP

Camel race season to start on Sept 12

AWARDS WORTH 1M RIALS IN THE OFFING



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by Oman Camel Racing Federation (OCRF) announced the annual camel races programme for the new season 2023-24.

OCRF disclosed the details through the press conference headed by Shaikh Said bin Saud al Ghufaili, president of the OCRF on Monday. With more than one million Omani rials as awards, the season is divided into 18 general races. The season will start on September 12 and conclude on May 4.

Al Ghufaili, OCRF President, explained that "this season will be distinguished by holding 18 races, including flat race, show race 'Ardah', camel beauty 'Muzayna' and camel milk competition 'Muhallaba'. Also, the competition venues and dates were carefully chosen in order to enrich Oman's heritage."

"Each participant has the chance to benefit from the competitions award which is exceeding one million rials,

the races rounds this year will divided into two field races on the same day, at Royal Camel Corps in Barka and Al Bashayer Square in Adam with 12 races in each field. In addition will be six races supported by Occidental Oman and Shell, with three races for each in Haima, Ibri and Adam," he concluded.

CAMEL RACE SEASON SCHEDULE

(Race No, Date, Competition, Location)

1. Sept 12, 13, 14 – Flat Race 1 (Barka and Al Bashayer)
2. Sept 25, 26, 27 – Flat Race 2 (Barka and Al Bashayer)
3. Oct 10, 11, 12 – Flat Race 3 (Barka and Al Bashayer)
4. Oct 15 to 19 – Muzayna 1 (Barka)
5. Oct 31, Nov 1, 2 – Flat Race 4 (Barka and Al Bashayer)
6. Nov 21, 22, 23 – Flat Race 5 (Barka and Al Bashayer)
7. Nov 24 to 30 – Muhallaba (Thamrait)
8. Dec 12, 13, 14 – Flat Race 6 (Barka and Al Bashayer)
9. Jan 7 to 11, 2024 – Ardah (Barka)
10. Jan 22 to 25, 2024 – OCRF final race (Barka)
11. Feb 4 to 8, 2024 – Muzayna 2 (Al Musannah)
12. May 3, 4, 2024 – Race for Ftamean (Sinaw)
- Races supported by OXY company**
13. Sept 30, 2024 – Flat Race 1 (Hayma)
14. Oct 5, 2024 – Flat Race 2 (Adam)
15. Nov 8, 2024 – Flat Race 3 (Ibri)
- Races supported by Shell company**
16. Oct 25, 2024 – Flat Race 1 (Haima)
17. Dec 6, 2024 – Flat Race 2 (Adam)

OAA wraps up events at Khareef Dhofar Festival

SALALAH: As the Khareef Dhofar Festival sweeps through the serene landscapes of Salalah, the Oman Automobile Association (OAA) was set to rev up the festivities with a series of thrilling and captivating events. The association's commitment to promoting motorsports and adventure tourism is on full display as they organised a variety of exciting activities during this year's festival.

The festival, known for its lush greenery and pleasant climate, provides the perfect backdrop for automotive enthusiasts and adventurers to unite and celebrate their passions.

August saw a month full of excitement as the OAA hosted a series of events. It started with Karting Circuit Experience (July 15 – September 2).

At Salalah Celebrations Square, the motorsport extravaganza kicked off with the Karting Circuit Experience, which was an exhilarating adventure for individuals aged 5 and above.

In the Digital Room at Salalah Celebrations Square, the Digital Motorsports event took place, running from July 15 to August 31. Here, motorsport enthusiasts indulged in the world of virtual racing and competed against each other in thrilling driving simulators, providing an immersive experience for both



casual gamers and competitive drivers. It was an unforgettable summer of motorsport excitement.

Dhofar Al Majad Caravan 8 (August 2): On August 2, the 4x4 Club did a captivating showcase of the governorate's natural beauty for car enthusiasts.

Discover Salalah (August 6-10): From August 6 to 10, the Nizwa Bikers Team led the way in exploring Salalah's hidden gems during the Discover Salalah event.

Dhofar International Bike Race 2 (August 10-12): Heart-pounding action unfolded from August 10 to 12 as Dhofar Motorsports presented the Dhofar International Bike Race 2, a thrilling bike race against the festival's scenic backdrop.

Off-Road Adventure Trip (August 13-25): Adventure seekers were treated from August 13 to 25, as they joined the Axis 3 Overlanders for an adrenaline-



pumping journey through rugged terrains.

Promotional Tour to Salalah (August 18-22): From August 18 to 22, the GTR Club invited festival-goers on a promotional tour of Salalah, showcasing the city's beauty.

Motorcycle Trip to Salalah (August 25 - September 1): Oman Riders club took to the open road from August 25 to September 1 trip to Salalah stopping at the beautiful scenery.

OAA Managing Director

Suleiman al Rawahi expresses his pride in the association's role in making these events possible.

"We are truly honoured to be a part of the Khareef Dhofar Festival once again. These events embody our commitment to promoting motorsports and adventure tourism in Oman. We believe that the combination of our stunning landscapes and the enthusiasm of our participants will make this festival a memorable experience for all."

"The association's dedication to creating unforgettable moments for automotive enthusiasts and adventure seekers remains unwavering."

The Khareef Dhofar Motorsport series has been partnered with and sponsored by the following organisations: Dhofar Municipality, Shell Oman Marketing Company, Redbull Mobile, Salam Air.

Bosher Club squad completes US tour

MUSCAT: Bosher Sports Centre (BSC), a part of Bosher Club has successfully returned back to Oman with achievements of 6 cricket matches played in Houston (2 matches) and Dallas (4 matches) against the North Texas Cricket Association (NTCA) in the United States.

Fourteen members of the Under-17 team formed by BSC has marked a milestone of being the first cricket academy from the Gulf region to visit the USA. The NTCA and BSC are in long-term cricketing tie-ups and will look forward to host in future all around Texas and adjacent States of USA.

BSC is also looking to host NTCA to visit Oman for similar cricketing tours to play matches. The tour which started from July 27 to August 7, 2023 has given good international exposure for good young talented cricketers of Oman which will boost their domestic season which is going to start soon.

Head coach of BSC, Sandesh Dhuri, who has conducted similar cricketing tours for young cricketers in countries of Australia,

United Kingdom, Sri Lanka, India, UAE and Qatar, added USA as another feather in the cap of overseas tours by BSC with 16th international tour since its inception from 2013 onwards.

Cricketers like Anas, Maaz, Vihaan Apte, Dev Rana has shown great talent in their skills and performances on the USA tour and has come up with great achievements in the six matches played.

The captain on the tour, Master Nimish Sandesh Dhuri before the travel has mentioned that such tours gives lots of international team building concepts and learnings to make them understand the game better in different conditions.

With an average of 35 runs in 6 matches and taking 12 wickets on the tour, Nimish Dhuri has been judged as the Player of the Tournament in USA.

The NTCA has been very impressed on the overall structure of tour management and the cricket played. The NTCA is keen to bring in BSC on large numbers to form the senior team to participate in USA in the future.



PEGULA,
JABEUR CRASH
OUT TO KEYS
AND ZHENG

Germany's Alexander Zverev reacts during the round of 16 match against Italy's Jannik Sinner. – AFP

Spain's Carlos Alcaraz hits a return to Italy's Matteo Arnaldi. – AFP

USA's Madison Keys waves to the crowd after her match against USA's Jessica Pegula. – USA Today Sports



Alcaraz surges into last eight

NEW YORK: Carlos Alcaraz surged into the quarterfinals of the US Open on Monday as upsets dominated the women's draw with Ons Jabeur and Jessica Pegula becoming the latest highly ranked players to go crashing out.

Defending champion Alcaraz, who has only dropped one set on his journey into the last eight, produced a dominant display to overwhelm Italian world No.61 Matteo Arnaldi, winning 6-3, 6-3, 6-4 in 1hr 57min.

Alcaraz will face 12th seed Alexander Zverev in Wednesday's quarterfinals after the 2020 US Open finalist from Germany defeated Italian sixth seed Jannik Sinner in a five-set duel tinged with controversy.

Zverev, who is returning to his best form after a gruesome injury at the French Open last year that forced a six-month lay-off, downed Sinner 6-4, 3-6, 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 on the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

The 4hr 41min battle, which wrapped at 1.39am local time, saw an ugly incident in the fourth set when Zverev complained of a 'Hitler phrase' being shouted from the stands as he prepared to serve.

"He just said the most famous Hitler phrase there is in this world," Zverev told the umpire. "This is unbelievable."

A male fan was subsequently identified as the alleged culprit and ejected from the arena before Zverev went on to seal victory.

"I love when fans are loud, I love when fans are emotional but I think me being German, and not really proud of that history, it's not really a great thing to do," Zverev said of the incident afterwards.

"If I just don't react I think it's bad from my side."

In other men's matches on Monday, eighth-seeded Russian Andrey Rublev advanced with a 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 defeat of Britain's Jack Draper.

Rublev will now face an all-Russian quarterfinal against close friend Daniil Medvedev, the third-seeded 2021 US Open champion who punched his ticket to the last eight with a 2-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-2 defeat of Australian 13th seed Alex de Minaur.

Rublev, who has known Medvedev since childhood, is godfather to his quarterfinal opponent's daughter.

PEGULA SUNK BY FRIENDLY FIRE

In the women's draw meanwhile, more seeds bit the dust a day after world number one and defending champion Iga Swiatek was sent packing in the fourth round.

American third seed Jessica Pegula was routed in straight sets by compatriot and friend Madison Keys, while Tunisia's fifth seed Jabeur — beaten in last year's final — was ousted 6-2, 6-4 by China's Zheng Qinwen.

Pegula's campaign came to an abrupt halt in front of a packed Arthur Ashe Stadium as 2017 US Open finalist Keys recorded a dominant 6-1, 6-3 win in just 61 minutes.

Pegula was left with no answer as Keys unleashed a stream of 21 winners to her six.

Keys also punished her friend's shaky serve, breaking her five times on her way to wrapping up a comfortable victory.

"It's always tough having to play a friend but we've been doing it our whole lives at this point," Keys, 28, said.

The 17th-seeded Keys will now face Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova of the Czech Republic in the quarterfinals on Wednesday.

Ninth seed Vondrousova booked her place in the last eight with a battling win over unseeded American Peyton Stearns, coming from a set down to win 6-7 (3/7), 6-3, 6-2.

Jabeur meanwhile, who has been struggling with flu since arriving in New York, finally saw her luck run out after scrapping her way to three-set victories in her previous two games.

The Tunisian simply had no answer to 23rd seed Zheng's blend of power and precision, with the 20-year-old from Shiyan looking far sharper than her weary opponent.

"Right now I feel just super happy and excited to play in a big stadium. I had a really good performance today," said Zheng.

Zheng is China's first US Open quarterfinalist since Wang Qiang in 2019. Two-time major champion Li Na reached the semi-finals in New York in 2013 and Peng Shuai did the same a year later.

Zheng's quarterfinal assignment is a daunting date with second seed Aryna Sabalenka, who celebrated her rise to the pinnacle of women's

tennis by routing Russia's Daria Kasatkina 6-1, 6-3 to secure her last eight berth.

Swiatek's exit on Sunday guarantees that the 25-year-old Belarusian will become the new world number one when the latest global rankings are released next week.

"It means a lot to me," Sabalenka said of her No 1 ranking after defeating Kasatkina.

"I've been pushing myself all this year to reach this goal. It's unbelievable, it's something crazy, I still can't believe it." —AFP

US OPEN QUARTER LINE-UPS	
Men	Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x1) v Alexander Zverev (GER x12); Daniil Medvedev (RUS x3) v Andrey Rublev (RUS x8); Frances Tiafoe (USA x10) v Ben Shelton (USA); Taylor Fritz (USA x9) v Novak Djokovic (SRB x2)
Women	Jelena Ostapenko (LAT x20) v Coco Gauff (USA x6); Sorana Cirstea (ROU x30) v Karolina Muchova (CZE x10); Marketa Vondrousova (CZE x9) v Madison Keys (USA x17); Zheng Qinwen (CHN x23) v Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x2)

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Oman’s startup ecosystem valued at \$301 million

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

The Omani startup ecosystem is currently valued at \$301 million, according to a recent report from The Startup Genome, a global startup research organisation. The report identified ecommerce, clean technology and financial technology (fintech) as the most lucrative industries for startups and investors in Oman. According to the report, the Omani ecommerce market is

predicted to reach \$868 million in value by 2025. Investments in Oman’s clean energy sector are targeted at \$140 billion in green hydrogen alone, as a result of the country committing to achieving Net Zero by 2050. Furthermore, in regards to fintechs, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has been actively supporting the development of financial startups. In collaboration with Omantel, CBO is offering Fintech accelerators to develop promising startups.



The accelerator aims to support startups “through mentorship, training, networking and fundraising support.” The total value of venture capital funding in tech startups amounted to \$28 million from 2018 to 2022. Furthermore, according to the report, Oman is ranked amongst the top ten countries in the region in terms of affordable talent and funding. In 2022, the Programme for Promising Omani Startups was established, as part of the

government’s efforts to advance local capabilities in innovation and creativity, and increase the competitiveness of the Omani economy. The programme aims to aid the development of innovative startups by providing owners with the necessary support, and facilitating local and global investments. Additionally, the programme also aims to create legal and regulatory frameworks that support emerging startups.

Oman’s OQ Group posts revenue of RO 5.8 billion for H1 2023

KEYTRENDS: European geopolitical crises, oil price decline weigh on energy giant’s first-half earnings; Sale Purchase Agreement signed for 40% partial divestment in Blocks 60, 48

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

OQ Group, the integrated global energy conglomerate of the Sultanate of Oman, has posted



revenues of RO 5.888 billion for the first half of this year, versus earnings of RO 7.734 billion for the corresponding period of 2022. Announcing its condensed consolidated interim financial

statements for H1 2023, the wholly state-owned energy group — part of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — said the decline in revenue was “mainly driven by a decrease in crude oil prices and decrease in oil price margins of its downstream (business).” “Furthermore, the geopolitical crises in Europe contributed to the increase of gas prices, which put European businesses in a stressed condition,” the Group further stated. While revenue from the Group’s domestic operations

totalled around RO 1.395 billion, the lion’s share of RO 4.492 billion came from its overseas operations. Spanning 17 countries, OQ’s operations cover the entire value chain from exploration and production of oil and gas, refineries, and petrochemicals to marketing and distribution of end-user products reaching more than 60 countries worldwide. Total assets amount to around RO 12 billion in value presently. Significantly, profit after tax plummeted to RO 424.767 million during the first half

of this year, down from RO 822.461 million in H1 2022. Gross profit fell to RO 623.342 million this year, down from RO 982.303 million a year earlier. Cost of sales was lower at RO 5.265 billion, down from RO 6.752 billion in H1 2022. Total comprehensive income for the period declined to RO 394.564 million, versus RO 965.942 million in H1 2022. Operating profit stood at RO 561.354 million, against RO 962.332 million in H1 last year. In a significant revelation, the

report referenced a Sale Purchase Agreement signed by OQ for partial divestment of 40 per cent interest in Block 60 and Block 48, following Board and shareholders’ approval. “The transaction is now awaiting approval from regulatory authorities. The total sale consideration is RO 548 million subject to adjustment for the period between the effective date (1 January 2023) and the date of the Royal Decree. Management anticipates executing transaction before the end of 2023,” it added.

OQGN bullish about post IPO dividend payments

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), the state-owned gas transporter that announced its intention to float a 49-per cent stake on the Omani bourse later this year, is strongly optimistic about its financial performance going forward. The company anticipates issuing a dividend for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2024. This dividend will be determined based on the greater of two factors: 90 per cent of the company’s profits for the year ending on December 31, 2024, or a five-per cent increase over the total dividends paid in 2023. Speaking at Monday’s ‘Intention to Float’ event, Khalid al Qassabi, Vice-President of Finance at OQGN, said the company’s confidence is also driven by the solid financials it has achieved over the past few years, despite the disruption caused by the pandemic. OQGN, part of OQ Group, is mapping a roadmap for dividend payouts in the financial landscape of 2023 and beyond. The corporation has announced its dividend intentions, stating that the first payout of RO 33 million will be made around January 2024 for the first nine months of 2023. Following that, a second dividend payout of RO 11 million is scheduled in April 2024 for the fourth quarter of 2023. Looking ahead to 2025, OQ intends to pay dividends equal to 90 per cent of profits for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2025, or a five-per cent increase above dividends paid in 2024. Commenting on the stock split announced



recently, Mansoor al Abdali, Managing Director at OQGN, said the paid up capital of the company is now around RO 433 million. As against an earlier share price of RO 1 per share, the stock split now makes OQGN’s shares more affordable to small or retail investors during the float. However, it is important to note that the company’s ability to make these dividend payments is dependent on several circumstances. This includes the availability of distributable reserves, ongoing capital spending plans, and other financial requirements in the coming quarters, all of which are subject to required clearances, officials added. On Monday, parent group OQ SAOC said it intends to, directly and indirectly through Oman Energy Trading Company Limited (OETCL) and Oman Oil Services Limited (OOSL), offer up to 49 per cent of the share capital of OQ Gas Networks (under transformation).

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) Announce the following Tenders:

Sr. No.	Tender No.	Tender Name	Last date for obtaining the documents	Bid Submission Date	Requirements from participants	Tender Document's Fees (Including VAT) (RO)
1	73/2023	Supply, Installation and Configuration of Governance, Risk Compliance & Internal Audit (GRC) Platform with 3 Years AMC	20/09/2023	17/10/2023	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration	52/500
2	74/2023	Supply and Installation of Cyber Security Protection Solutions in IT.	20/09/2023	17/10/2023	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration	52/500

Participation:	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity Apply on E-tendering.
Buying the Tender:	By E-Tendering System.
Fees:	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer), SMEs are exempted from tender's fees.
The deadline for clarification:	Before (21) Days from bid submission date.
Submission:	The submission of hard copy will be only for Bid Bond & other documents by E-Tendering.
Terms and conditions:	- No other writing or any reference thereto should be mentioned on the envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from bid submission date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from bid submission date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). Small & Medium Enterprises are exempted from the submission of 1% of the bid bond. - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer:	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address:	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 O Block No: 321 - Contact Details: 92217856, 99105413
Email Website:	tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com / link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



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Oman exports 178.9m oil barrels until July

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman oil exports until the end of July 2023 reach 178, 956,300 barrels, calculating the average price of \$80.50/barrel, while oil production amounted to 223,544, 500 barrels.

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the total production of crude oil decreased by 1.5 per cent to reach 174,642,500 barrels, while the total production of oil condensates increased by 6.6 per cent, recording 48,902,100 barrels.

The average daily production of oil reached 1,054,500 barrels until end of July.

China topped the countries importing Omani oil, with total exports amounting to 163,167,900 barrels, followed by Japan with 5,845,400 barrels, then India with 2,716,200 barrels, and Korea

with 1,951,600 barrels, while exports to other countries amounted to 5,275,100 barrels.

On the other hand, the total domestic production and import of natural gas amounted to 30.914 billion cubic metres as of end July, an increase of 1.4 per cent compared to the same period in 2022, with 30.485 billion cubic metres. Its uses for industrial projects amounted to 18.102 billion cubic metres.

The total use of natural gas for oil fields reached 7.865 billion cubic metres, power generation stations 4.794 billion cubic metres, and industrial areas 152.500 million cubic metres.

The non-associated production of natural gas, including imports, amounted to 24.713 billion cubic metres, while the associated production amounted to 6.201 billion cubic metres.

SEZAD continues to offer lucrative incentives to investors

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 5

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), located in Al Wusta Governorate at the heart of the Sultanate of Oman, is emerging as a key business hub in the Middle East and North Africa (Mena) region.

Spanning an extensive area of 2,000 square kilometres, SEZAD offers a diverse range of economic, tourism, and service development zones, positioning itself as an attractive investment destination.

One of the most prominent features of SEZAD is its state-of-the-art multi-purpose port, equipped to handle various cargo types and accommodate large vessels.

This port serves as a vital gateway for international trade and a strategic link between Oman and other global markets.

Additionally, the presence of a dry dock for ship repairs and a fishing port further enhances the economic activities within the zone.

SEZAD boasts a regional airport that facilitates seamless connectivity, allowing businesses and tourists to access the zone conveniently.

This airport plays a crucial role in promoting tourism, industrial growth, and logistics within the Special Economic Zone.

Investors are drawn to the SEZAD due to its appealing investment incentives. In a post,



SEZAD said the zone offers 100 per cent foreign ownership, providing international investors with greater control and flexibility over their business operations.

Furthermore, companies can benefit from a flexible Omanisation rate of up to 10 per cent, allowing them to strike a balance between local employment and skilled foreign workforce.

One of the key attractions for businesses considering SEZAD as their investment destination is the income tax exemption for a period of 30 years.

This exemption significantly reduces the financial burden on companies, enabling them to allocate resources towards expansion, innovation, and job creation.

Import and re-export duties are set at 0 per cent within the Special

Economic Zone, encouraging international trade and facilitating the movement of goods. This favourable trade environment stimulates economic growth and attracts businesses engaged in import-export activities.

SEZAD offers investors the advantage of no minimum capital requirement, making it easier for startups and small businesses to establish their presence within the zone. This flexibility fosters an entrepreneurial ecosystem and encourages the growth of diverse industries.

To further incentivise long-term investments, SEZAD provides right-to-benefit conventions for up to 50 years. This stability and security allow businesses to plan for the future with confidence, ensuring a conducive environment for sustained growth and profitability.

The strategic location of SEZAD, combined with its robust infrastructure, diverse economic zones, and investment incentives, positions it as an ideal destination for both local and international investors.

The zone's emphasis on economic, tourism, and service development zones creates a dynamic ecosystem that fosters growth, innovation, and job creation.

As the largest Special Economic Zone in the Middle East and North Africa, SEZAD plays a pivotal role in Oman's economic diversification and development plans.

The Sultanate of Oman continues to invest in the development of SEZAD, further enhancing its infrastructure and attracting investments across various sectors.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds offers 100% value for diamonds

MUSCAT: Spending vs. saving has always been a dilemma for customers when it comes to buying jewellery. For years now, gold jewellery was the only article that served both as a value-appreciating adornment and a reliable investment.

Even though diamond jewellery remained as attractive as ever, questions about its exchange value held customers back from considering it a reliable investment.

That has all changed with the new policy introduction from Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one of the world's leading jewellery retailers, that gives customers 100% Value on Diamond Exchange.

Now, customers wishing to exchange their diamond jewellery for either gold or diamond jewellery can do so at full value of diamonds, without any loss, making it as lucrative an

investment option as gold.

"Diamond jewellery has always been aspirational. Over the years, there has been an increasing preference for diamond jewellery as a gift, especially amongst Gen Z and Millennial customers. However, the one thing that was always a concern regarding diamond jewellery was its value as an investment compared to gold jewellery.

Providing 100% value for diamond jewellery, upon exchange, is our way of negating these concerns to make diamond jewellery the perfect gift as well as a reliable investment that holds value", said Shamlal Ahamed, Managing Director – International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

'We want to revolutionise the diamond jewellery retail, taking into consideration the concerns we identified during the research



conducted on jewellery lovers and their resistance to buying diamond jewellery. Giving new meaning to the phrase, "A Diamond is Forever", this policy change was crafted to protect the value of the diamond jewellery among the new era of jewellery lovers.

Ever since our inception in 1993, Malabar Gold & Diamonds

has always been at the forefront of introducing customer-centric and transparent policies aimed at protecting customer interests and this new policy on diamonds further testifies this", commented Abdul Salam KP, Vice Chairman, Malabar Group.

The new policy comes in addition to the unique and customer centric policies named 'Malabar Promises' offering customers complete peace of mind with initiatives like transparent price tag indicating gold weight, stone weight, net weight and stone charges of the respective jewellery, tested and certified diamonds ensuring 28-point quality check of global standards, guaranteed buyback, 100% value on gold exchange, 100% 916 hallmarked jewellery, assured lifetime maintenance, ethical and responsible sourcing, fair price policy & fair labour practices.

NBO hosts kids carnival, strengthens employee engagement

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) recently hosted its annual Kids Carnival, a tradition since 2017. The event, which took place at NBO's head office, was exclusively dedicated to employees and their families, emphasising the bank's strong bond with its workforce.

The Kids Carnival has consistently garnered an enthusiastic response from employees and their families over the years. Its aim was not only to provide an enjoyable experience but also to instil values of responsibility and the significance of financial literacy in young minds.

With the new school year, NBO recognised the essential role of preparing children for academic excellence. The carnival featured a series of interactive workshops, cultural



activities and engaging sessions, all meticulously designed to ignite a passion for learning among children.

One of the highlights of the carnival was the robotics workshop, offering children a captivating glimpse into the world of technology and innovation.

Financial literacy was another key area of focus for NBO, aiming to impart an understanding of the financial management skills from an early age.

Dhofar forum discusses beneficial impacts of AI on society

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 5

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) held a workshop on the future of artificial intelligence (AI) and its impact on society in Dhofar Governorate on Tuesday.

The workshop was attended by government employees, individuals, students, and job seekers. It was presented by Hamdan bin Mohammed

al Alawi, Director of the Department of Developing the AI Programme and Advanced Technologies at the MoTCIT, and Tawa bint Abdullah al Dawood, Head of the Development and Studies Department at the same department. Dr Mashaal bint Awad al Sieria from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences also presented a paper on the impact of AI on education.

The workshop aimed to review the developments of AI, the challenges and opportunities it



can provide to society and the economy, build a society ready to deal with modern technologies, promote public understanding of AI and its use ethically and sustainably, and reduce fears related to AI.

The workshop covered the following topics: The definition of AI and advanced technologies; The impact of AI on job patterns; The future directions of AI; Practical applications of AI tools; and Importance of preparing for AI in the education system.

"The workshop is part of a series of workshops being held by the MoTCIT to raise awareness about AI and its impact on society," said Hamdan bin Mohammed al Alawi. "We are committed to building a knowledge-based economy that is driven by innovation and technology." The workshop was a valuable opportunity for participants to learn about the future of AI and its impact on society. It also highlighted the importance of preparing for AI and the opportunities it presents.



Canada oil sands carbon capture project struggles to get key contract



A tailings pond at the Suncor tar sands mining operations near Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada. — Reuters

OTTAWA: Canada is struggling to get a key tool in place for major carbon capture and storage (CCS) projects, said a representative of one of the largest such ventures, as the country seeks to launch incentives vital to cutting emissions from Alberta's oil sands.

A government fund has told the Pathways Alliance, comprised of the six largest oil and gas producers in Canada, that their project is too large and too risky for a contract for difference, a tool which would lock in future carbon credit prices, the representative said.

The mechanism gives investors in CCS certainty about their future revenue by setting a minimum price for their carbon credits. Oil companies in the country's highest-emitting sector are counting on CCS to help dramatically cut emissions while continuing to pump oil and gas.

Pathways is still in talks with the government to set up such a contract, though probably not through the C\$15 billion (\$11 billion) Canada Growth Fund - a body set up last year by the Finance Ministry to help attract

private investment in clean tech by mitigating financing risks - the representative said.

"We sincerely do want to figure out a path to work with them," said a finance ministry official who was not authorised to speak on the record.

Canada is the world's fourth-largest oil producer, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has made getting to net-zero by 2050 a guiding principle of his government in recent years.

However, Canada is lagging behind the US, which has offered massive incentives to clean tech companies under the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) for more than a year now.

But Canada's system is more complex because, unlike the US, it has a carbon pricing system that will allow companies that capture or reduce emissions to sell carbon credits.

Carbon credits represent reduced or avoided carbon emissions, and companies use them to mitigate greenhouse gases they generate. However, environmental groups have said these schemes allow companies to appear to take climate action when in reality they are not cutting emissions. — Reuters

Global business activity showed signs of slowdown in August

LONDON: Global business activity largely slowed further last month as services firms struggled in the face of weak demand as rising prices and borrowing costs made indebted consumer rein in spending, a raft of surveys showed on Tuesday.

In the euro zone, the picture was gloomier than initially thought as the bloc's dominant services industry fell into contractionary territory, suggesting the bloc could slide into recession.

Germany's services sector contracted for the first time this year and France's shrank more than first estimated.

In Britain, outside the European Union, its survey showed the sharpest business slowdown in seven months.

Asia's surveys for August were also more downbeat with China's services activity expanding at the slowest pace in eight months as weak demand continued to dog the world's second-largest economy while in India growth lost some steam.

Japan proved an outlier as service sector activity expanded there at its quickest pace in three months, underpinned by robust consumer spending as inbound tourism regained momentum. Global equities fell on Tuesday as the weak readings rekindled worries over China's sputtering post-pandemic economy.

"Weaker economic data out of Asia was the main driver of market sentiment," noted economists at RBC. HCOB's final euro zone Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), compiled by S&P Global and seen as a good barometer of overall economic health, dropped to 46.7 in August



Ships gather off the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, California. — Reuters

from July's 48.6, a low not seen since November 2020.

That was below the 50 mark separating growth from contraction for a third month and weaker than a preliminary estimate for 47.0. Tuesday's figures point to a 0.1 per cent contraction in euro zone gross domestic product this quarter, S&P Global said.

"The final PMIs published today were revised down from the already-low levels reported in the flash measure two weeks ago. We continue to forecast a recession in the second half of the year," said Adrian Prettejohn at Capital Economics.

The headline services PMI for the bloc sank to 47.9 from 50.9, below the flash 48.3 estimate, as the new business index, a gauge of demand, dropped further below

breakeven to 46.7 from 48.2, a low not seen since early 2021. Still, the downturn in manufacturing eased last month, suggesting the worst may be over for the bloc's beleaguered factories, a sister survey showed.

Services PMI readings for Britain, Germany, France, Italy and Spain were all below breakeven. "August's services PMI pointed to a contraction in UK private sector activity. The EY ITEM Club still thinks GDP is likely to grow modestly in Q3 ... but today's evidence of a decline in new orders suggests that the long-term outlook is gloomy," said Martin Beck, chief economic advisor to the EY ITEM Club forecasting group.

China's Caixin/S&P Global services PMI dropped to 51.8 in August from 54.1 in July, the

lowest reading since December when Covid-19 confined many consumers to their homes.

The data broadly aligned with the official services PMI released last week, which showed the sector continued to trend downwards.

Chinese stocks fell after the survey, while optimism spurred by Beijing's latest stimulus measures also dimmed. Overall conditions in India remained strong although its PMI dipped to 60.1 from 62.3. Japan's PMI bucked the trend and rose to 54.3 last month from 53.8.

"The Bank of Japan will be cheered by the signs of stronger services sector employment, but worried about the persistence of cost pressure," said Duncan Wrigley at Pantheon Macroeconomics. — Reuters

China to launch \$40 billion state fund to boost chip industry

BEIJING: China is set to launch a new state-backed investment fund that aims to raise about \$40 billion for its semiconductor sector, two people familiar with the matter said, as the country ramps up efforts to catch up with the US and other rivals.

It is likely to be the biggest of three funds launched by the China Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund, also known as the Big Fund. Its target of 300 billion yuan (\$41 billion) outdoes similar funds in 2014 and 2019, which according

to government reports, raised 138.7 billion yuan and 200 billion yuan respectively.

One main area of investment will be equipment for chip manufacturing, said one of the two people and a third person familiar with the matter. President Xi Jinping has long stressed the need for China to achieve self-sufficiency in semiconductors.

That need has become all the more pressing after Washington imposed a series of export control measures over the last couple of



An employee works inside a chip factory in Beijing. — Reuters

years, citing fears that Beijing could use advanced chips to boost its military capabilities.

In October, the US rolled out a sweeping sanctions package that cut China's access to advanced chipmaking equipment and US allies Japan and the Netherlands have taken similar steps.

The new fund was approved by relevant Chinese authorities in recent months, two of the people said.

China's finance ministry is planning to contribute 60 billion yuan, said one person.

Other contributors could not be immediately learned.

The fundraising process will likely take months and it was not immediately clear when the third fund will be launched or if further changes will be made to the plan, said the first two sources.

Backers of the Big Fund's previous two funds include the finance ministry and deep-pocketed state-owned entities such as China Development Bank Capital, China National Tobacco Corporation and China Telecom. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

WASHINGTON

Oil prices slip on global demand woes

Oil prices slipped on Tuesday as fresh services data added to gloom over the state of the global economy, particularly China's stuttering post-pandemic recovery, although expectations of an extension in supply cuts by leading Opec+ producers limited losses.

Brent crude futures for November were down 68 cents at \$88.32 a barrel, while US West WTI October futures edged 31 cents lower to \$85.24 a barrel.

Global business activity



largely slowed last month as services firms struggled in the face of weak demand due to rising prices and borrowing costs making indebted consumers rein in spending, surveys showed on Tuesday. — Reuters

FRANKFURT

ECB says inflation to wane throughout autumn

In the fight against persistently high inflation in the euro zone, the chief economist of the European Central Bank (ECB), Philip Lane (pictured), sees light at the end of the tunnel.

"Our calculations are basically that there were very strong price increases a year ago, which will fall out of the data this autumn. So we do expect to see this famous core inflation come down throughout the autumn," Lane told Irish magazine *The Currency* in an interview published on



Tuesday.

Core inflation strips out particularly price volatile items such as energy and food. Lane said he viewed currently high inflation as a temporary phenomenon. — dpa

LONDON

UK's second biggest city declares financial distress

The UK's second biggest city on Tuesday admitted that it cannot balance its books, blaming Conservative governments for years of under-funding.

Birmingham City Council in central England said it had issued a Section 114 Notice under the Local Government Finance Act 1988, which blocks spending on all but essential services. Leaders of the Labour-controlled council called the move "a necessary step" to get spending back on a stronger footing.



They said "long-standing issues", including the roll-out of a new computer system, had been compounded by cuts of £1 billion by successive Conservative governments since they came to power in 2010. — Reuters

Recession warning with surprise slump in output



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

Recession fears grew again in the UK as a key business survey last week painted a grim picture of the strains in the economy.

The preliminary version of the closely watched S&P Global/CIPS private sector output index fell far more steeply than expected by forecasters from 50.8 in July to 47.9 in August.

It was the first reading under 50 – which indicates contrasting output – since January, ending a six-month period of expansion as the economy shrugged off slump fears earlier in the year.

It was also the fastest rate of decline since January 2021 when the nation was in the grip of the second pandemic lockdown.

However, this latest data is the strongest signal yet that the crushing weight of 14 successive

interest rate rises is causing major stress for businesses. Financial markets immediately discounted the likelihood of another major interest rate rise in September with a half-point hike by the Bank of England (BoE) now seen as impossible.

The manufacturing sector has been hardest hit with its PMI index falling from 45.3 to a 39-month low of 42.5.

The services index dropped from 51.7 to a seven-month low of 48.7.

According to the Confederation of British Industry's (CBI) industrial trends survey, the balance of factories reporting a rise in output versus a fall slumped to -19 per cent, compared to plus 3 per cent in the three months to July. Martin Sartorius, the CBI's principal economist, said: "With output volumes contracting

at their fastest pace since the Covid-19 pandemic and order books deteriorating, the survey makes for gloomy reading for manufacturers."

Most economists believe the UK will narrowly avoid recession this year but the survey, nevertheless, points to a rough road ahead. Sartorius argues that the weak outlook shows the need for the government to "double-down on delivering sustainable growth" by offering incentives to boost green investment and encourage decarbonisation.

Chief business economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence, Chris Williamson, said: "The early PMI survey for August suggests that inflation should moderate further in the months ahead, but also indicates that the fight against inflation is carrying a heavy cost in terms of increased recession

risks.

"A renewed contraction of the economy already looks inevitable, as an increasingly severe manufacturing downturn is accompanied by a further faltering of the service sector's spring revival.

The survey is indicative of GDP declining by 0.2 per cent over the third quarter so far."

The survey said manufacturers saw a sharp and accelerated fall in production volumes, which extended the current period of decline to six months.

Meanwhile the fall in new orders across the private sector was the fastest since November 2022, with lower levels of customer demand now seen in the service and manufacturing sectors.

The worrying figures come less than a week after grim official retail data for July showing that

the sale in stores were badly hit by the wet weather conditions – which then extended into August as well.

GDP only grew by 0.2 per cent in the second quarter, although it was a relatively perky 0.5 per cent in June.

However, this is likely to have been flattered by a transfer of economic activity from May when there was an extra Bank Holiday to celebrate the King's coronation.

Chief UK economist at forecaster Capital Economics, Paul Dales said: "The fall in the activity PMI to below the boom-bust level of 50.0 in August and the further drop in the prices balances probably won't prevent the Bank of England from raising interest rates from 5.25 per cent to 5.50 per cent in September, but it will encourage it that higher rates are working."

Superstar cities in the age of Zoom

On Friday morning, I spoke to a conference of the Regional Science Association in Alicante, Spain. Notice the choice of preposition: "to," not "at." Given family commitments, I couldn't attend in person, so this was a Zoom presentation from home – something we've all become familiar with over the past three years.

The title of my session was "Is the New Economic Geography Still Alive and Well in 2023?" The obvious subtext was, is it still alive and well, given our ability to do what I was doing: participate in a discussion with people thousands of miles away?

Some background: Economic geography – the study of where people do stuff and why – has been around for a very long time. The "new" economic geography refers to a particular way of approaching the subject that makes as much use as possible of buttoned-down, formal economic models. My own most cited academic paper, "Increasing Returns and Economic Geography," published in 1991, was one of the early works in this genre.

What's the point of formal modeling here? It helps clarify one's thinking and quite often yields insights that should have been obvious – that can, once arrived at, be expressed easily in plain English – but that you didn't have before.

Maybe the most important insight from the NEG is that there is always a tension between the forces of agglomeration, which tend to make activity clump together, and centrifugal forces that tend to make it spread out. And changes in technology can push the economy to a tipping point in either direction, transforming where we work and live.

Thus, in the second half of the 19th century, the rise of large-scale manufacturing production, which gave industry an incentive to concentrate near the biggest markets, and railroads, which made it easy for distant farmers to feed urban populations, led to the rise of the "manufacturing belt," a concentration of industry in the Northeast and the inner Midwest.

Sometime around the 1920s, however, centrifugal forces gained the upper hand. Trucking made it



PAUL KRUGMAN

The author, a New York Times opinion columnist, writes about macroeconomics, trade, health care, social policy and politics.



Illustration by the New York Times.

less important to be near a rail hub, while electrification led to a redesign of factories – hulking mills replaced with sprawling one-story structures, best not located in dense urban areas. So industry and wealth spread out.

The manufacturing belt gradually dissolved, and in general, disparities in income across the United States narrowed over time.

In a way, then, US economic geography became less interesting. And to be honest, the early NEG literature had a somewhat backward-looking, almost steampunk feel, dwelling on things like the rise of the manufacturing belt and the emergence of local manufacturing clusters like the detachable collar and cuff industry of Troy, New York.

There was also considerable interest in China, whose rise as a manufacturing superpower has been accompanied by the growth of industrial clusters reminiscent of those prominent in America circa 1900.

But wait, the story isn't over. Around 1980, the forces driving economic geography changed again, with the rise of a knowledge economy. Technology-intensive firms,

whether or not they were explicitly in the technology sector, wanted access to a large pool of highly educated workers, which by and large meant locating in big coastal metropolitan areas.

Growing employment opportunities in these areas drew in even more highly educated workers, so regional disparities began to widen again.

And while big coastal metros were booming, large parts of the United States – especially what some economists have called the "eastern heartland" – were left behind. Then came Covid. For a few months in 2020, it looked as if population density itself might be a major source of contagion risk.

Once we learned more about the disease, however, and especially after vaccines became available, this concern vanished.

But Covid did something else. Remote work has been technologically possible for some time, ever since large numbers of people gained access to high-speed internet.

But the possibility went largely unused until fear of contagion forced much work to become remote. Once that happened,

remote work reached critical mass: Millions of workers learned how to interact over the internet and found their co-workers doing the same thing. And by and large, they liked it, for obvious reasons: absence of commuting, easier management of work-life balance and so on.

As a result – even though, in many ways, life has returned to its pre-pandemic normal – many people are still working from home, and office occupancy remains depressed.

So does this mark the beginning of a sustained decline in superstar cities? I don't think so.

While remote work is pretty clearly here to stay, there's a big difference between fully remote work, in which you never visit the office, and hybrid work, which involves working from home only two or three days a week.

Fully remote work can be done from anywhere, and you might expect a significant number of fully remote workers to relocate to smaller cities that offer urban amenities like walkable downtowns.

Early indications are, however, that fully remote work will remain a fairly small niche of the workforce. From what I've seen,

both employers and workers are increasingly seeing the value of the informal interactions that come when you go into the office, at least some of the time.

And hybrid workers still need to live within a major metro area's commuting zone.

In fact, if anything, the rise of hybrid work may reinforce the advantages of superstar metros – or perhaps more accurately reduce one of their major disadvantages. After all, one of the major hassles of working in someplace like New York City is the time and expense of commuting.

Hybrid workers don't have to commute as much as full-time in-office workers. Alternatively, they can move farther away from their jobs, getting cheaper housing, while commuting longer distances, but on fewer days.

So will new technology remove the edge superstar metros have gained over the past generation? Probably not.

It may force big changes in their internal structure; what will we do with all that excess office space? But at this point, I don't see us going through another historical reversal in the economy's geography.

— The New York Times

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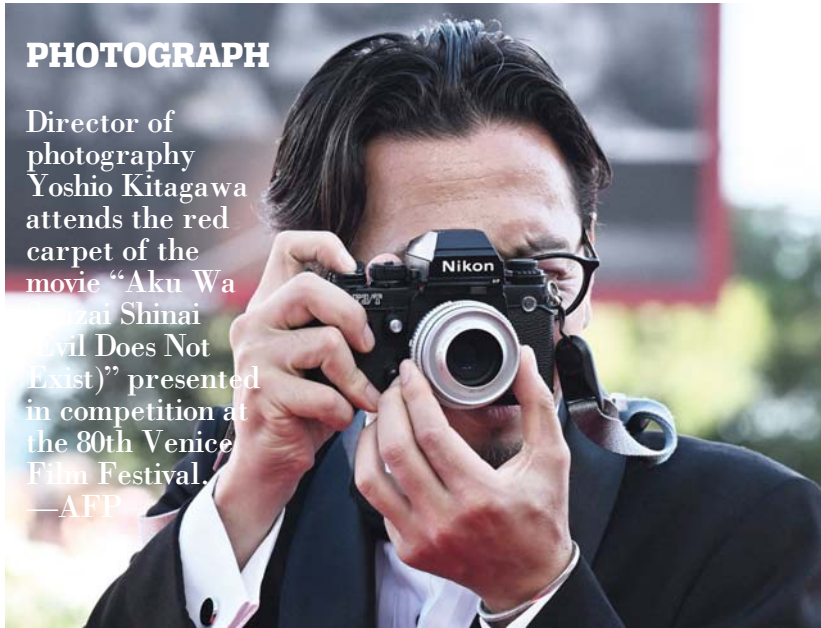


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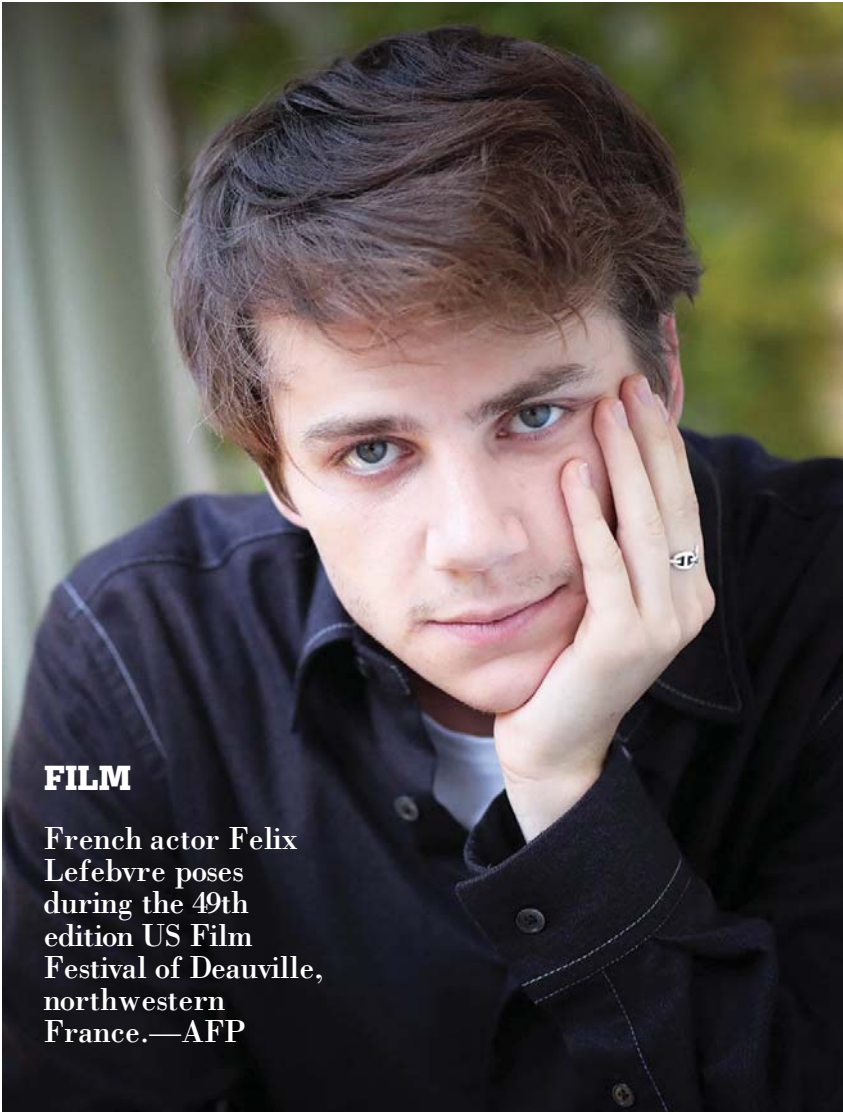
TRAVEL

The Singapore Flyer observatory wheel is seen among high-rise buildings in Singapore. —AFP



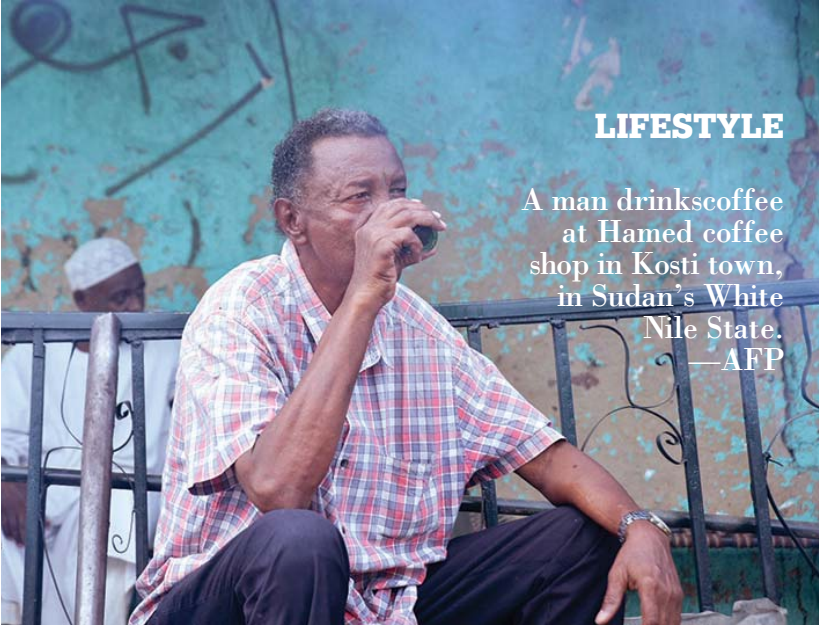
PHOTOGRAPH

Director of photography Yoshio Kitagawa attends the red carpet of the movie “Aku Wa Shizai Shinai (Evil Does Not Exist)” presented in competition at the 80th Venice Film Festival. —AFP



FILM

French actor Felix Lefebvre poses during the 49th edition US Film Festival of Deauville, northwestern France. —AFP



LIFESTYLE

A man drinks coffee at Hamed coffee shop in Kosti town, in Sudan's White Nile State. —AFP



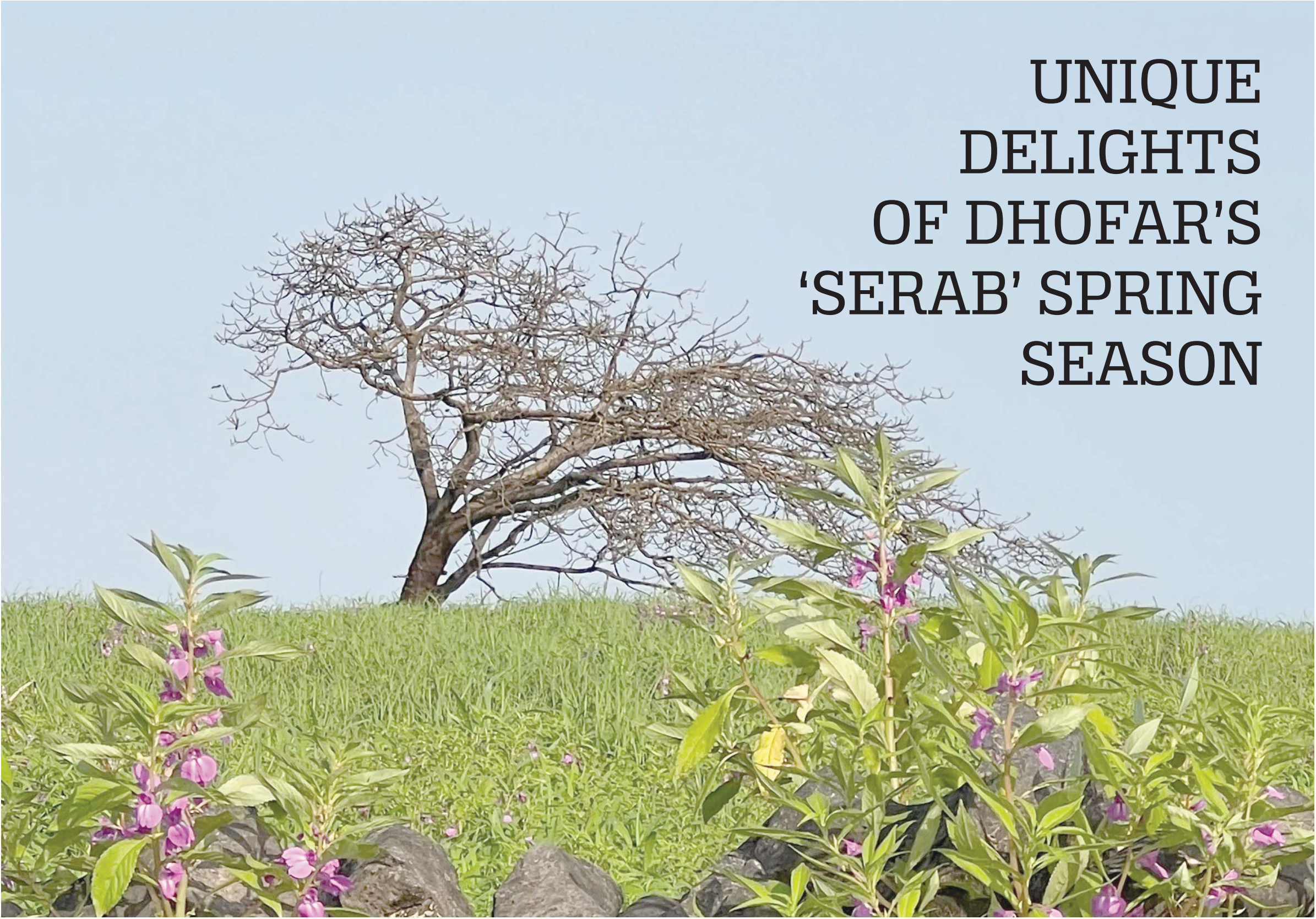
FOOD

A Luckin Coffee employee prepares baijiu liquor-flavoured latte, the latest product in collaboration with Chinese liquor brand Kweichow Moutai, at a Luckin Coffee shop in Beijing. —AFP

art & life

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UNIQUE DELIGHTS OF DHOFAR'S 'SERAB' SPRING SEASON

BY QASIM AL MAASHANI
PHOTOS BY Mohammed Amer Al-Mashani

From September to December, a delightful spring season is known locally as 'Serab' in the Dhofar Governorate. The weather takes a pleasant turn with sunny days, mild temperatures, and low humidity during this time. As the fog dissipates, cool breezes set in, and vibrant flowers bloom, drawing tourists eager to savour the natural beauty. Moreover, the tranquil sea complements the serene atmosphere, making it an ideal time for a visit.

During the Serb season, Dhofar witnesses a decline in monsoon activity (southwest), so the humidity

decreases. The mist gradually clears, and the atmosphere is moderate and sunny with the appearance of some scattered clouds, and the sea turbulence characteristic of the monsoon comes to a complete stop, making sea outings a promising pursuit.

The Serab season holds vital economic significance for various communities, including farmers, fishermen, and herders. Farmers reap the rewards of crops that rely on the monsoon rains, such as corn, beans, and cucumbers. Additionally, honey production is boosted, and the abundance of fish in the region provides ample opportunities for fishermen.

During this season, a unique tradition takes place as camel owners lead their herds to fresh grazing



grounds. This practice is accompanied by the enchanting sounds of traditional music and poetry, all while preserving ancient social customs.

In springtime, camels in Dhofar exhibit distinctive behaviour compared to other local animals. Instead of staying in the mountains during Khareef, they prefer the flat areas. However, when spring arrives, these camels eagerly migrate to the mountains and wadis, forming large herds that can number anywhere from 500 to 2000 camels. These herds can be spotted in well-known valleys like Wadi Khusaad, Wadi Naheiz, Wadi Darbat, and various other mountainous regions across Dhofar.

During their time in the mountains and lush valleys, the herders accom-

pany their camels on a journey that spans a month or two. This experience resembles a fun nature-based tourist trip, where they disconnect from modern life. Many camel owners prioritise this season over their weekly holidays and annual vacations.

Spring also brings an abundance of sheep, particularly in Jabal Samhan and the surrounding mountains. Cows, camels, and sheep during this season are known for their increased milk production, owing to the availability of rich natural pastures. Consequently, many residents of Dhofar relish fresh milk during the spring season, appreciating its nutrient-rich qualities derived from the flourishing natural pastures.



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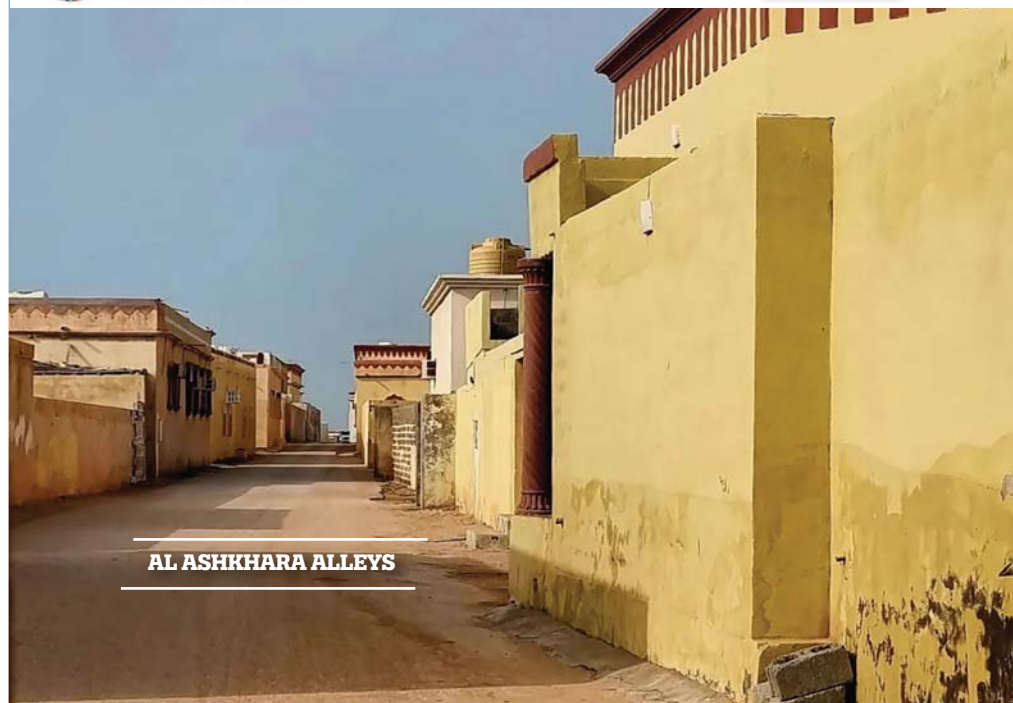
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Three dogs star in Leopold Mozart symphony in Denmark

On stage at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen, Torben Petersen waves his arms like a conductor to encourage Sophus, his eight-year-old spaniel, to bark.

Sophus, along with two other equally well-trained pooches, Cookie and Sica, barked on command in time with the Danish Chamber Orchestra for a rare performance on Sunday of "Hunting Symphony", a little-known piece by Leopold Mozart, the father of Wolfgang Amadeus.

The work is rarely performed with live dogs on stage, with orchestras usually preferring to use recorded sound.

Selected at an audition last spring for their barking skills, the three hounds rehearsed conscientiously with their masters, who were generous with treats to get them to bark on cue.

"The symphony is in three movements and in the last movements, we will hear the hunt begin and we will have shootings, and then the dogs will start to bark," the head of

the orchestra, Andreas Veto, said during a rehearsal before Sunday's show.

For the Danish orchestra, there was never any question of not using live dogs on stage.

"It has been a wish by our chief conductor Adam Fischer for several years to perform exactly this piece, because he will be able to put in this element of participating dogs," said Veto.

In 2014, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in the United States performed the piece with hounds on stage.

During Sunday's rehearsal, the animals listened attentively to the first movements from the rear of the stage before being brought to the front by their masters.

"If I had to be there all by myself, I think I would be nervous but all the attention is on her, she is the star," Helle Lauvring, the master of Cookie, a four-year-old Spanish Water Dog, said.

"I'm just behind her with all the treats," said the 60-year-old who snaps her fingers to get Cookie to bark.—AFP



Bait Al Zubair Competition for School Literacy Initiatives concludes

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

THE THIRD EDITION of the Bait Al Zubair Competition for School Literacy Initiatives, which was held in association with the Ministry of Education, concluded with the announcement of the winners.

The latest competition followed the success of the first and second editions. The idea is to address educational, pedagogical, administrative, and societal challenges by promoting reading and literacy in schools. It aims to enrich the reading experience and offer innovative solutions to prevalent issues.

The closing ceremony for the third edition was held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education. Addressing the gathering, Fatima

al Shukri, Competition Supervisor Bait Al Zubair's Children's Laboratory, and Idris al Nabhani, Director of the Ministry of Education's Department of Educational Activities, emphasised the significance of the partnership and its alignment with Oman Vision 2040, highlighting the importance of fostering community engagement with educational institutions to build a knowledge-based society.

The ceremony also included remarks from the competition jury, represented by Awad al Luwaihi, who commended all participants and praised the notable advancements in the initiatives presented. Visual presentations showcasing the competition and its stages were also a part of the event.

The top honours in this edition went to the 'Read to Be' initiative

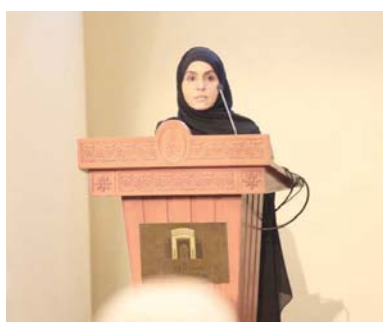


from Ras Madrakah School for Basic Education, which secured first place and received a prize of RO 1,000. The second place was awarded to the "Implementing the Nour Al Bayan Methodology" initiative from Hudhayfah bin Al Yaman School for Basic Education, receiving RO 700. The third place was claimed by the "By Reading Asmo" initiative from Kabara School for Basic Education, earning RO 600, while the fourth place went to the "I am a Skilled Reader and Author" initiative from Al Ahed School for Basic Education, receiving RO 500.

The fifth place was awarded to the "I Read Electronically" initiative from Al Buraimi School for Basic Education, which received RO 400.

Additionally, the "Journey" initiative from Maawala Bin Shams School for Basic Education and the "Athar" initiative by student Rahaf al Alawi from Hajar Umm Ismail School received incentive prizes and RO 400 each.

Since its inception, the competition has aimed to honour and celebrate Arabic language reading initiatives and encourage competition in the realm of reading, either by



furthering existing initiatives or inspiring future ones. It seeks to tap into the potential of students and school staff to foster a culture of reading and strengthen ties between schools and their local communities.

Notably, the Bait Al Zubair Competition for School Reading Initiatives has welcomed participation from students and all school

employees, including administrative and teaching staff in public and private schools. To participate, initiatives must be at least two academic years old at the time of nomination, with each school allowed a maximum of two entries. As outlined in the competition guide, creative and innovative aspects in implementing reading initiatives are key criteria.

Distinguishing this edition, Fatima al Shukri highlighted the absence of local committees in governorates responsible for receiving, sorting, and evaluating entries. Instead, entries from all governorates were submitted directly to Bait Al Zubair, undergoing initial sorting in May, preliminary evaluation in June, and final evaluation on the day preceding the closing ceremony. The top five qualified initiatives were granted the opportunity to make a final presentation before the jury.

The Bait Al Zubair Competition for School Reading Initiatives is one of several projects undertaken by the Bait Al Zubair Foundation to elevate competitiveness and acknowledge individual and collective achievements in various cultural domains. Another notable project is the Sadiq Jawad Award for Intellectual and Philosophical Studies, with the winners set to be announced in November.



DESIGN

After Doubts About Puglia, a Designer Comes Around

ONE MIGHT DESCRIBE Andrew Trotter's passion for Puglia, in southern Italy, as a slow burn.

The British-born, Barcelona-based designer first visited the region, which forms the heel of Italy's geographic boot, about a decade ago. His close friend Carlo Lanzini planned to create a boutique hotel that would cater to the growing number of travellers lured by Puglia's charming medieval villages, its sun-bleached landscape dotted with ancient olive groves and its nearly 500 miles of coastline, featuring picturesque coves with limestone cliffs and lovely sand beaches.

Lanzini enlisted his help in finding and renovating a masseria, the name of the traditional whitewashed farmhouses found across the Pugliese countryside. "We went twice, both times in the winter, and I didn't actually like it very much," said Trotter. "It's a place that's grown on me rather than an immediate love."

At that time Trotter, 51, had recently left a career in fashion, launched a short-lived Barcelona design shop and co-founded Openhouse, a boutique and gallery that evolved into a semiannual interiors and lifestyle magazine, with his friend Mari Luz Vidal, a photographer. Having studied interior design

and spent a year at the London firm of Anouska Hempel in the early '90s, it was a return to his roots.

When Lanzini ultimately decided to construct a new masseria-inspired building for his hotel venture, near the town of Ostuni, Trotter put himself forward to oversee its design. After some convincing, he got the gig, and the resulting six-guestroom Masseria Moroseta "very quickly became a little bit famous," as Trotter put it, leading to other commissions designing and renovating vacation homes in Puglia, including for Lanzini as well as new clients who admired Trotter's minimalist yet warm aesthetic.

While Studio Andrew Trotter soon had projects in locations around the world, Trotter and his domestic partner — the firm's business manager, Marcelo Martinez, 31, who is Spanish — continued to travel to Puglia regularly. They decided to look for a residence in the region that could serve as their base and as an income-generating rental property when they



weren't using it. Their search led them to the southern Pugliese town of Soletto, in the heart of the Salento peninsula, where a centuries-old house, tucked into a cobbled alley, caught their attention.

"The town is very sleepy, and it's something I love about the real south of Puglia, which is very untouristic. In the smaller villages you feel like you're in a movie, like 'Cinema Paradiso,'" Trotter said, adding, "We're the youngest people in Soletto."

Even though an offer had



already been made on the house, the couple convinced the agent to let them have a look. Behind the front wall and arched stone gate with large wooden doors, an open-air courtyard served as the entry to the two-story residence. Expanded in stages over time, the house incorporated two vaulted chapels, one estimated to be 400 years old, while parts of the upper floor were believed to have been added as recently as the 1920s.

The family that previously owned the property hadn't used it in a long time, but many of their belongings remained, untouched. "There were clothes and furniture, artwork, photos of the family," said Trotter. "But for about 20 years, nobody had come to the house. Nothing worked. There was no running water, no electricity. There was a hole in the back garden where the sewage went to."

Not to mention, there was only one bathroom, the walls were wonky and decaying, and the only way to climb to the second floor was by an exterior staircase in the front courtyard. "That quirkiness is what gives charm to the house," Martinez said. Features like a 15-foot vaulted ground-floor ceiling gave the interior a character and mood that a mere glimpse at plans and snapshots did not reveal.

Also, the house was exactly the size they wanted, and it had a garden with enough space for a small pool. When the other offer fell through, they "just went for it," Trotter said. (He declined to divulge how much the couple paid for the property.)

Trotter and Martinez, who discussed the project over Zoom from Barcelona, Spain, set about updating the house for contemporary living, making it comfortable and simply stylish, while retaining as many elements as possible to preserve the home's distinctiveness and historic feeling. They dubbed it Casa Soletto.

For convenience and rentability, they added three upstairs baths so that each bedroom has its own, plus a powder room on the ground floor, all of which meant putting in extensive plumbing. New electrical systems were installed, though lighting was kept minimal. Many of the antique doors and existing floors — terrazzo tile or polished concrete — were preserved, and portions of the roof and walls were repaired.

On the ground floor, where the rustic walls were built with stones and earth up to three feet thick, Trotter and Martinez had to replace expanses of cement plaster added in the last century that were trapping moisture within. Throughout the house the walls have been refinished in subtly textured lime plasters or washes, in earthy tones from dusty beige to chocolaty brown to pale green. All were made by Domingue Architectural Finishes, one of a handful of firms the couple partnered with on the project.

Scandinavian furniture company Frama provided an

assortment of clean-lined wood tables, chairs and stools that complemented the mix of antiques and simple upholstered seating clad in solid, neutral linens. Australian carpet maker Armadillo provided the jute rugs that are found in most rooms. (In exchange for their contributions, the companies can use Casa Soletto's images and story in their marketing.)

Trotter and Martinez, who spoke by phone and over Zoom, kept some of the furniture left by the previous owners, including large wooden gun cases they repurposed as coffee tables, a few beds with distinctive headboards and, in the largest bedroom, a glass-front cabinet filled with old books accumulated by the doctor who once owned the house.

Resisting the urge to contemporise the kitchen, they instead worked with local craftsmen to restore the wood cabinets, replicating them for additional storage, and to create fronts for a built-in refrigerator and dishwasher. They installed an ILVE range that's "quite old school," said Martinez. "The goal was to make everything functional and up-to-date, but without trying to do something too contemporary or out of place."

The couple used a fair amount of the artwork that had been left hanging on the walls, a mix of unattributed landscapes, still lifes and portraits. But they also commissioned new works from Eleanor Herbolosh, an Antwerp-based artist who made three abstract paintings mixing ink with soil excavated from beneath the home and from the garden.

Herbolosh's works hang prominently in the atmospheric dining room, which occupies the later of the two chapels, at the front of the house, and a cozy lounge in the older chapel at the back, where they opted for a darker, moodier palette. "We wanted it to be a bit like a cave where you go and watch a film or just hang out, read a book," Trotter said.

The garden has been completely re-imagined, with a plunge pool and plantings selected with advice from London landscape designer Luciano Giubbilei. A terrace connected to the largest bedroom overlooks the garden, while a smaller balcony off the front bedroom offers views of the nearby Gothic bell tower commissioned by the medieval nobleman Raimondo Orsini del Balzo.

"It rings at 6:30 every morning, and on Sundays it's not just a simple bong-bong-bong," Trotter said. "It keeps going, every 20 minutes."

Completed in July, the renovation of Casa Soletto took two years, and there's nothing else like it in town.

"The mayor and the priest came to see the house," Trotter said. "Italians like to make everything new and perfect, and we've done it in a way that it still feels old, so I think they don't get it." But for him and Martinez, he added, "true luxury is not about being in super-polished perfection." —**NYT**

Lea Michele Ends 'Dream' Run in 'Funny Girl' After Reinvigorating Show

"THAT WAS MY dream come true," Lea Michele gushed from the stage on Sunday after her final performance in "Funny Girl," the Broadway revival that the actress breathed new life into when its future looked grim one year ago.

Michele's sudden addition to the production, which closed with its star's exit, stretched its run to nearly 600 performances and allowed it to recoup its capitalisation costs — far from a guarantee on Broadway. At Sunday's matinee, the actress basked in the show's success, and received seven standing ovations, including for the insistent barn burner "Don't Rain on My Parade" and the reflective ballad "People."

"I was truly given the greatest gift that surpassed this dream and that was the unconditional true love and support from this cast, who



has worked so, so, so hard," Michele added. "I was embraced with open arms the minute I came in."

Just as Michele reversed the show's fortunes, "Funny Girl" appeared to have reversed hers. Three years ago, Michele's celebrity had been clouded by a wave of criticism over bullying behaviour and a prima donna attitude. Since she stepped in as the show's lead, Michele has reassured the role of a celebrated Broadway star, announcing

Tony nominees, performing on late-night shows and booking a solo concert this fall at Carnegie Hall.

At her final show at the August Wilson Theater, Michele gave the audience an extra song: "My Man," which includes lyrics from an original performed by Fanny Brice, the pioneering Jewish entertainer whose life is the basis for the musical.

Michele has said that the song — which the show's original star, Barbra Streisand,

sang in the film version, though it was not included in either Broadway production — has been an important one to her since she sang it on the television series "Glee." A belter about devotion to a man despite him being a constant disappointment, "My Man" was dedicated in the series to a character played by Cory Monteith, who Michele dated both on TV and in real life. Monteith, who had struggled with substance abuse, died of a combination of heroin and

alcohol in 2013.

"The whole thing with life imitating art imitating life really gets me," said Richard Gruber, who saw Michele in "Funny Girl" seven times and was seated in the theatre's second row at the performance on Sunday.

Gruber, 69, who lives in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, flew on Sunday for the final performance and had a return flight on Sunday night.

"I just find her riveting," Gruber said, clutching a white rose that the production gave audience members at the front of the house to toss at curtain call.

Over the years, theatre producers had trouble reviving "Funny Girl" because of its inextricable association with Streisand, who was 21 when the original production first opened on Broadway. (Streisand is not known to have attended any performances of the revival.)

Streisand has long been an idol to Michele, who started as a child actress on Broadway, became a known entity as a lead in "Spring Awakening" and rose to become a household name in "Glee" as an uptight but talented high school glee club member. In a blending of TV and reality, Michele's character, Rachel Berry, landed the role of Brice, and Michele performed several of the musical's songs on

the show.

Michele had long been discussed as an option for a "Funny Girl" revival, but the show's director, Michael Mayer, who has directed Michele in "Spring Awakening," said last year that he had sensed that she was not ready to return to work after the birth of her child. Actress Beanie Feldstein was cast in the role, but she drew middling reviews when the show opened in spring 2022. It received one Tony nomination, for Jared Grimes, who portrays Brice's dance coach and sidekick.

When Feldstein bowed out of the show earlier than expected, Michele was tapped to replace her, fuelling a flood of press attention, social media debate and, once she made her debut, rave reviews that bolstered ticket sales. A tour, featuring Katerina McCrimmon, starts on Saturday in Providence, Rhode Island.

With "Funny Girl," Michele made her first appearance in a Broadway cast in 15 years. She has indicated that the next gap won't be so significant. The actress told Variety that she has already booked her next job, hinting that it is a show she expects people will recognise, but that is very different from the one that drew her back to Broadway.

—**NYT**