

P11

POPP DOUBLES DOWN AS GERMANY MAUL MOROCCO 6-0



P13

OMAN'S FDI INFLOWS REACH \$3.72 BILLION IN 2022



P18

EXPLORING THE EVOLUTION OF MUDIMA IN OMAN



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLES EMIR OF QATAR

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar on the demise of Shaikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Abdullah al Thani. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sympathies, praying to Allah the Almighty to have mercy on the departed soul and grant the deceased's family patience to bear the loss. — ONA

HIS MAJESTY GREET'S PRESIDENT OF TUNISIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Kais Saied of the Tunisian Republic on his country's Republic Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life. His Majesty prayed to Allah the Almighty for the return of this and similar occasions on President Saied at a time the Tunisian people have achieved further progress and prosperity. — ONA

SAN FRANCISCO

TWITTER REPLACES BIRD LOGO WITH X



Twitter launched its new logo on Monday, replacing the blue bird with a white X on a black background as the company moves towards rebranding as X. The social media network's website showed the company's new logo, but its URL was still showing as twitter.com and the blue "Tweet" button was visible. — AFP

Landmark survey reveals major threats to Arabian Myrrh trees



MUSCAT: The 'Survey of Arabian Myrrh Trees in the Sultanate of Oman' project has reached a significant milestone with the completion of its second phase. Led by the Environment Authority and represented by the Environment Conservation Office in Salalah, Dhofar Governorate, the survey has shed light on the pressing challenges facing the precious myrrh trees.

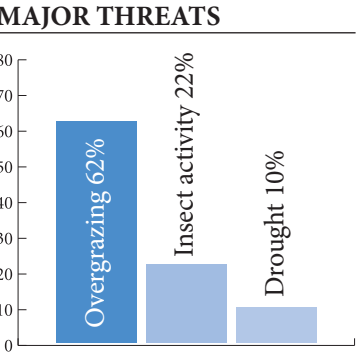
According to the comprehensive results of the second phase, the most significant threats to myrrh trees include overgrazing (62%), insect activity (22%), drought (10%), and unsustainable harvesting methods (6%). These factors have contributed to a concerning decline, with the species experiencing a decrease of over 70%, and its current population reduced to less than 250 trees in nature.

NATURAL SPREAD

The study also revealed that the confirmed spread area of the myrrh tree species covers 92 square kilometres, with a potential natural spread range estimated at 3,048 square kilometres. To assess the current status of the species, the second phase relied on approximately 15 scientific indicators, ensuring a robust and comprehensive evaluation.

Furthermore, the survey diligently documented and collected samples from a total of 59 trees representing the last gatherings of myrrh trees in the

MAJOR THREATS



Sultanate of Oman.

These valuable records are now part of a local database, aiding further conservation efforts. The gravity of the situation has prompted calls for the reevaluation of the myrrh tree's classification at the national level, drawing from the criteria set by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN.2001).

The Environment Authority, along with other regional and international authorities, stresses the importance of protecting this endangered species. As part of its commitment to conservation, the Environment Authority plans to continue implementing the remaining stages of the survey throughout the year 2023.

Among the proposed initiatives is the establishment of a dedicated garden for Arabian myrrh trees within areas of their natural spread in the Dhofar Governorate. On a separate note, Oman's Electricity and Water Production has shown encouraging growth by May 2023, marking a positive trend for the country's vital utilities. — ONA

Heavy rains, thunderstorms hit North Al Sharqiyah

MUSCAT: A number of Al Sharqiyah North wilayats in Oman have been experiencing moderate to heavy rains as the region is impacted by an air trough. The downpour has been causing overflowing wadis in several villages of Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, including Samad Al Shan, Al Khashba, Al Buwaytin, Lizq, and Al Shuwaie. Additionally, areas in the Wilayat of Ibra, such as Al Hayma, Warid, and Al Qaa, have also witnessed varying intensities of rainfall.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has issued warnings that the governorate will continue to be affected by the air trough over the next few days. The Oman Meteorology Office reported prevailing multi-level clouds over most of the governorates with chances of scattered rains.

On Monday, thundershowers accompanied by downdraft winds were experienced over mountainous and open areas of Al Dhahirah Governorate.

As per the CAA, the Sultanate of Oman can expect sporadic rains of varying intensity, especially in Al Sharqiyah South, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Wusta, and Dhofar governorates.

Areas around the Hajar Mountains and neighbouring regions should be prepared for torrential rains and thunderstorms. Additionally, active winds may cause rising dust and low horizontal visibility in parts of the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, Al Wusta, and Dhofar.

INSIDE



BABIES AT WORK

SHOULD THERE BE WORKPLACE NURSERIES IN OMAN?

Should there be workplace nurseries in Oman? This is a question that has been raised in the context of the growing number of women in the workforce. The article discusses the challenges faced by working mothers and the potential benefits of workplace nurseries. It also mentions that the Ministry of Labour is currently studying the issue.

SPOTLIGHT

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435 children killed, 3.3m displaced by conflict

SUDAN'S 100-DAY-OLD WAR

GENEVA: In Sudan, at least 435 children have been killed and at least 2,025 injured since violence broke out three months ago, according to a statement issued by the UN children's agency Unicef on Monday.

"The impact that this conflict has had on children in Sudan over the last 100 days is unfathomable," said Ted Chaiban, Unicef deputy executive director.

In total, the UN children's agency has received reports of 2,500 child rights violations so far, but the number is likely to be much higher, the statement said.

"Every day, children are killed, injured, abducted and witness schools, hospitals and vital infrastructure being damaged, destroyed or looted," said Chaiban, who is currently in Sudan.

More than 3.3 million people have been displaced by the ongoing violence in Sudan, according to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR).

Of these, some 740,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries, the organisation



reported in Geneva on Monday. The head of the UNHCR Filippo Grandi said: "This has to stop. It is time for all parties to this conflict to immediately end this tragic war."

Until dialogue is established between both warring parties, he said, refugees must be protected from violence.

Conditions in the host countries of Egypt, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic are "atrocious," the UNHCR complained in its statement. Refugee centres are overcrowded, it said.

Furthermore, the many internally displaced people within Sudan are facing similar capacity problems. The current rainy season is hampering the work of aid organisations and the transport of refugees, the UNHCR reported.

RISE IN PRICES

Those affected are suffering from sharply rising prices for food and fuel, it said.

Sudan has been roiled since mid-April by an armed conflict between the army and the rival paramilitary militia, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Former Sudanese vice president Mohammed Hamdan Daglo's RSF - made up of tens of thousands of fighters that emerged from fighters in Darfur - is fighting the armed forces led by the de facto president, Abdel Fattah al Burhan.

A series of truces, brokered by Saudi Arabia and the United States, has since largely failed to hold amid a growing humanitarian crisis. — dpa



99.7% of registered pilgrims performed Haj this year

MUSCAT: The Oman Haj delegation said that 99.7 per cent (13,956 pilgrims) of 14,000 registered beneficiaries performed the Haj this season 1444 AH.

Forty-four people were not able to perform the Haj rituals for various reasons.

Further, the Omani Haj mission announced that registration of Oman's pilgrims for 1445 AH will be opened during the next two months and those who are willing to attend the haj rituals of next year will be able to register their interest online.

Sultan bin Saeed al Hinai, head of the mission in Oman said the percentage of satisfaction expressed by the pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman through a questionnaire was 94 per cent (quality of accommodation), 97 per cent (food and nutrition), and 94 per cent (hygiene).

The mission worked in cooperation with the Ministry of Haj and Umrah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other competent to find appropriate solutions to address the challenges.

The mission said the survey results showed a low rating regards



the number of toilets in the Mina camp (71 per cent dissatisfied), toilets in the Arafat camp (54 per cent not satisfied), and the cleanliness of toilets in the Mina camp (46 per cent not satisfied).

He stressed that there is cooperation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to find solutions to raise the efficiency of toilets and increase their number, which is expected to start from the next Haj season. He adding that the mission succeeded in reducing irregular pilgrims by an estimated 99 per cent, as it only monitored a

few cases and took the necessary measures regarding violators.

He also stressed that these services are linked to infrastructure works in the holy sites, and the Omani Haj mission will do its best with the competent authorities in the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to discuss appropriate solutions to improve the environment suitable, which is the ultimate and desired goal pursued by the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to enrich the experience of pilgrims and Umrah performers. — ONA

THE AVERAGE COST OF HAJ BY AIR WAS RO 2,054

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The number of pilgrims who used air transport during this year's Haj was 58.5 per cent, an increase of 3.5 per cent compared to the last year, whereas 41.5 per cent used land transport. The average cost of Haj by air was RO 2,054, compared to RO 1,367 as the average for Haj by land, of which RO 257 were paid to the Mutawafa Company for Pilgrims of Arab countries by Haj and Umrah companies via the Saudi electronic track to equip the Mina and Arafat camps, which formed 12.5 per cent of the average cost of Haj by air while it constituted 18.8 per cent of the cost of Haj by road.

Out of the average cost of Haj by air and land, RO 190 was paid for the fees for services prescribed by the Ministry of Haj and Umrah, which is equivalent to 9.2 per cent of the average cost of Haj by air, and constitutes 13.9 per cent of the average cost of Haj by land.

The most important challenges of the Haj season 1444 AH were many. Many cases of cancellation of eligibility for Haj after approval was granted happened and this has posed a challenge to the Haj Mission.

The ministry had formed a work team headed by the Under-Secretary and Head of the Omani Haj Mission to visit the Holy Land to discuss appropriate solutions with the competent authorities in the

Kingdom regarding the services at the Mina and Arafat camps.

"We have succeeded in reducing illegal pilgrims by an estimated 99 per cent, as we could identify only a few cases and took necessary measures regarding violators, and the reinforcement of the scout delegation by more than 330 per cent had an active role in achieving this goal, in addition to the transfer of fake companies transporting irregular pilgrims to legal procedures during the past seasons," the ministry spokesperson said.

"The entry and exit of Omani pilgrims were made smooth but unfortunately, we had to face a many as 6000 pilgrims who fell sick and we had to deal with 4 deaths during the course," he added.

Passenger traffic surges at Muscat, Salalah airports

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The number of passengers using the Muscat International Airport increased 32 per cent to 995,638 in June 2023 compared to the same period last year, according to the figures issued by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

During the same period, aircraft movement at Muscat Airport increased by 32 per cent to 8,637 in 2023 from 6,654 in 2022.

The freight movement increased by one per cent to 13,988 tonnes from 13,971 tonnes.

The number of passengers using Salalah Airport increased 23 per cent to 96,134 in June 2023 compared to 78,3321 during the same period last year.

During the same period, aircraft movement at Salalah increased by 2 per cent to 967 in 2023 from 945 in 2022.

The freight movement increased by two per cent to 58 tonnes from 57 tonnes.

The number of passengers using Sohar Airport dropped 51 per cent to 1,938 in June 2023 compared to 3,970 passengers in



the same period last year.

During the same period, aircraft movement at Sohar increased by 141 per cent to 109 in 2023 from 45 in 2022.

The number of passengers using Duqm Airport decreased 21 per cent to 4,648 in June 2023 compared to 5,881 passengers in the same period last year.

During the same period, aircraft movement increased by 4 per cent to 71 in 2023 from 68 in 2022.

The number of aircraft passing the Omani airspace increased by 19 per cent, from 37,960 to 31,842.

According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the traffic data worldwide continued to show strong growth in air travel demand.

Globally, traffic was now at 96.1 per cent of May 2019 (pre-pandemic) levels as international traffic climbed 40.9 per cent versus May 2022, with all markets recording strong growth, led once again by carriers in the Asia-Pacific region. International RPKs reached 90.8 per cent of May 2019 levels, with Middle East and North American airlines exceeding pre-pandemic levels.

Middle Eastern airlines saw a 30.8 per cent traffic increase compared to May a year ago.

"People need and love to fly. The strong demand for travel is one element supporting a return to profitability by airlines. In 2023 we expect airlines globally to post a \$9.8 billion net profit. It's an impressive number, particularly after huge pandemic losses. But a 1.2 per cent average net profit margin is just \$2.25 per departing passenger. As a return, that is not sustainable in the long-term." Willie Walsh, IATA Director General, said.

Mwasalat reports increase in bus passengers

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 24

Mwasalat said that 1,900,000 passengers used its bus services of which 33.72 per cent were Omani passengers while 111,000 passengers used ferry services (80.09 per cent Omanis) in the first six months of this year.

It may be noted that 1.3 million passengers used buses and 103,000 passengers used ferries during the same period in 2022. Over 10,000 passengers used the buses on daily buses while over 600 passengers used the ferry services. The company transferred 29,200 vehicles (ferry services) and 10,500 tonnes of cargo during the same period.

Mwasalat currently has an Omanisation percentage of 93 per cent.

According to experts, the expansion of public transport is essential if the Sultanate of Oman has to join the fight against pollution, climate change, global warming, and rising sea levels.

According to the official estimates, the transport sector emits 15.9Mt of carbon each year, or 18 per cent of Oman's emissions in 2021. Passenger cars make up 60 per cent of this total (1.3 million and cars account for 87 per cent of the transport fleet). Emissions are expected to grow by 41 per cent by 2050 under a business-as-usual scenario, driven by population growth.

The pathway to net-zero involves full electrification of light vehicles and short-distance heavy vehicles and a transition to hydrogen fuel cells for long-distance heavy vehicles.



Nama calls for rational use of water

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 24

Nama Water Services has said that the main desalination and water production plants in the Wilayat of Barka have been affected by the green tide phenomenon, which results in a decrease in the quantities of desalinated water.

"Companies operating in the sector are taking a number of precautionary measures to ensure the safety of stations and water quality and to reduce the impact on subscribers." Namaa Water Services has activated emergency plans, which include operating alternative sources and reserve wells and activating the interconnection



between desalination plants Suhar, Barka, and Al Ghubra.

The company called on subscribers to cooperate

by taking the necessary precautions and rationalising water consumption until the quality of seawater quality improves.

According to environmental experts, the green tide is huge accumulations of large green algae that occur in many parts of the world but are more common in temperate and tropical latitudes.

Coastal ecosystems are becoming more vulnerable to harmful algal blooms (HABs), especially in enclosed coastal embayments, as a result of increased nutrient enrichment caused by urbanisation, tourism, industrial wastes, desalination plants, and agricultural activities.



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Report any human trafficking incident to NCCHT

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking (NCCHT) encourages people to report any case of human trafficking to the nearest law enforcement authority or the NCCHT for immediate action.

“Human trafficking is a crime. It is one of the issues that requires societal solidarity to support official efforts in addressing it. Therefore we must encourage victims to report to extend them immediate help,” an NCCHT spokesperson said.

Human trafficking incidents can be reported physically or through the toll-free number 80077444. This will help the authorities nab the culprits as early as possible, he said.

The Sultanate of Oman has always been upholding the rights of citizens and residents. It has taken concrete steps to reinforce human rights as His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued several Royal Decrees in the recent past. The most notable among them was Royal Decree No 6/2021 on the promulgation of the Basic Law of the State with its new amendments, which guaranteed freedoms, human



dignity, and equality in rights and responsibilities.

The Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) is also vigilant to ensure and protect individual rights. It follows domestic as well as international conventions and treaties to ensure individual rights. This is in line with Oman Vision 2040, which works on fulfilling citizens' aspirations.

Oman joined three international conventions related to human rights in 2020.

Royal Decree No 44/2020 ratified the Sultanate of Oman's joining the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) scripted in New York on December 20th, 2006. This convention aims to prevent enforced disappearance as

Oman is committed to combating the phenomenon of human trafficking and all practices associated with it, which are not compatible with lofty human principles and values, as they constitute an insult to legitimate human rights and dignity

CAPTAIN KHALID
BIN ALI TABUK

well as crimes against humanity.

Besides, Royal Decree No 45/2020 ratified the Sultanate of Oman joining the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment aims to prevent torture all over the world and obliges member states to take effective measures to prevent torture within their boundaries.

With regard to the foreign female domestic workers who were stranded for want of pay, the Commission has called up the sponsors of many of the stranded domestic workers and many of them were sent to their native places, according to the OHRC.

Additionally, it follows the procedures taken by the authorities concerned with the protection of human rights, such as ROP, NCCHT and other relevant authorities, by allocating direct contact lines. OHRC affirmed that it provides shelter for domestic workers until legal action is taken to ensure their rights in accordance with the law.

Captain Khalid revealed that in 2022, seven cases of this kind were registered with the Royal Oman Police, and the number of complaints received by the department on suspicions of human trafficking from different governorates is more than 266. Out of them seven crimes were proven in 2022.

Captain Khalid bin Ali Tabuk, Head of the Human Trafficking Department at the Directorate General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigations of the Royal Oman Police (ROP), said that the

Sultanate of Oman's criminal level in human trafficking is very low, according to statistics prepared by the DG of Inquiries and Criminal Investigations.

The world over, human trafficking is the third biggest crime. Most of them were carried out for financial return, following the arms trade and drug trade. It is one of the hidden organised crimes that are managed by a criminal organisation on a global level, and follow-up and work to combat it takes a long time.

“Oman is committed to combating the phenomenon of human trafficking and all practices associated with it, which are not compatible with lofty human principles and values, as they constitute an insult to legitimate human rights and dignity,” said Captain Khalid.

However, there was a hike in the number of human trafficking during the Covid-19, but it has reduced after the pandemic got over.

“The Covid-19 pandemic caused an increase in the number of victims of human trafficking through the exploitation of social networks and the deteriorating economic conditions,” he added.

‘Seeds for the Future’ programme kicks off, to groom graduates

MUSCAT: Huawei's programme for 2023 in the Sultanate of Oman, code-named 'Seeds for the Future' kicked off on Monday under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The programme is supported by Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel).

The programme aims to groom the skills of undergraduates and fresh graduates. It also seeks to exchange knowledge, promote innovation and increase awareness regarding the information and communications technology (ICT) sector.

During the 'Seeds for the Future' programme, the 'Tech4Good'



regional competition will be held in a bid to promote social entrepreneurship, problem solving skills and leadership through teamwork.

The regional competition brings together youth to explore means of utilising digital technology in tackling social issues. — ONA



Four-day workshop highlights maritime labour convention

SALALAH: A 4-day training workshop began in Salalah on Monday for specialists tasked with applying the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC2006). The workshop is organised by the Ministry of Labour, in cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and International Labour Organization. A number of departments concerned in Oman

and some specialists from the GCC countries are taking part in the workshop, which discusses a set of topics, including the amendments adopted on 6 June 2022 at the 110th session of the International Labor Conference and the statement of the procedures in force in regulating maritime work, in addition to the role of seafarers' employment offices in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve: A pristine haven of natural marvels

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 24

Jabal Samhān Nature Reserve in the Governorate of Dhofar stores wonders. Encompassing an impressive expanse of 4,500 square kilometres (1,700 sq miles), this sanctuary remains untouched by human habitation, standing as an unspoiled realm of natural splendour.

Renowned wildlife photographer, Salim al Shahri, mentioned the sanctuary as one of the world's wonders.

In an interview with the Oman Observer Al Shahri underscored the reserve's significance, particularly in the majestic embrace of the Dhofar Mountains, where it serves as a refuge for the awe-inspiring Arabian leopard. This elusive and graceful big cat finds serenity amidst the sanctuary's tranquil expanses.

The photographer eloquently unveiled the delicate ecosystem of the reserve, shedding light on the diverse prey species thriving



within its borders. Among the remarkable inhabitants are the regal Arabian gazelle, the agile Nubian ibex, the elusive Cape hare, the rock-dwelling hyrax, the Indian crested porcupine, the enigmatic desert hedgehog, and a symphony of captivating bird species.

“On rare occasions, the leopards

might turn to domestic livestock for sustenance, a testament to the intricate balance of predator and prey relationships in the wilderness,” Al Shahri revealed.

Beyond the Arabian leopard's presence, the sanctuary welcomes other noble predators, adding allure to its rich tapestry of life. The regal caracal, the elusive



striped hyena, and the enigmatic Arabian wolf gracefully play their roles within this sanctuary, contributing to the harmonious rhythm of undisturbed wildlife.

Through his artistry with the camera lens, Al Shahri unveils the marvels of Jabal Samhān Nature Reserve, offering the world a glimpse into its exquisite

biodiversity. His photography becomes a portal to a realm where nature's grandeur takes centre-stage, illuminating the imperative of preserving such pristine ecosystems for generations to come.

As observers delve into the captivating images and immerse themselves in the photographer's

profound insights, they are reminded of the urgency to safeguard our planet's precious wildlife and natural habitats. Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve stands as a testament to the unparalleled beauty and importance of nurturing nature's gifts for the well-being of all life on Earth.

(Pictures by Salim al Shahri)



B A B I E S A T W O R K

SHOULD
THERE BE
WORKPLACE
NURSERIES
IN OMAN
?

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shadadm

WITH the rising cost of bringing in nannies and house helps to cater to children at home when parents are at work, employees in Oman are waiting for the day when workplace nurseries become a reality.

However, the question that remains unanswered is how prepared are organisations to accommodate employees with babies and infants that need parental care and attention and how effective will the contribution of such employees be at work.

“Affording the maid to take care of the house and children is so expensive these days. Therefore, allowing parents to take their babies to workplaces is a great idea. Authorities need to fast-track the thought of providing on-site nurseries for our children. If it so happens, it would be a win-win situation for both parents and employers,” Afraah Nizar, a mother of three young children, said.

Last year, Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, said nurseries at workplaces are an excellent idea, and the ministry encourages and supports it.

“There is a study on the possibility of creating a legal framework in this regard,” she had said in Oman TV’s weekly

talk show ‘With the Youth’ programme. Some employees said they are ready to pay for the babysitter as long as it is a small amount. “I do not mind paying a small fee for the babysitter because I know my baby will be in good hands. Moreover, I will get a few minutes to check on them. Also, my kids being with other kids makes good sense as they get time to interact,” Zakiya al Hussaini, a mother of two, said.

According to the Minister of Social Development, a decision will be taken if there is no objection to implementing such a step in government institutions.

“There are set standards and basics for nurseries supervised by the ministry, and also there are guidelines in this regard, in addition to the rules and regulations governing them,” she said.

Many say that times have changed when women used to stay at home to look after children and husbands go to work.

“Both my wife and I go to work. It has become a necessity for women to work now with the rising cost of living to help each other, unlike before, when we could make ends meet with one of us working. I think the idea of work establishments offering baby-sitting activities would be great,” Abdullah al Naamani, a bank employee whose wife also works, said.

Internationally, workplace nurseries are a proven method to enhance employee loyalty and productivity. This is also a result of a breakdown in childcare or absence of being minimalised.

Affording the maid to take care of the house and children is so expensive these days. Therefore, allowing parents to take their babies to workplaces is a great idea. Authorities need to fast-track the thought of providing on-site nurseries for our children

AFRAAH
NIZAR

A mother of three young children





China to step up policy adjustments amid tortuous recovery

BEIJING: China's top leaders pledged on Monday to step up policy support for the economy amid a tortuous post-Covid recovery, focusing on boosting domestic demand, signalling more stimulus steps.

The world's second-largest economy grew at a frail pace in the second quarter as demand weakened at home and abroad, raising pressure on policymakers to deliver more stimulus to shore up post-Covid recovery.

China will step up economic policy adjustments, focusing on expanding domestic demand, boosting confidence and preventing risks, state news agency Xinhua cited the Politburo, a top decision-making body of the ruling Communist Party, as saying.

"Currently, China's economy is facing new difficulties and challenges, which mainly arise from insufficient domestic demand, difficulties in the operation of some enterprises, risks and hidden dangers in key areas, as well as a grim and complex external environment," Xinhua quoted the Politburo as saying, after a meeting chaired by President Xi Jinping.

China will implement its macro adjustments "in a precise and forceful manner" and strengthen counter-cyclical adjustments, as the government sticks with a prudent monetary policy and pro-active fiscal policy, the Politburo was quoted as saying.

Xinhua quoted President



Chinese President Xi Jinping attends the joint press conference of the China-Central Asia Summit in Xian, Shaanxi province, China. — Reuters File Photo

Currently, China's economy is facing new difficulties and challenges, which mainly arise from insufficient domestic demand, difficulties in the operation of some enterprises, risks and hidden dangers in key areas, as well as a grim and complex external environment

Xi as saying during a separate meeting that China will strive to achieve its annual development targets.

While China is seen on track to hit its modest 2023 growth target of around 5 per cent, there are risks of the annual goal being missed for the second year in a row, analysts said.

Most analysts say policymakers are unlikely to deliver any aggressive stimulus due to worries about growing debt risks.

Capital Economics analysts said that the outcome of the meeting suggested that further policy support would be rolled out in coming months.

"But the absence of any major announcements of policy specifics does suggest a lack of urgency or that policymakers are struggling to come up with suitable measures to shore up growth," they said in a note.

A senior central bank official said earlier this month the bank will use policy tools such as the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) to weather the challenges facing the world's second-largest economy.

Last week, the central bank kept its lending benchmarks steady, despite signs of a faltering economic recovery.

China will actively expand domestic demand, boosting residents' incomes to enable consumption to drive economic growth, while speeding up local special bond issuance to spur investment, Xinhua said.

The government will boost demand for autos, electronics and household products and promote tourism, Xinhua added. — **Reuters**



The leader and candidate of conservative Partido Popular as he addresses supporters from a balcony of the PP headquarters in Madrid.— Reuters

Fugitive Catalan leader holds key to Spanish electoral impasse

BARCELONA/MADRID: A Catalan independence leader on the run from Spanish justice could hold the key to unlocking a political impasse after Sunday's election ended in a hung parliament.

Former Catalan regional government head Carles Puigdemont, who lives in self-imposed exile in Belgium since leading a failed push to split Catalonia from Spain in 2017, unexpectedly finds himself a potential kingmaker after no bloc on the left or right won enough seats to form a majority.

One path out of the labyrinth would be for Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez to secure a vote in favour, or at least an abstention, of his forming a government from Puigdemont's Junts party in exchange for further concessions on independence.

The centre-right People's Party (PP) and the far-right

Vox won the most seats in parliament with a combined 169 - short of the 176 seats needed for a majority and confounding poll predictions.

The ruling Socialists (PSOE) and far-left Sumar won 153 but have more possibilities for negotiating support from small Basque and Catalan separatist parties, as they did following 2019's election.

Sanchez could win over left-wing separatist party Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), as he did to form a minority government in 2020. But he will likely also need the backing of the more hardline Junts, which has not supported Sanchez in the past four years.

Centre-right Junts has not conveyed a clear position but has vowed to adopt a more confrontational approach than ERC.

Its Secretary-General Jordi

Turull said on Monday he would use the "window of opportunity" created by the election impasse to achieve Catalan independence.

"The state knows that if it wants to negotiate with us, there are two issues that are fundamental and generate consensus in Catalonia which are an amnesty and self-determination," he said in an interview with local radio station RAC 1.

Turull was among the nine Catalan jailed separatist leaders pardoned by Sanchez in 2021. However, many more are still facing trial over their role, chief amongst them

Puigdemont, who still wields considerable influence within Junts, said in mid-July that Junts would not support Sanchez because he was unreliable. Early on Monday he tweeted that Junts is a party that keeps its word. — **Reuters**

Thousands more evacuated as Greece 'at war' with fires

RHODES, Greece: Authorities evacuated nearly 2,500 people from the Greek island of Corfu on Monday as the heat-battered nation was "at war" with several wildfires.

Tens of thousands of people have already fled blazes on the island of Rhodes, with many frightened tourists scrambling to get home on evacuation flights.

About 2,400 visitors and locals were evacuated from the Ionian tourist island of Corfu from Sunday into Monday, a fire service spokesman said, adding that the departures were a precaution.

"We are at war and are exclusively geared towards the fire front," Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis told parliament, warning that the nation faced "another three difficult days ahead" before high temperatures are forecast to ease.

Greece has been sweltering under a lengthy spell of extreme heat that has exacerbated wildfire risk and left visitors stranded in peak tourist season.

Kelly Squirrel, a transport



Smoke rises as wildfire burns near the village of Palia Perithia, on the island of Corfu, Greece. — **Reuters**

administrator from the United Kingdom, said police had ordered people from her hotel on Rhodes to evacuate.

"We had to keep walking," she said at the international airport. "So we walked for about six hours in the heat."

Rhodes, which counted 2.5 million visitor arrivals in 2022, is one of Greece's leading holiday destinations.

Greek television broadcast images of long lines of people, some in beachwear, lugging suitcases along the island's

roads on Saturday, when the evacuations were ordered.

Some 30,000 people fled the flames on Rhodes at the weekend, the country's largest-ever wildfire evacuation.

Police said 16,000 people had been transported on land and evacuated 3,000 by sea. Others had to flee by road or used their own transport after being told to leave the area.

"We are exhausted and traumatised," said Daniel-Cladin Schmidt, a 42-year-old German tourist waiting to be evacuated with his wife and nine-year-old son.

"There were thousands of people, the buses couldn't pass, we had to walk for more than two hours," he said at Rhodes airport.

"We couldn't breathe, we just covered our faces and moved forward."

Holiday-makers and some locals spent the night in gyms, schools and hotel conference centres on the island.

In the departures hall of the international airport, AFP saw groups of tourists sleeping on the floor, surrounded by luggage. — **AFP**



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

ANNOUNCEMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL TENDER

Tender No.	92/2023/MHT/HQ-18 International Tender	Tender Name	Appointing a company to producing a promotional film for the Sultanate of Oman
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)		25 O.R	
Tender Document Sales End Date		13/8/2023	
Last Date for Bid Submission		5/9/2023	
Grade		International	
E-Tendering Portal		https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om	

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E.Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Bids are submitted that fulfill the technical conditions and specifications, accompanied by electronic tender bond from a local or International bank registered in Oman not less than (1%) of the bid value, valid for (90) days from the date of its submission.
 - The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids.
- The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
	For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ita.gov.om or 24402200
For further information	Email : solic@mht.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085



Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. delivers his second State of the Nation Address (SONA), at the House of Representative in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines. – Reuters

Marcos says drug war has ‘a new face’

MANILA: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos said on Monday the nation’s anti-narcotics campaign has “taken on a new face” with a focus on rehabilitation and education.

“The campaign against illegal drugs continues but it has taken on a new face,” Marcos said in his second State of the Nation address to lawmakers, diplomats and judges.

“It is now geared towards community-based treatment, rehabilitation, education and reintegration to curb drug dependence amongst our affected citizenry,” he said.

Marcos said the government would also “relentlessly continue our fight against drug syndicates” and crack down on “unscrupulous law enforcers” involved in the drug trade.

“I will be accepting their resignations,” he said to cheers and applause.

Nearly a thousand top-ranking police were asked to resign in January as the government sought to clear the corruption-tainted force of officers involved in illegal drugs. It is not clear how many resignations have been accepted so far.

Human rights activists expressed outrage at Marcos’s speech, which came days after his declaration that the Philippines would no longer deal with the International Criminal Court after The Hague-based tribunal rejected Manila’s appeal to stop a drug war investigation.

“The supposed new face of his anti-narcotics campaign is merely a rehash of tired old PR lines that mean literally nothing in the context of the continuing EJKs in his drug war, and his disinterest and even contempt for justice for the victims during the past administration,” said Cristina Palabay of human rights alliance Karapatan.

Marcos also used his 71-minute speech to highlight his government’s efforts in the past year to boost agricultural productivity, improve education and build infrastructure.

He also sought to drum up congressional support for his legislative agenda, including reforming the military and uniformed personnel pension system to make it more sustainable, and granting amnesties to insurgents who surrender. — AFP

Israel MPs approve key judicial reform clause as protests flare



Protesters run after crossing the police line at the entrance to the Knesset during a demonstration against Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and government’s judicial overhaul, in Jerusalem. – Reuters

JERUSALEM: Israel’s hard-right government on Monday pushed through parliament a key clause of its controversial judicial reform package despite months of mass protests and concerns voiced by foreign allies.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his coalition allies approved the bill in a Knesset vote boycotted by opposition lawmakers, some of whom shouted “shame, shame”.

Critics charge the judicial revamp will undermine Israel’s liberal democracy by removing checks and balances on the executive, while the government argues it needs to curb judicial overreach.

The bill, passed with 64 votes in the 120-seat chamber, aims to limit

the powers of the Supreme Court in striking down government decisions which the judges deem “unreasonable”.

The reform package has triggered one of the biggest protest movements in Israel’s history since it was unveiled by the government in January.

The bill was passed hours after Netanyahu, 73, returned to the Knesset — only a day after undergoing surgery to have a pacemaker fitted — as police outside the legislature used water cannon and mounted officers were deployed against a crowd of demonstrators.

President Isaac Herzog — who had tried but failed to broker a compromise after half a year of mass street protests — earlier

warned that Israel faced a “national emergency”.

Netanyahu’s coalition government, which includes far-right and ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties, argues that the proposed changes are needed to ensure a better balance of power. Israel’s traditional bedrock ally Washington had on Sunday reiterated concern about the political turmoil, with Biden urging Israeli leaders to postpone the vote.

“From the perspective of Israel’s friends in the United States, it looks like the current judicial reform proposal is becoming more divisive, not less,” he said in a statement.

“It doesn’t make sense for Israeli leaders to rush this — the focus should be on pulling people

together and finding consensus.”

While legislators met inside, protesters outside parliament booed, beat drums, blew horns and chanted “shame”.

The government had taken a “cautious path”, said Justice Minister Yariv Levin, the driving force behind the revamp.

“We are not cancelling the reasonableness clause but reducing its use, so that a judge’s personal opinions won’t come at the expense of the people’s desire,” he told parliament at the end of a marathon debate before the vote.

Opponents accuse Netanyahu, who has been fighting corruption charges in court, of a conflict of interest, and some protesters have labelled him the “crime minister”. — AFP

Gabon’s Bongo to face 18 candidates in presidential vote

LIBREVILLE: Gabon’s leader Ali Bongo Ondimba, who is favourite for a third term, will face 18 other candidates in next month’s presidential election, authorities announced on Monday.

Bongo’s family has ruled the oil-rich West African state for 55 years.

The 64-year-old, who took over from his father Omar Bongo Ondimba in 2009, officially announced in July that he would run again for president.

His leading rivals for the top job include Alexandre Barro Chambrier of the opposition Rally for the Fatherland and Modernity (RPM) party and the National Union’s head Paulette Missambo.

The opposition failed to agree on a single candidate to challenge Bongo in the August 26 poll, but both candidates are former ministers and part of the Alternance 2023 coalition. In April, the Gabonese parliament voted to amend the constitution and



Ali Bongo Ondimba

reduce the president’s term from seven to five years.

Sections of the opposition criticised the changes, in particular the end of two rounds of voting, as a means of “facilitating the re-election” of Bongo.

With less than five weeks to go to the elections, Alternance 2023 has denounced modifications to the electoral code.

These notably include a move to allow a maximum of only three

observers at each polling station — one for the ruling majority, one for the opposition and one for all independent candidates.

Previously every candidate could appoint an observer for every polling station.

“The claim of parity between the majority and the opposition is a trick. It favours supposed opposition parties without any candidates or very few,” Francois Ndong Obiang, head of the Reagir party, told a

meeting of Alternance member parties. Prime Minister Alain-Claude Bilie-By-Nze had last week urged the opposition not to “throw oil on the fire”. “In order to hold a calm election, those involved must be careful not to throw oil on the fire,” he said.

The president was narrowly re-elected in 2016, with just 5,500 more votes than rival Jean Ping who claimed the election had been fixed. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ALGIERS

Algeria wildfires kill 15, injure 26

Wildfires raging across northern Algeria amid a heatwave have killed 15 people, injured 26 others and forced mass evacuations, the government said on Monday.

The North African country has recorded 97 fires across 16 provinces, the worst in Bejaia, Bouira and Jijel, but most have been put out, according to the interior ministry. Fanned by strong winds and with temperatures hitting 48 degrees Celsius, the fires have raged through residential areas. Some 1,500 people had been



evacuated from the three provinces east of the capital Algiers.

The ministry said operations were underway, calling on citizens to “avoid areas affected by the fires and to use the toll-free numbers available for any reports” of new blazes.

DAKAR

At least 15 migrants drown off coast

At least 15 people drowned when a boat carrying migrants capsized off the coast of Senegal’s capital Dakar on Monday, Senegal’s President Macky Sall said on Monday.

The incident occurred offshore from one of the country’s popular beaches in the Ouakam area in the early hours of Monday.

“I express my deep sorrow following the death of around fifteen Senegalese people following the sinking of a pirogue (boat) off the coast of



Dakar. My heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims,” Sall said. Alerted by local fishermen and the national navy, a contingent of firefighters and divers were still searching for bodies in the area on Monday afternoon.

ACCRA

Ex-minister arrested over \$1m probe in Ghana

A Ghanaian minister who resigned over the weekend after her houseworkers allegedly stole more than \$1 million in cash from her home, has been arrested for suspected corruption. Sanitation Minister Cecilia Abena Dapaah has denied any crimes, but the case drew criticism from Ghana’s opposition who questioned why a minister had such large amounts of cash in her house. Special prosecutor Kissi Agyebeng said Dapaah was placed under arrest on Monday. “in respect of suspected corruption



and corruption-related offences regarding large amounts of money.”

The arrest came as President Nana Akufo-Addo’s government deals with the country’s worst economic crisis in years which has pushed Ghana to seek a \$3 billion loan from the IMF.



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In brief

■ TOKYO



N KOREA FIRES POSSIBLE BALLISTIC MISSILE

North Korea launched a possible ballistic missile, Japan's defence ministry said on Monday. The projectile is believed to have fallen outside Japan's exclusive economic zone, according to public broadcaster NHK citing government officials.

South Korea's military also said Pyongyang fired a ballistic missile towards the Sea of Japan.

In response, Seoul and Washington have staged joint military exercises with advanced stealth jets and US strategic assets.

The launch also comes ahead of celebrations in North Korea this week marking the 70th anniversary of the end of the Korean War.

■ MALE



ELECTION COMMISSION FEARS POLL TURMOIL

The Maldives Election Commission has sacked its chief ahead of presidential polls in September, an official said on Monday, triggering opposition fears it would be able to hold a free and fair vote.

Fuwad Thowfeek, the president of the five-member Elections Commission, was removed following a majority no-trust resolution, the official said.

"He was voted out, but remains in office until the decision is ratified by parliament," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

■ THE HAGUE



POLICE SWOOP ON GANG SMUGGLING MIGRANTS

Police in five countries have broken up a people smuggling gang illegally bringing Cuban migrants into the EU through an "unusually long and expensive" route, Europol said on Monday.

Police in June arrested 62 suspected smugglers who moved migrants from Cuba through Serbia, before taking them to Greece and finally flying them to Spain, Europe's policing agency said.

"Members of the migrant smuggling network used a well-known messaging application to advertise their illicit services to Cuban clients in vulnerable situations," said the Hague-based Europol, who coordinated the operation together with Interpol.

Russia talks of retaliation after 'Ukrainian drone strike' near Moscow army HQ

MOSCOW: Russia spoke of taking harsh retaliatory measures against Ukraine after two drones damaged buildings in Moscow early on Monday, including one close to the Defence Ministry's headquarters, in what it called a brazen act of terror.

Nobody was hurt in the attack, of which a senior Ukrainian official said there would be more, but one drone struck close to the Moscow building where the Russian military holds briefings on what it calls its "special military operation", a symbolic blow which underscored the reach of such drones.

Roads nearby were temporarily closed, windows on the top two floors of an office building struck by a second drone in another Moscow district were blown out, and debris was scattered on the ground.

A third "helicopter-type drone" which was not carrying explosives fell on a cemetery in a town outside Moscow, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement in which it vowed that all those responsible would be found and punished.

The Kremlin said it would press on with its campaign in Ukraine and meet all the aims of an operation which Kyiv and much of the West say is a brutal war of conquest.

The Moscow drone attack,



Workers clear the rubble in the centre of Odesa after a Russian military strike. — AFP

though not serious in terms of its human cost or damage, was the most high-profile of its kind since two drones reached the Kremlin in May.

A swarm of 17 drones also launched attacks overnight on Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014, the Russian Defence Ministry said, adding it had used anti-drone equipment and air defences to

bring them down. The Russian-installed head of Crimea said an ammunition warehouse had been struck and a residential building damaged.

"We regard what happened as yet another use of terrorist methods and intimidation of the civilian population by the military and political leadership of Ukraine," the foreign ministry said.

"The Russian Federation reserves the right to take harsh retaliatory measures."

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, now deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, said Moscow needed to broaden the range of targets it struck in Ukraine, adding what he called high-impact unexpected and unconventional ones.

Ukrainian President

Volodymyr Zelenskiy, whose government rarely comments on attacks inside Russia or on Russian-controlled territory, had on Sunday promised what he called "a retaliation to Russian attacks for Odesa".

Drone fragments had been found near a building on Komsomolsky Avenue. The site is close to various defence ministry buildings. — Reuters

UN Command in talks with N Korea over US soldier

SEOUL: The UN Command has started a conversation with Pyongyang over American soldier Travis King, who ran across the border into North Korea last week, its deputy commander said on Monday.

"A conversation has commenced with the KPA through the mechanism of the armistice agreement," Lieutenant General Andrew Harrison said at a press briefing, referring to North Korea's military, the Korean People's Army.

The UN Command is a US-led multinational force that oversees the Korean War truce. The two Koreas remain technically at war because the 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice and not a peace treaty.

"The primary concern for us is for Private King's welfare," Harrison said, adding that the incident was "still subject to investigation".

Harrison said that, under the armistice agreement, there was a mechanism allowing the UN Command to communicate with the North's military in the Joint Security Area (JSA).

"That process has started" but due to the "very delicate nature of these negotiations" he said he would not go into further detail.

"Obviously there is someone's welfare at stake and clearly we are in a very difficult and complex situation which I don't want to risk by speculation or going into too much detail about the communications that have existed."

The United States does not have formal diplomatic ties with the North and, since North Korea



UN Command deputy commander Lieutenant General Andrew Harrison speaks at a press briefing, at the Seoul Foreign Correspondents' Club in Seoul. — AFP

“The primary concern for us is for Private King’s welfare. The incident was still subject to investigation

ANDREW HARRISON
Lieutenant General

closed its borders at the start of the pandemic, most embassies with a presence in Pyongyang have withdrawn their foreign diplomats.

North Korea has not commented publicly on King. Private Second Class King was

being escorted to Seoul's airport last week and was due to fly to Texas after an altercation with police and a stint in South Korean jail.

But instead of getting on the plane to face disciplinary hearings at Fort Bliss, King slipped away, joined a tourist tour of the Demilitarised Zone and fled across the border. He is now believed to be in North Korean custody.

Most of the border between the two Koreas is heavily fortified. But at the JSA, the frontier is marked only by a low concrete divider and is relatively easy to cross, despite soldiers on both sides.

The JSA has been closed to tourists since King's border crossing, and it will likely remain that way for the foreseeable future, Harrison said. — AFP

UN talks seek to fix 'broken' global food system

ROME: A three-day United Nations summit opened in Rome on Monday aimed at tackling a "broken" global food system where millions are starving, two billion are overweight or obese and the planet is suffering.

The food systems summit comes amid growing food insecurity around the world, with UN agencies warning of an increasing number of people suffering from chronic hunger.

"In a world of plenty, it is outrageous that people continue to suffer and die from hunger," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

"Global food systems are broken -- and billions of people are paying the price."

More than 780 million people go hungry around the globe, even as nearly one-third of the world's food is wasted or lost, he said.

And while 462 million people are underweight, two billion are overweight or obese, he added.

The summit brings together representatives from the UN's three food agencies headquartered in Rome -- the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World



Antonio Guterres

Food Programme (WFP) — alongside heads of states, government representatives and delegates. Food systems include all activities related to producing, processing, transporting and consuming food, and making them more sustainable, efficient and equitable is a complex task.

Involving multiple sectors and actors, food systems are affected by varied trends such as urbanisation, climate change, technology and government policy.

Weather shocks, the Covid pandemic and conflicts including the war in Ukraine have helped push the number of people facing hunger up by 122 million since 2019, according to the WFP.

Between 691-783 million people faced hunger last year, with a mid-range of 735 million, WFP estimated in a report earlier this month.

— AFP

Exploring the many faces of Botox



Dr Nisma Haris

The writer is a general physician and content creator

Looks and appearances matter in today's world to the extent that Botox procedures have taken the world by storm. Gone is the era when such cosmetic procedures were limited to a few prosperous of the society. These days from celebrities to influencers everyone irrespective of age goes for Botox. Who knows this friend of yours who looks so youthful and flawless had undergone a Botox? As the perception prevails, Botox is merely confined to getting rid of wrinkles in your late 40s and enhancing your features or popping up whatever element you love. Perceptions apart, what actually is Botox? Botox treatments are minimally invasive treatments that use botulinum, a purified toxin known as 'type A toxin' from a bacterium. This toxin temporarily paralyses the facial muscles not letting them contract and hence, resulting in the reduction of wrinkles and fine lines. It is usually injected in between the eyebrows for frown lines and around the eyes for crows' feet.

An office procedure that can be done in almost as good as 10 minutes with no prior need for general anesthesia or any sort of incision for the procedure has brought Botox worldwide acceptance. Your cosmetic healthcare provider will numb the area with a topical anesthetic for pain or discomfort concerns. Here, the most obvious question pops up. Does it really erase all the wrinkles, crows' feet, and fine lines forever? Basically, you're inhibiting the muscle contractions and decreasing the facial movement," said Dr. Kristen Broderick, an assistant professor of plastic and reconstructive surgery at Johns Hopkins Medicine. "And then, therefore, you're preventing or slowing the formation of wrinkles over time." Moreover, Doctors stress that the wrinkles are postponed, not prevented. "Mother Nature always wins," says Dr Mathew Avram, director of the Dermatology Laser and Cosmetic Centre and director of dermatologic surgery at Mass General Hospital in Boston.

BLURB; FROM CELEBRITIES TO INFLUENCERS: THE BOTOX TREND TAKES THE WORLD BY STORM, BUT WHAT'S THE REAL DEAL BEHIND IT?

Speaking of safety and efficacy, it is FDA-approved and relatively safe. However, minor bruising may develop. Minor side effects include tiredness, headache, swelling or drooping eyelid, neck pain, dryness of eyes, double vision, or allergic reactions. One should take caution after the procedure and avoid rubbing, or massaging the treated area to prevent the toxin from spreading to other areas. Botox last for four to six months and vary from person to person. The muscles will relax and the wrinkles might return after the effects of treatment wean off. Additional injectables can be given for the maintenance of desired results. Yet, Botox is generally confused with facelift procedures which is an entirely different procedure and might take up a few weeks to recover. Last but foremost, don't fall into the trap of DIY Botox, a trend circulating on social media through YouTube videos or online unregulated Botox tutorials. Your face is precious and should be in safe and authorised hands.

Med migration conference paves way for donors' fund

Gael Branchereau

Italy hosted Mediterranean leaders in Rome on Sunday at a conference aimed at extending an EU-backed deal with Tunisia to curb the arrival of migrants on European shores. The summit convened by Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni laid the foundations for a fund to finance investment projects and support border controls, with a medium-term aim of better regulating migratory flows. Opening the conference, Meloni said talks would focus on illegal and legal immigration, refugee support and "the most important... wide cooperation to support development in Africa". The day of talks was the "start of a process" that would be followed with a donors' conference to finance investment projects and support border control, Meloni said, adding that no date had yet been set. The United Arab Emirates pledged \$111 million to that fund, Meloni said in a press conference following the conference. Ahead of the talks, Pope Francis appealed to the leaders to help the scores of people who try to enter Europe each year in search of a better life as they flee poverty and conflict. "The Mediterranean can no longer be the theatre of death and inhumanity", the pontiff said during his weekly Angelus prayer. During the 2022 election campaign that brought her to power, the far-right Meloni vowed to "stop the disembarkation" of migrants in Italy, which the government puts at nearly 80,000 coastal arrivals since January, compared to 33,000 in the same period last year. But while the government has put obstacles in the path of humanitarian ships rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean, it has failed to stop the departures themselves, which mostly originate in Tunisia and Libya. Italy and the European Commission have sought to step up engagement with Tunisia, promising funding if it stems emigration from its territory. Meloni has also sought to act as an intermediary between Tunisia -- cash-strapped and on the cusp of a major debt crisis -- and the International Monetary Fund, where a nearly \$2 billion bailout package for the North African country has stalled amid an IMF demand for structural reforms. Last week, the EU signed a memorandum of understanding with Tunisia that provides for 105 million euros in direct European aid to prevent the departure of migrant boats and combat smugglers. — AFP

What I learned in Ukraine



Bret Stephens

The writer is an American conservative journalist, editor, and columnist

Last week, a friend asked me what I could learn from a four-day trip to Ukraine I was planning that I couldn't glean just by reading the news. It was a fair question. With the trip now behind me, I can answer. I learned how strange it is to visit a country to which no plane flies and, as of last Monday, no ship sails — thanks to Russian President Vladimir Putin's cruel and cynical withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative through which Ukrainian farm products reached hungry countries like Kenya, Lebanon and Somalia. The only feasible way for a visitor to get from the Polish border to Kyiv, Ukraine, is a nine-hour train ride, where the sign inside the carriage door urges, "Be Brave Like Ukraine." I learned that you need to download the Air Alert! app to your smartphone as soon as you enter the country. It sounds an alarm every time the system detects drones, missiles or other incoming aerial threats in your vicinity, something that happened time and again during my short stay. Following the alarm, a recording — in English by "Star Wars" actor Mark Hamill — intones: "Proceed to the nearest shelter. Don't be careless. Your overconfidence is your weakness." I learned that Kyiv is hopping. Despite what the US Embassy says have been 1,620 missile and drone attacks on the city — and despite an economy that contracted 29 per cent in the first year of the war — cars jam the roads, people dine in outdoor cafes on well-swept sidewalks and activists, civil servants and elected officials freely share divergent views with visiting columnists. To adapt a phrase attributed to Yitzhak Rabin, Ukrainians are going about their everyday lives as if there is no war, while waging war as if there is no everyday life. I learned that every member of the US Embassy staff in Kyiv, led by our courageous and cleareyed ambassador, Bridget Brink, volunteered for the duty. They have been separated from their families and living for months on end in hotel rooms. They have the job of overseeing one of the largest US assistance efforts since the Marshall Plan, ensuring that tens of thousands of individual pieces of American military



Municipal workers remove debris at a site of a building damaged during Russian missile strikes, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Odesa. — Reuters

UKRAINIANS ARE GOING ABOUT THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES AS IF THERE IS NO WAR, WHILE WAGING WAR AS IF THERE IS NO EVERYDAY LIFE

hardware in Ukrainian hands are properly accounted for, reconstituting an embassy that was gutted on the eve of Russia's attack and keeping tabs on Russian war crimes — some 95,000 of which have been documented so far by the Ukrainian prosecutor general's office. I learned what it was like to sit in conference rooms and walk along corridors that would soon be shattered by Russian ordnance. On Tuesday, I joined a diplomatic group led by United States Agency for International Development Administrator Samantha Power on a visit to the port of Odesa. Power met first with Ukrainian officials to discuss logistical options for their exports after Putin's withdrawal from the grain agreement, then with farmers to discuss issues such as de-mining their fields and de-risking their finances. The stately Port Authority building in which the meetings took place, a purely civilian target, was struck barely a day after our departure. I learned that Ukrainians have no interest in turning their victimisation into an identity. Years ago, in Belgrade,

I saw how the Serbian government had preserved the wreck of its old defence ministry, hit by Nato bombs in the 1999 Kosovo war, in keeping with its self-pitying perceptions of that war. By contrast, in Bucha, the Kyiv suburb that suffered some of the worst atrocities during Russia's brief occupation in the early days of the war, I witnessed the transformation of apartment buildings dotted with patched-up bullet holes into trendy coworking spaces. As Anatoliy Fedoruk, the mayor of Bucha, told Power, "Memory will stay in memoirs but residents want to rebuild without reminders." I learned that Ukrainians aren't likely to trade sovereign territory for Western security assurances, much less for some kind of armistice deal with Moscow. They tried the former in the 1990s with the Budapest Memorandum, in which they surrendered the nuclear arsenal on their soil to Russia for the sake of toothless guarantees of territorial integrity. They tried the latter with the equally toothless Minsk agreements after Russia's first attack in 2014. The goal of Western policy should be to provide Ukraine with the military means they need to win, rather than to pressure Ukraine into again bargaining away its rights to sovereignty and security for the sake of assuaging our anxieties about Russian escalation. — The New York Times

Inconclusive vote fuels uncertainty

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and his right-wing rival will each begin negotiations on Monday to try to head off a fresh vote after an inconclusive snap election resulted in a hung parliament.

Defying polls that for months had written him off as defeated, the Socialist premier managed to curb the gains of the right-wing opposition.

With all the votes counted, Alberto Nunez Feijoo's Popular Party (PP) and far-right Vox — its potential ally — won a total 169 seats, short of the 176 needed for a governing majority. Sanchez's Socialists and radical left Sumar ally secured 153 seats for the left bloc.

“Both the right and the left have a very tenuous, and hazardous, path to a majority, and neither is very likely to succeed,” said Federico Santi, analyst at political risk consultancy Eurasia Group.

The front pages of newspapers on Monday highlighted the political gridlock now facing Spain.

“The government is up in the air,” top-selling daily newspaper El Pais headlines on its front page.

Addressing a crowd of euphoric activists shouting “No pasaran!” — the famous anti-fascist slogan of Spain's 1936-1939 civil war meaning “They shall not pass!” — Sanchez was jubilant.

“The backwards-looking bloc that wanted to roll back all the progress we made over the past four years has failed,” said Sanchez who focused his campaign on the danger of a PP-Vox government.

With their 153 lawmakers, the Socialists and Sumar will need the support of several regional formations such as the left-wing Catalan separatist ERC party or the pro-independence Basque party EH Bildu, seen as the heir of the now-defunct armed separatist group ETA.

But they will also have to negotiate the abstention of the headline Catalan separatist party JxCat which



Hazel Ward

The writer is Deputy Bureau Chief, Paris, at AFP

SPAIN, WHICH HELD FOUR GENERAL ELECTIONS BETWEEN 2015 AND 2019, COULD FIND ITSELF ONCE AGAIN IN DEADLOCK AND FORCED TO CALL A NEW VOTE

has demanded a referendum on independence for Catalonia — a likely red line for Sanchez.

“If it depends on JxCat, it is a challenge because it has shown itself to be more opposed to Sanchez than it was in the past,” said Antonio Barroso, an analyst at political consultancy Teneo.

If everything came together, Sanchez could assemble 172 lawmakers behind him, which is more than Feijoo, and would be enough to secure a second parliamentary investiture vote which only requires a simple majority.

Otherwise, Spain — which held four general elections between 2015 and 2019 — could find itself once again in deadlock and forced to call a new vote.

Feijoo, who narrowly won the election on paper, has insisted he has the right to form a government.

“As the candidate of the most-voted party, I believe it's my duty... to try and govern our country,” he told supporters after results came in.

“It is with great determination that I will take on the task of opening dialogue to form a government,” he said, urging the Socialists not “block” his efforts.

Without an absolute majority, Feijoo would seek to form a minority government but for that he would need the Socialists to abstain during any investiture vote in parliament — which they have no intention of doing.

The results were a bitter blow for PP supporter Carmen Rodriguez de la Cruz.

“I didn't expect it at all, I can't believe we're going to be stuck with Sanchez and that blond and the (Catalan and Basque) independentist parties,” she said in a reference to Yolanda Diaz, head of Sumar.

Sanchez, 51, called the snap polls in late May after his Socialist party and its far-left junior coalition partners suffered a drubbing in local and regional elections in which the right surged. — AFP

FIREFIGHTER'S HEROIC RESCUE!



A fireman gestures and holds a cat and two rabbits after rescuing them from a fire between the villages of Kiotari and Gennadi, on the Greek island of Rhodes. Firefighters tackled blazes that erupted in peak tourism season, sparking the country's largest-ever wildfire evacuation -- and leaving flights and holidays cancelled. Tens of thousands of people have already fled blazes on the island of Rhodes, with many frightened tourists scrambling to get home on evacuation flights. — AFP

Will new climate science chief be a woman?

ALISTER DOYLE

Amid scorching heatwaves from Europe to China and the United States, governments will this week pick a new leader for the UN's flagship science panel on climate change - with pressure to name a woman for the first time in its 35-year history. The new chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), set up in 1988, will oversee mammoth reports in the next few years by hundreds of scientists, meant to guide a shift from fossil fuels to limit worsening global warming.

June was the hottest month on record around the world, and swathes of southern Europe, the United States and China have been hit by sweltering weather, wildfires, droughts and floods.

The IPCC, which won the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for its work, will meet in Nairobi from July 25-28 to choose a chair from four eminent scientists - two women and two men, all aged over 60 — who will be tasked with leading the studies, likely to be published in the late 2020s.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described the last series of IPCC reports — published in 2021-23 under the chairmanship of South Korea's Hoesung Lee, and thousands of pages long - as “code red” for the planet.

Gender equality and diversity have long been challenges in climate science - and all the IPCC's chairs have been men.

* MEETING IN KENYA TO PICK NEW UN CLIMATE SCIENCE CHAIR
* TWO WOMEN AMONG CANDIDATES FOR IPCC SO FAR LED BY MEN
* PLANET FAST HEADED TOWARDS BREACHING 1.5C WARMING LIMIT

A 2019 report found that the proportion of female scientific authors working with the IPCC had risen to about 30 per cent from just 10 per cent.

“This is the first time a woman has even been nominated — in 35 years,” said Debra Roberts, a South African professor and IPCC veteran who is one of the two female candidates alongside Brazil's Thelma Krug.

If selected, they would also be the first chairs from Africa or Latin America.

On Friday, as Roberts headed to Nairobi for the IPCC chair's selection meeting, she said on Twitter that she had received the endorsement of the 55-nation African Union for her candidacy. Overall, the IPCC has 195 member governments.

The two male scientists vying for the post - Belgium's Jean-Pascal van Ypersele and Jim Skea of Britain - both said they would work hard for gender balance in other leading IPCC roles if elected.

“I am a feminist man,” said van Ypersele, who has a campaign video that includes a 2020 photo of him on the summit of Mont Blanc, at an altitude of 4,808 metres, holding a banner emblazoned: “I am ready to lead the IPCC to new heights”.

“We need to do an awful lot more. The issue of gender in



South Africa's Prof Debra Roberts

IPCC is critical,” Skea added, saying he would work to make the body “inclusive and truly representative” while coming up with practical solutions, led by deep cuts in emissions.

Krug did not respond to a request for an interview.

The IPCC's secret ballot is hard to predict - nations have tended not to vote in large blocs, for example developing versus developed nations. If no candidate secures a majority in a first-round vote, the top two go to a runoff.

Sir Robert Watson, a British-US citizen who chaired the IPCC from 1997-2002, said the thorniest problem for an incoming chair was that average surface temperatures are on track soon to breach 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times and could go up to 3C higher by 2100.

The 2015 Paris climate agreement, backed by all



Brazil's Thelma Krug

governments, set a goal of limiting global warming to “well below 2C” while “pursuing efforts” for 1.5C. Temperatures are already up 1.2C.

Watson said the IPCC should be more critical of governments' broken promises of drastic cuts in emissions.

“There has to be some real-world reality - I think governments are deluding themselves that 1.5 is possible,” he said. “I am convinced we are on a pathway to 2.5 or 3 degrees.”

He said the IPCC should focus on preparing for a 3C warmer planet that would wreak havoc with food and water supplies and healthcare systems, swamp coasts as ice melts, and drive many species of animals and plants to extinction.

The World Meteorological Organization has said it is likely - a 66 per cent chance - that temperatures will exceed 1.5C in

at least one of the next five years, although this would not signal that the Paris pact goal was lost. An El Nino event that releases warmth from the eastern Pacific is now also stoking heat.

Harjeet Singh, head of global political strategy at Climate Action Network International, which groups 1,900 civil society organisations, also said the IPCC should shift towards bluntly prescribing solutions.

“There is a climate emergency. Please tell leaders what needs to happen,” he said.

IPCC candidates, however, said they needed to work collaboratively with governments, following a mantra that the IPCC is “policy relevant but not policy prescriptive”.

“We are not in the business of telling governments what to do or to be marking a scorecard,” Roberts said. But, she added, the IPCC “does not pull any punches” in describing the crisis.

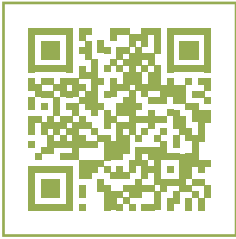
In her view, the IPCC should look in coming years into using artificial intelligence and machine learning to help cope with a surge in the scientific literature about global warming.

Skea also said that the bald scientific facts “can often speak very loudly for themselves”, and that the IPCC was not in the business of telling governments “you are not doing enough”.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

sport

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Dominos emerge basketball champs

MUSCAT: The Dominos Pizza Elevate Team completed their series sweep, winning their best-of-three championship series by defeating Team Excellence 78-70 and emerging as the undisputed back-to-back OPBL Tournament, Division B Basketball Champions at the Oman Club in Al Khuwair last Friday.

The Dominos Elevate Team soundly defeated Team Excellence in game one of their series at scores 85-62 with Karl Anthony Lorion emerging as the game's best player.

However, game two of the series proved to be a different story. Unlike the lopsided victory in game one, Team Excellence showed their grit, resilience, and determination from the outset surprising the lackluster first-half effort of the Dominos/Elevate Team. Team Excellence was paced by a scorching effort from their man cogs, Lagundi, Torrefalma, Ellamil, Dayag, DePaz, and Acob executing their plays with precision shooting and passing to take a huge 12-point lead 42-30.

This insurmountable lead was brought into play up to the 3rd and the last few minutes of the

4th quarter with Team Excellence still leading by 5 points 70-65 and looking to upset and stun the defending Champions, hoping to extend the series for Coach Del Upam, Mike Patigdas, and their stalwarts.

However, the game took a turn when Austin Parole scored consecutive crucial baskets to bring back life to the Dominos/Elevate cause and were supported by his team-mate's efforts, Ronnie Hernando, Karl Lorion, Mark Israel, and tournament MVP Joshua Alcarde.

This play showed the mettle of the eventual winners who demonstrated composure in the heat of the battle despite being down and overcoming adversity with their heart and championship experience.

The team members were ably supported by the rest of the team comprised of scoring machine -Garner Lazo, forward Karl Padlan, Kenneth Katimbang, Jaycer Saldana, Andrew Tibayan, Noel Sarmiento, Danilo Mamaril, Benjie Oliveros, Josh Ramos, Drey Gobris, Dave Fermin, Keith Labrador, Ron Poblador, Mark Alin and Assistant Coaches, Pad Canong, J Ramos and Jundee Edisan.

Oman beach team keep shape ahead of friendly meet in Belarus

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 24

With over seven months left for the top assignment at the 2024 Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup in Dubai city, Oman beach soccer team's preparations are under way in the sands court at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The national team, coached under the long serving national coach Talib Hilal, began their training sessions on Friday and will conclude on Tuesday (August 1).

The coaching staff focused in the earlier days of the camp on the physical and fitness sides of the players after the team back to action since two months of absence.

Oman beach soccer team confirmed their participation at the friendly beach soccer matches, which will be held in Belarus from August 4 to 14. The preparatory meet will feature attendance of some qualified teams to the 2024 Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup in UAE including Egypt and the hosts UAE. The Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup will be held from February 15-25, 2024. The preparatory event in Belarus will act as a suitable event for the team to take on more friendly matches ahead of the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup.

Coach Talib Hilal will lead Oman for their fifth time at Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup and third in succession. The winner of Beach Soccer Asian Cup in 2015 will look



for a different show in this edition of the world-class event and chase up for high targets.

The national experienced coach Talib Hilal opted 12 players for the domestic camp which included namely:

Khaid al Araimi, Munthir al Araimi, Yahya al Murikhi, Amjad al Hamdani, Abdullah al Souti, Sami al Balushi, Nouh al Zadjali, Younis al Owaisi, Mishaal al Araimi, Al Yaqdhan al Hindasi, Ahmed al Owaisi and Nouh al Battashi.

The majority of the players

took part with the team in the last Arab Beach Soccer Championship and ANOC Asian qualifiers. Coach Talib Hilal's men had ended the Arabian meet as runners-up. The team lost to Egypt 4-2 in the final game of the championship.

Oman began their campaign strongly with a 7-1 win over Palestine in the opening match. Later, the team had received a shock 5-3 loss against Egypt before registering an outstanding 14-0 victory over Kyrgyzstan in the last group match to secure a

spot in the quarterfinals. They were second behind toppers Egypt. In the quarterfinals, Oman had managed to edge UAE 5-4 to book a berth in the semifinals. Later, Oman had defeated Morocco 4-2 in the semifinals to confirm their attendance in the final match.

In another key event at ANOC World Beach Games, Oman's beach soccer men team missed the chance to attend in the ANOC Games as they had lost to UAE 3-2 in a tight clash in the Asian qualifiers.

Bausher Sports Centre announce US cricket tour



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 24

Bausher Sports Centre (BSC) announced the international tour in Texas, US, in corporation with North Texas Cricket Association (NTCA), from July 27 to August 7.

This tour marks a significant milestone for 15 talented players, of nurturing young cricketing talents and providing them with unparalleled global sports exposure.

The BSC has been a pioneer in promoting cricketing excellence in Muscat, to improve the skills and talents into noteworthy sportsmen who bring pride to Oman.

Sandesh Dhuri, the Head Coach of Cricket, explained to Oman Daily Observer, "the BSC is one of the private training centres in the country, that forges a strong association with Oman Cricket as ,BSC's extensive experience in organising and participating in international cricket tours"

Sandesh expressed confidence in the team's abilities and conveyed his gratitude to Oman Cricket for its unwavering support in nurturing young cricketing talents.

Over the years, BSC has graced various cricketing destinations, including Dubai, Australia, Qatar, Sri Lanka, India, and the UK. As well as building enduring relationships with the international players.

BSC admin emphasised the inclusive approach for selecting the

players, that an open invitation is extended to all aspiring cricketers in Oman. In certain cases, the talent search expands to schools in different regions of Oman, welcoming youngsters with a passion for cricket to join the touring squad.

INVITATION

The North Texas Cricket Association (NTCA), a governing body for cricket in North Texas, extended an invitation to BSC for

a cricketing in Texas. NTCA, with its representation of 65 clubs and 1,200 members, plays a pivotal role in governing and administering the game while actively contributing to the growth of cricket in the region. It also spearheads the staging of all cricket events in North Texas.

Highlighting the team's approach to fostering camaraderie and forging strong connections during the tour, Nimish emphasised the importance of playing good cricket. "If we show

our best cricket on the field, not only will we strengthen our bond as team-mates, but we will also build good connections with our opponent teams. We are keen to leave a positive impact both on and off the field," he said.

As BSC sets forth on this journey, it not only aspires to excel on the cricket field but also to strengthen cultural ties and build lasting friendships between Muscat and Texas, leaving a mark of sportsmanship and camaraderie.

Popp doubles down as Germany maul Morocco 6-0

MELBOURNE: Talismanic captain Alexandra Popp scored a brace as Germany launched their bid for a third Women's World Cup title with a 6-0 demolition of debutants Morocco on Monday.

In the tournament's most one-sided match to date, veteran striker Popp led from the front, heading in two first-half strikes before Klara Buehl, Lea Schueller and two own goals blew out the score after the break in front of 27,256 at Melbourne Rectangular Stadium.

The Germans' cake-walk put them top of Group H on three points, with rivals Colombia and South Korea to play their opener in Sydney on Tuesday.

"We stayed true to ourselves," Germany coach Martina Voss-Tecklenburg told reporters.

"It was a great to have a 6-0 score ... I look forward to the next match, but today we want to be happy with what we did today. It was truly a team performance."

Seven months after the Moroccan men's fairytale run to the World Cup semi-finals in Qatar, the Atlas Lionesses became the first Arab team to take the field at the women's showpiece.

They will hope for better in their next match against South Korea after humiliation against the Euro 2022 runners-up, who took little time to get into their groove and were ruthless to the finish.

"As it stands we came across a team which was superior to our own -- David and Goliath," said Morocco coach Reynald Pedros.

"They had something that we didn't.

"I think it goes without saying we were probably going to lose but I think we didn't need to lose by six goals."

Under the first burst of sustained German pressure, Morocco were quick to crumble.

A poor clearance allowed Kathrin Hendrich space on the



right to swing in a cross that goalkeeper Khadija Er-Rmichi misread and Popp thumped in from directly in front in the 11th minute.

Morocco regrouped through captain Ghizlane Chebbak, who launched a long-range effort in the 24th minute, causing Germany's keeper Merle Frohms to scurry

across for the save.

The first shot on goal energised the Moroccans but their set piece defending proved a dead weight.

Whirling around in the box,

Popp scored again in the 39th minute, Buehl's corner pinging off the back of her head.

An animated Chebbak demanded more from her team in a fiery halftime address but 23 seconds after the restart, the Moroccans conceded a third goal.

After Lina Magull hit the woodwork from close range, Buehl swooped on a clearance and filed a sizzling, low strike into the right corner.

The night grew ugly for the Moroccans as defender Hanane Ait El Haj put the ball into her own net less than 10 minutes later.

Worse was to come as the Moroccan keeper punched a clearance straight into the head of a team mate, setting up a second own goal by defender Zineb Redouani in the 79th minute.

Lea Schueller completed the rout a minute before stoppage time, smashing in the sixth goal after team mate Lena Lattwein's attempt careened off the keeper. — **Reuters**

Djokovic withdraws from Toronto ATP Masters

Toronto, Canada: World number two Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from the ATP Toronto Masters due to fatigue, Tennis Canada said on Sunday.

The announcement comes a week after the 23-time Grand Slam champion from Serbia fell to Spain's Carlos Alcaraz in the final at Wimbledon.

His withdrawal deprives the US Open tune-up tournament that starts on August 7 of a four-time champion.

"I have always enjoyed my time in Canada, but after speaking with my team, we believe this is the right decision to take," Djokovic said in a statement released by Tennis Canada.

"I would like to thank Karl Hale, the Tournament Director, for understanding this decision. I really hope I can return to Canada



and Toronto in the coming years to play in front of great fans there."

Alcaraz denied Djokovic a record-equalling eighth Wimbledon title last week, handing him his first defeat on the All England Club's Centre Court in 10 years.

The Spaniard's victory also ended 36-year-old Djokovic's chance of a calendar Grand Slam after his triumphs at the Australian Open and French Open took his tally of major titles to a men's record 23.

Wimbledon quarter-finalist

Christopher Eubanks will now gain automatic entry into the Toronto main draw.

The American defeated fifth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas and 12th-seeded Cameron Norrie en route to the last eight at Wimbledon.

Hale acknowledged that Djokovic, who won the Canadian title in 2007, 2011, 2012 and 2016, would be missed.

"Of course, we're disappointed that Novak won't be playing at the National Bank Open this year," Hale said in a statement.

"He's an incredible player and one we know our fans were eager to watch at Sobseys Stadium.

"He will be missed but we still have a long list of sensational players confirmed for this year's event, including 41 of the top 42 players in the world." — **AFP**

Muscat Blazer grab women's volleyball title



MUSCAT: Oman volleyball association incorporating with lulu exchange Oman organised women's volleyball tournament on Friday, at al Amal sports in Muscat. The one day tournament honoured by chief guest Aisha al Jabri, head of Oman volleyball

association, member of board director, along with Binod Das, marketing manager of lulu exchange .17 teams took part in the tournament, the final match played between Muscat Blazer and Slashers, where Blazer beat slashers to claimed the title.

Shafique, Masood propel Pakistan after bowlers delight

COLOMBO: Abdullah Shafique and Shan Masood smashed half-centuries to help Pakistan take the opening day honours after they bundled out Sri Lanka for 166 in the second Test on Monday.

Pakistan, who lead the two-match series 1-0, reached 145-2 at stumps, trailing Sri Lanka by 21 runs in Colombo.

Shafique, on 74, and skipper Babar Azam, on eight, were at the crease when bad light stopped play for the day.

Shafique put on a second-wicket stand of 108 with the left-handed Masood, who made 51, to put Sri Lanka on the backfoot with their attacking play.

Bowlers set up Pakistan's dominance after leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed and fast bowler Naseem Shah shared seven wickets between them to dismiss the hosts in the second session.

"We are looking for a big lead and we want to win this game," said Pakistan's fast bowler Shah.

"For me, as a fast bowler, every wicket is important."

In reply, Imam-ul-Haq fell early for six, but Shafique and Masood hit back with a steady flow of boundaries as Pakistan went

about with nearly six runs an over for a large part of their innings so far.

Shafique, who was dropped by Prabath Jayasuriya on 42 off his own bowling, reached his fifty with a majestic six off the same bowler. Masood raised his fifty off 44 balls, but soon departed as fast bowler Asitha Fernando got his second wicket with Kusal Mendis taking a sharp diving catch at mid-wicket.

Shafique, who survived a close lbw call on 74, stood firm and along with Azam saw the rest of the day through as they went past Sri Lanka's first-innings total.

Dictated terms

Earlier, Pakistan wrapped up the Sri Lankan innings in 48.4 overs after the hosts elected to bat first.

"In these two Tests we have made a lot of mistakes in our batting," said Sri Lanka's assistant coach Naveed Nawaz, calling on his players to "come out of this rut and score runs".

Sri Lanka were in early trouble at 36-4 after play started 30 minutes late due to overnight and early morning rain.

Dhananjaya De Silva, who



Pakistan's captain Babar Azam (L), Sarfaraz Ahmed (2R) and Abdullah Shafique (R) unsuccessfully appeal for a Leg Before Wicket decision against Sri Lanka's Dilshan Madushanka (2L) during the first day of the second and final cricket Test match between Pakistan and Sri Lanka at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) Ground in Colombo. — **AFP**

made 122 and 82 in Sri Lanka's first Test loss, attempted to hit back in a quickfire knock. He shared a fifth-wicket stand of 85 runs with Dinesh Chandimal, who made 34.

Shah, who took three wickets, broke the stand after he got

Chandimal caught by Haq.

Abrar, who returned figures of 4-69, soon got going with two quick wickets, including de Silva's, to dent Sri Lanka's hopes of a turnaround.

De Silva reached his 13th Test

fifty and then hit a six off Abrar before the spinner had his revenge by getting him caught at mid-wicket.

De Silva batted with freedom, hitting nine fours and a six in his 68-ball innings, until his

departure.

"Pakistan's two fast bowlers ... challenged our batsmen to hit to the gaps. They dictated terms to our batsmen with their field setting and the bowlers' accuracy," added Nawaz. — **AFP**

VINGEGAARD WINS SECOND SUCCESSIVE TOUR DE FRANCE



Jumbo-Visma's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard celebrates lifting his bike on the podium with the overall leader's yellow jersey after winning the 21st and final stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 115 km between Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines and the Champs-Élysées in Paris. — AFP



“Winning for the second time is amazing with all the Danish people here. I hope to come back to take a third win, at least try it.”

JUMBO-VISMA'S
DANISH
RIDER JONAS
VINGEGAARD

fifth stage win on this Tour right at the line in a photo finish.

“What a wonderful finish, it's been such a high level Tour,” said the surprise stage winner.

CRACKED
The world's greatest bike race provided tense drama with spectacular backdrops as Vingegaard and Pogacar remained separated by seconds until the Dane edged ahead with a sensational individual time trial last Tuesday. The following day, on a 28km climb to the ski resort of Courchevel, Pogacar cracked, shouting “I'm gone, I'm dead” before Vingegaard killed off the race with a sensational final climb.

The event had been billed as a showdown between the defending champion Vingegaard and Pogacar, who has won the Tour twice and now come second twice.

Tour director Christian Prudhomme used boxing terms to describe the struggle.

“They went 15 rounds and then there was a punch in the gut, a knee on the floor and a knock out punch,” he said Sunday.

All time great Eddy Merckx told AFP the pair had delivered a thrilling show.

“Pogacar is a more complete rider, but in the high mountains at least, Vingegaard remains the stronger,” he said.

“I don't know what happened to me. I took on too much this year and after two weeks I started to look as white as this shirt,” said runner-up Pogacar, pointing to his best under-25 rider's white jersey.

Pogacar started well enough, taking minor advantages in the Basque hills until Vingegaard attacked on the first mountain stage in the Pyrenees to take the overall leader's yellow jersey.

And while Pogacar clawed back a few seconds here and there, the defending champion never relinquished the lead all the way to Paris.

Runner-up in 2021, the softly-spoken Vingegaard was the only rider to challenge the Slovenian prodigy in the high mountains.

In 2022, he went one step higher and won the title at altitude, and it proved to be the case again in 2023, but with a Tour of such poise and dominance his claim to be targeting a third straight title must be taken seriously.

“The Tour de France is the greatest race in the world,” beamed the 26-year-old. “There's something so special about it and I can tell you I'll be back again next year to try and win it again.” — AFP

Jonas Vingegaard

Victories of the Tour de France 2023 winner

TOUR DE FRANCE

2023 – Winner
2022 – Winner

OTHER VICTORIES

2023 – Tour of the Basque Country: Winner
Criterium del Dauphine: Winner
2022 – Croatia's CRO Race: 2 stages
2021 – Coppi e Bartali: 2 stages
The UAE Tour: 1 stage
2019 – The Tour de Pologne: 1 stage

AFP Source: ASO Photo AFP/Thomas Samson

2023



1.75 m
60 kg
Aged 26
Danish

PARIS: Jonas Vingegaard won his second successive Tour de France on Sunday after Jordi Meeus claimed the final stage honours on the Champs-Élysées in Paris.

Denmark's Vingegaard of the Jumbo-Visma team crossed the finish line after the 21-day race 7min 29sec ahead of Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar, the champion in 2020 and 2021.

Pogacar's UAE teammate Adam Yates of Great Britain rounded out the top three podium.

Vingegaard's winning margin was the largest since 2014 when Italian Vincenzo Nibali took the fabled champion's yellow jersey by 7min 39sec.

“I enjoyed fighting for this win with ‘Pogi’ and Yates, but now I'm just looking forward to having a nice dinner here in

Paris with my family,” said the champion.

“It was a long, hard race and one day ran into another but there's a feeling of being proud and happy.

“Winning for the second time is amazing with all the Danish people here. I hope to come back to take a third win, at least try it.”

Despite finishing runner-up, Pogacar was happy to focus on the positives.

“Considering everything it's been a great Tour, I have to be happy with that,” Pogacar said after picking up his best young rider jersey for the fourth time.

“We have two guys on the podium, and I won two stages and the white jersey. I love cycling,” he said.

The final stage was won by outsider Meeus of the Bora team, with Jasper Philipsen denied a



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SME Authority approves financing of RO 11.3 million in H1

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 24

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) has announced that it has approved 127 financing requests totalling RO 11,295,231 in value in the first half of 2023.

According to a recent report published by the Authority, the requests were distributed across four financing programmes: Industrial and Service Projects programme (76 requests covering RO 7.4 million in funding); Contracts programme (31 requests amounting to RO 2.7 million in funding; Working Capital and Fixed Assets programme: 19 requests of a total of RO 1 million in funding; and Incubated Enterprises and Business Accelerators programme (1 request of a funding value of RO 70,000).

The financing programmes are part of a series of programmes launched in collaboration with Oman Development Bank to support SMEs.

Other programmes include: Local Value Added programme, the Craftsmanship and Home-

هيئة تنمية المؤسسات
الصغيرة والمتوسطة
SMEs Development Authority



Based Business Products Financing, Productivity, Street Vendors, and Mobile Business Activities Financing programmes, and the Financing for Small and Medium Enterprises Holding Contracts from Omani Investment Authority Companies.

Furthermore, the data indicates that the total number of registered small and medium enterprises (SMEs) within the authority reached 104,574 by the end of June 2023.

The majority of which are micro enterprises (89,558), followed by (14,006) small enterprises and (1,010) medium enterprises. According to the data, these SMEs employ 79,326 Omani nationals.

Additionally, the Authority reported that incubated enterprises under its incubation programmes generated a total revenue of RO 1,205,578 in the first half of this year.

Earlier this year, the Authority launched a free of charge online entrepreneurship academy with the aim of promoting SMEs.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 24

SOHAR Port and Freezone have signed a land lease agreement with Green Ferro Alloy (FZC) LLC to establish Oman's first silicon metal plant in SOHAR Freezone.

With a total investment of \$68 million, this project reinforces SOHAR's position as a global trade hub and represents a significant milestone in the economic growth and diversification of the region, meeting the growing demand for silicon metal in Asia, Europe, and North America.

The silicon metal plant, which will occupy a land area of 160,000 sqm, will be designed and built to produce high-quality silicon metal, initially at a capacity of 25,000 TPA in the first phase and expanding to 50,000 TPA in the second phase.

The molten silicon metal is poured from the furnace to ladles and molds, expertly cooled through molds or continuous casting. After cooling, the silicon metal is crushed and packaged in large bags, ready for global export.

This innovative process ensures premium quality silicon metal for our valued customers worldwide. "We are excited about this partnership with SOHAR



THE SILICON METAL PLANT, WHICH WILL OCCUPY A LAND AREA OF 160,000 SQM, WILL BE DESIGNED AND BUILT TO PRODUCE HIGH-QUALITY SILICON METAL, INITIALLY AT A CAPACITY OF 25,000 TPA IN THE FIRST PHASE AND EXPANDING TO 50,000 TPA IN THE SECOND PHASE

Freezone and the promising opportunities it offers to investors. By leveraging the strategic

advantages provided by SOHAR Freezone and its proximity to key markets, the establishment of the first silicon metal factory in the Sultanate of Oman will strengthen the mining sector in the area," an official of Green Ferro Alloy said.

Commenting on this achievement, Omar al Mahrizi, CEO of SOHAR Freezone, DCEO SOHAR Port said, "This agreement marks a pivotal moment for us as it strengthens our position in global trade and

reinforces our commitment to economic resilience.

The establishment of the first Silicon Metal plant in Oman showcases our dedication to diversifying industries.

Moreover, it demonstrates our ability to attract significant foreign direct investment, fostering business growth by increasing throughput and creating new opportunities, shaping a brighter and more sustainable future for SOHAR and beyond."

Oman offers lucrative opportunities for long-term investments: MoEM

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 24

At the Energy and Minerals Forum held in Salalah on Sunday, a senior official of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals delivered a presentation that delved into the historical and geographical significance of minerals in Oman, shedding light on its unique geological features.

Eng Saud bin Khamis al Mahrouqi, Director General of the Directorate General of Minerals, highlighted the most crucial minerals found in the Sultanate of Oman.

A key focus of the presentation was on creating attractive long-term investment opportunities. Al Mahrouqi emphasised the identification and preparation of public sites for building materials, marble, and ornamental stones.

These sites underwent a thorough approval process to ensure they were ready for competitive offerings. The



ultimate goal was to achieve fairness, maximise added value, optimise the utilisation of Oman's mineral wealth, and generate appealing prospects for investment, he said.

The mining sector's performance was also detailed in the presentation. The sales value of mineral ores, both metallic and non-metallic, amounted to approximately RO 98 million.

In parallel, the total production of mineral ores (metallic and non-metallic) reached around 63 million tonnes. The sales volume of building materials in the local market closely aligned with the demand, amounting to approximately 16 million tonnes, catering to the needs of the year 2022.

Furthermore, Al Mahrouqi highlighted the integration of efforts between government agencies, investors, and society.

The mining sector played a pivotal role in propelling societal development by providing essential services based on raw materials.

It also emerged as an attractive environment for private sector investments, encompassing exploration, production activities, and mineral-based industries.

This, in turn, led to increased revenues, export growth, and the generation of employment opportunities. The presentation underscored

the significance of legislation and laws in ensuring sustainable development within the sector.

All stakeholders, particularly the workers, were encouraged to assume their responsibilities, mitigate risks, and actively contribute to the sector's positive growth.

One of the strengths of the mineral sector in Oman lies in its provision of geological and mining information and data.

This includes geological maps, geophysical and geochemical surveys, and exploration and evaluation studies, crucial for further exploration and development of mineral ores in Oman.

Moreover, the sector's diverse elements enable it to effectively contribute to diversifying the production base and income sources. The rapid growth of exports and the integration of mineral-based products into various industries create numerous direct and indirect employment opportunities, he added.

Oman's FDI inflows reach \$3.72 billion in 2022: Report



JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 24

In a positive development for Oman's economy, the country witnessed a significant surge in foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows during the year 2022, reaching a commendable total of \$3.72 billion. These findings were recently unveiled in a research report conducted by Emirates NBD, one of the leading banks in the Middle East.

"FDI has been at the heart of the GCC countries' economic vision to grow their economies and diversify away from oil and gas," the report said.

The UAE led the GCC region in FDI inflows in 2022, attracting \$22.73bn, representing a 10% y/y increase. Saudi Arabia came in second place amongst its GCC

neighbours in total FDI inflows with \$7.89bn in 2022, a decline of 35% y/y and the Sultanate of Oman came third with \$3.72 billion.

The report sheds light on Oman's growing appeal as an attractive investment destination albeit a decline of 8% in FDI inflows compared to the previous year. This influx of foreign capital is a testament to the government's ongoing efforts to diversify the economy and create a business-friendly environment that fosters growth and innovation.

The Sultanate of Oman has been actively implementing economic reforms and initiatives aimed at attracting foreign investments. These measures include the introduction of new laws and regulations, streamlining bureaucratic processes, and enhancing transparency and investor protection. **TURN TO P14**

Investments in converting industries sector in Oman reach RO 122 million

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion pointed out that there are a number of investment opportunities available in the converting industries sector, with an investment volume exceeding RO 122 million.

The ministry elaborated that these opportunities are represented by the establishment of a factory of barriers and copper bars in Sumail Industrial Zone and Ibri Industrial Zone, an opportunity to establish steel casting and steel ingots manufacturing plant in the Governorate of Al Batinah North.

It also include an opportunity to set up semi-rigid aluminium foil containers manufacturing, a new facility at Sohar Industrial Estate that produces pre-formed aluminium, such as food containers, plates and trays for the retail and restaurant sectors and an investment opportunity to set up a steel factory, which aims to establish a new plant for the manufacturing of light-gauge steel framing for construction in the Governorate of Dhofar.

These opportunities will contribute to attracting quality



investments in the sectors of economic diversification and the development of the governorates.

These opportunities are distributed in a number of governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. Such opportunities will also contribute to creating the appropriate environment for the success and development of all investments, empowering and stimulating the private sector to invest, in addition to contributing to augmenting the proportion of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the gross domestic product (GDP) and promoting the Sultanate of Oman as an investment hub in various converting industries sector.

These investment opportunities in the converting industries also come within the framework of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion's action plan for the major projects, programmes, initiatives and targeted investment sectors that contribute to the development of the national economy in order to create an enhanced and enabling business milieu for investment in diverse sectors in line with Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

New India Assurance celebrates 105th foundation day



MUSCAT: New India Assurance Company Limited celebrated the 105th foundation day of the company yesterday in Muscat. From a very humble beginning in July 23, 1919, to becoming one of the premier insurance provider across 28 countries, this momentous occasion symbolises the dedication and perseverance of each member of the New India family.

On the occasion, the COO, V V Raghavan expressed deep gratitude to all loyal customers, employees and supporting stakeholders in building a legacy of trust and reliability.

Looking ahead, he said, the company will embrace innovation and continue to serve all the stakeholders in a better way. He further adds New India Oman has its presence in Oman from 1975 and will shortly begin its 50th year celebrations.

He further thanked the regulator, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) for their support and guidance and also expressed gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and people of Oman for accepting New India as the preferred insurer of Oman.

OABC to hold FTA webinar on non-tariff barriers to trade

MUSCAT: What do dates, plastics, refrigerators and toothpaste have in common? These are just a few of the items that require extra measures to be applied when trading them internationally.

The Oman American Business Center (OABC) will hold its next webinar on Monday, July 31 at 11:00 am on various non-tariff measures (NTMs) that are

generally applied to ensure the health of humans and animals and environmental protection.

The session will be led by the experts of the AmCham Jordan FTA Unit. Joining them will be Sondos Samara, Partner & Quality Manager at Environmental Laboratory for Microbiological and Chemical Analysis. Samara has been leading her



company in the transformation from a food testing lab to offering services in more than several sectors, including food, pharmaceuticals, water, cosmetics and chemical analysis while supporting many Jordanian exporters in ensuring they meet the regulatory measures for their products.

The FTA programme is in partnership with the US Embassy Muscat. The online

workshops are completely free and accessible to all, but make sure to secure your spot by registering in advance before Sunday, July 30.

"Please don't hesitate to extend invitations to your colleagues and peers whom you believe could greatly benefit from this programme. Only those who register will receive the webinar link to join," OABC noted.

Oman's FDI inflows reach \$3.72 billion in 2022: Report

FROM PAGE 13

Such initiatives have undoubtedly played a vital role in bolstering investor confidence in the country. Oman's FDI inflows in 2022 were primarily driven by investments in key sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, renewable energy, and tourism.

The manufacturing sector, in particular, witnessed significant interest from international investors, drawn by Oman's strategic location, skilled labour force, and favourable business conditions.

The logistics industry also experienced a considerable boost in FDI, owing to Oman's well-developed infrastructure, including ports, airports, and free zones. Investors recognized the country's potential as a regional logistics hub, connecting the Arabian Peninsula with other global markets.

Additionally, Oman's commitment to renewable energy initiatives attracted substantial foreign investments.

The country's vast renewable energy resources, including wind and solar, offer immense potential for sustainable development. Foreign investors recognised this potential and seized opportunities to contribute to Oman's green

energy transition.

Moreover, the tourism sector received a significant boost through FDI inflows, driven by Oman's rich cultural heritage, stunning natural landscapes, and ambitious tourism development plans.

Foreign investors recognised the potential for growth in this sector and actively participated in the development of hotels, resorts, and tourist infrastructure projects.

In response to the remarkable surge in FDI inflows, the Omani government has expressed its commitment to further enhancing the investment climate.

Plans are underway to introduce additional reforms, including the simplification of business licensing processes, the strengthening of intellectual property rights, and the improvement of infrastructure. The positive FDI figures for 2022 reflect Oman's growing reputation as an attractive investment destination in the Middle East.

The country's strategic location, economic diversification efforts, and commitment to business-friendly policies have yielded fruitful results, attracting foreign investors across various sectors.

Code with Vodafone opens for registration to inspire young coders

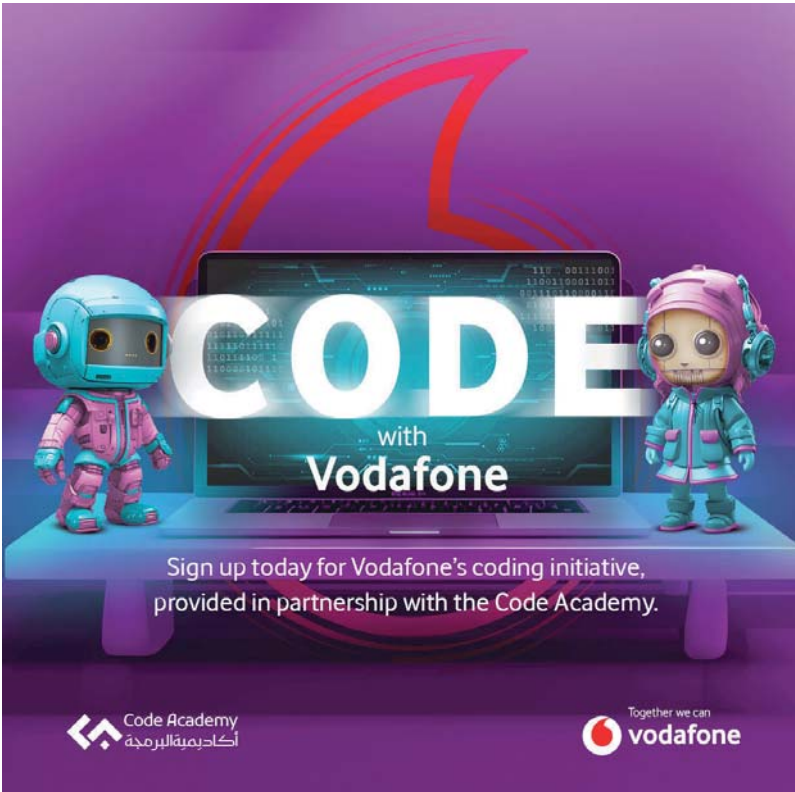
MUSCAT: Aspiring tech whizzes from across Oman can now register for Code with Vodafone, targeting young minds ages 10-13 across the Sultanate of Oman with the aim of enabling the rise of the coder generation.

The initiative has been designed and executed in partnership between Vodafone Oman and Code Academy, a training institute that specialises in delivering IT and trending technology programmes.

Code with Vodafone is the one of several socially impactful digital initiatives on the company's horizon.

In collaboration with its strategic partners, Vodafone aims to harness technology to bring together individuals, organisations and entities as one, enabling growth and development beyond the telecom industry in Oman.

Sayyid Fahad bin Abdul Aziz Saud al Busaidy, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Vodafone Oman, said: "Code with Vodafone, in partnership with Code Academy, has been formulated to bridge the technical knowledge gap between school and higher education, with longer-term aspirations to build the foundation for the creation of a new vocational career path.



Our determination to offer value in Oman is not only restricted to our customers, who benefit from our market-leading products and services – we want to work together with multiple partners to bring about positive change across all sectors of society."

Catalysed by the latest coding capabilities, Code with Vodafone

will offer in-person and online courses to talented young people in problem-solving, programming, cyber security and emerging technologies such as data science and AI – in addition to soft skills and innovation.

The programme will consist of two phases, a three-week 'boot camp', and a one-year online programme which will include bi-

monthly sessions on coding and will run until July 2024. Vodafone will also provide soft-skill development opportunities and guest speakers for the students.

Youth looking to unlock new coding horizons are invited to register for the bootcamp through the Vodafone website until July 27, 2023.

The initiative draws upon Code Academy's wider curriculum, Future Tech, which comprises three age-based stages educating students from Grades 1-12.

It is the brainchild of a group of specialists from the academic and industry sectors that aims to discover the talents of school students, develop their skills and deepen their passion for technology.

Describing the programme's birth, Dr Mohammed al Badawi, Code Academy CEO said, "It is an outcome of more than two years of preparation and development; including reviewing the current education curricula, studying similar programmes regionally and internationally, investigating local society needs and global trends in the IT field, and securing the necessary approvals from the concerned governmental bodies."



Oman records increase in electricity and water production



MUSCAT: The total production of electricity in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 0.6% till the end of May 2023 to reach 15,537.5 GW per hour compared to 15,440.1 GW per hour during the corresponding period in 2022, according to the preliminary data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

To break down the figures, the governorates of Al Dhahirah, North Al Batinah and South Al Batinah, recorded a rise by 1% in total electricity production till the end of May 2023 to reach 9,838 GW per hour.

Meanwhile, electricity production in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah surged by 327.3% to reach 35.4 GW per hour.

A rise was also recorded in the following governorates: Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South by 6.6% to reach 3,494.8 GW per hour and Dhofar by 13.4% to reach 1,836.1 GW per hour.

Further, the Governorate of Muscat recorded a decline in total electricity production by 82.6% to stand at 89 GW per hour.

Musandam Governorate registered a drop by 1.7% to reach 150.7 GW per hour and Al Wusta Governorate also

OMAN'S NET PRODUCTION OF ELECTRICITY TILL THE END OF MAY 2023 REACHED 15,045.8 GW PER HOUR.

went down by 27.8% to reach 93.5 GW per hour.

Oman's net production of electricity till the end of May 2023 reached 15,045.8 GW per hour.

The net figures are inclusive of purchases by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) and the Rural Areas Electricity Company (RAEC).

The highest volume of net electricity production was registered in the governorates of Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah South and Al Batinah North, which stood at 9,516.9 GW per hour.

On the other hand, total water production in the Sultanate of Oman recorded a rise by 1.6% to reach 210,931,200 million cubic metres by the end of May 2023 compared to 207,673,700 million cubic metres during the corresponding period in 2022.

Dhofar Governorate's water production recorded a rise during the same period by 4.2%, followed by Muscat governorate which recorded an increase by 2.1%. — **ONA**

ENGIE foresees significant role in Oman green ammonia project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 24

ENGIE, a global leader in low carbon energy and services, says it envisions a sizable role for itself in both the upstream and downstream components of a mega green ammonia project planned for development in a land block awarded by the Sultanate of Oman last month.

A consortium jointly headed by ENGIE and Korean steel conglomerate POSCO won the 340 sq kilometre land block in Duqm in a public auction overseen by Hydrom, the orchestrator and master planner of Oman's green hydrogen industry.

Other partners in the consortium include Samsung Engineering, Korea East-West Power Co (EWP), Korea Southern Power Co. (KOSPO), and FutureTech Energy Ventures Company Ltd (a subsidiary of PTTEP).

The consortium is committed to bringing into commercial production an integrated complex comprising upstream solar and wind based elements for renewable electricity generation, electrolyzers and a downstream green ammonia plant with a capacity of 1.2 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) by 2030.

In remarks to the Observer, a



top executive said ENGIE's role in the project is not limited to the development of renewable electricity – a core strength of the French multinational utility company – but will also span green ammonia production at the downstream end.

“Our objective is to work on both sides (upstream and downstream),” said Frédéric Claux (pictured), ENGIE Managing Director - Flexible Generation & Retail, AMEA and Country Manager GCC.

“Our partners have no experience in renewables, so we'll bring experience to develop the wind and the solar (components). But we clearly want to be involved in the H2 production and potentially what we call the Haber-Bosch process, which is the industrial facility for the

production of ammonia. At the end of the day, we want to export the product, and ammonia is today a natural carrier for exporting the (green) molecules.”

Renewable electricity for the production of green hydrogen will come from massive arrays of solar and wind farms of a total installed capacity of 5 gigawatts (GW), supported by battery energy storage capacity (BESS).

Also at the upstream end, electrolyzers will produce around 200 kilotonnes of green hydrogen per annum. This hydrogen will be piped to downstream facilities in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm where it will be processed into green ammonia.

Both ENGIE and POSCO, as consortium leaders, will jointly have a 50 per cent controlling stake in the consortium, with

the remaining 50 per cent shared among the consortium partners, said Claux.

Earlier, the executive described ENGIE's participation in the Oman Green Ammonia Project as another milestone in the utility company's lengthy presence in the Sultanate of Oman.

“As a global utility, we've been in Oman for the last 20 years; we operate a few power plants and water plants – we know the country, we have been established here for so many years.

(And with the signing of the green ammonia project), we have embarked on a new trajectory. We have a Net-Zero objective for 2045, and clearly, green hydrogen is part of this new trajectory and part of our strategy.”

ENGIE, said Claux, was excited to be part of the consortium because of the presence of a variety of partners each bringing a complementary set of skills and expertise to the project.

Adding to its commercial appeal is the assurance of an offtaker in the form of POSCO, which has committed to lifting the green hydrogen output to decarbonise its steel operations in South Korea, among other locations around the world. Offtake commitments help in strengthening the bank ability of the project, he stated.

Investment opportunities in Oman's SEZs explored

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 24

A delegation of 15 Chinese businessmen, accompanied by the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman accredited to the People's Republic of China, recently visited the Public Authority for Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) to strengthen the investment partnership between

Oman and China.

The visit aimed to introduce investment projects and commercial opportunities available in OPAZ's economic and free zones, and identify the most promising economic sectors in Oman.

During the visit, the delegation learned about the facilities and incentives offered to foreign investors by OPAZ, as well

as the services and modern technologies that support the business environment. A detailed presentation was given on the economic, industrial, and free zones supervised by OPAZ, including their nature of economic activities, volume of investments, and contribution to the GDP.

The delegation emphasised the importance of focusing on several sectors that achieve mutual benefit

for both countries, including building and construction, renewable energy, fisheries, as well as oil and gas industry sectors.

This week, the delegation continues to visit economic and investment projects in Oman to explore opportunities for enhancing economic sectors and contributing to doubling the volume of trade exchange between the two countries.

Oman tourism promotional workshops launched in India

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 24

The first mobile promotional workshops organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) to familiarise and promote the tourism components of the Sultanate of Oman in the Indian tourism market were launched in New Delhi yesterday.

It promotes attractive destinations and diverse experiences that make Oman a unique and memorable destination in addition to promoting a number of tourist styles such as weddings and events, conference and exhibition tourism, the latest developments in the Omani tourism sector and upcoming developments and special promotions that will make the exploration of the Sultanate of Oman more attractive.

The promotional seminars will be held in four major cities of the Indian Republic that are exporters of the tourist movement (Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, Mumbai) and will run from July 24 to 31, 2023 with the participation of a selection of tourist companies and hotel



facilities, as well as India's most prominent tourism sector partners representing travel agencies and tour operators.

During the launched, Issa bin Saleh al Shaibani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of India, addressed the historical ties that bring together the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India, and the levels of joint cooperation in various fields, including the tourism sector.

He also discussed the importance of such seminars to highlight developments in the Omani tourism sector and the latest facilities to attract the Indian tourism market to the Sultanate of Oman and to market the tourism offers and packages offered by the Omani travel and tourism companies.

Asma bint Salem al Hajriyah, Assistant Director General of Tourism Promotion at the

Directorate General of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said the seminars complement the promotional seminars initiated by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of India, where these meetings are an ideal opportunity to familiarise themselves with the tourist destinations, products, services and experiences of the Sultanate of Oman.

This contributes to the



THE NUMBER OF VISITORS ARRIVING IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN GREW BY 1, 548 630 VISITORS FROM JANUARY TO MAY 2023, A 95.1% INCREASE COMPARED TO THE SAME PERIOD LAST YEAR. 3-5-STAR HOTELS ALSO RECORDED A RISE IN REVENUE TO RO 98,431,000, AN INCREASE OF 34. 7% COMPARED TO THE SAME PERIOD IN 2022.

promotion of tourism and the increased flow of more tourists from exporting markets.

The number of visitors arriving in the Sultanate of Oman grew by 1, 548 630 visitors from January to May 2023, a 95.1 per cent increase compared to the same period last year. 3-5-star hotels also recorded a rise in revenue to RO 98,431,000, an increase of 34. 7 per cent compared to the same period in 2022.

The number of guests in these hotels reached 801, 014 with a 27.3 per cent rise compared to the same period last year.

In 2022, 355,459 Indian travellers visited the country compared to 106,042 Indian travellers in 2021, making India the second largest tourist-exporting market to the Sultanate of Oman.

Indian tourists accounted for 12.2 per cent of the total number of tourists coming to Oman.

Opportunity Oman: Renewable energy



DR YOUSUF BIN HAMED
AL BALUSHI

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Oman, a visionary nation dedicated to sustainable development, is taking significant strides in embracing renewable energy sources to fuel its future.

With unwavering commitment from the government and a supportive regulatory framework, Oman presents a flourishing landscape for renewable energy investments, particularly in solar and wind power.

This article explores the vast opportunities and advancements in Oman's renewable energy sector, highlighting its potential to drive economic growth, job creation, and environmental sustainability.

Oman, like numerous other nations, faces a myriad of challenges concerning energy security, environmental sustainability, and economic development.

However, the potential benefits of transitioning towards solar energy have captivated the attention of policymakers, investors, and environmentalists alike. Oman, blessed with a geographically advantageous location that provides ample sunlight throughout the year, benefits from solar energy as a sustainable and abundant resource.

This article delves into the primary advantages and investment opportunities associated with embracing solar energy in the Sultanate of Oman.

Under the visionary leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Oman made a profound announcement in October 2022, demonstrating its unwavering commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

Oman's pursuit perfectly aligns

with its 2040 vision, which seeks to position Oman as a gateway to overcome challenges, adapt to regional and global changes, and capitalise on opportunities to drive economic competitiveness, social well-being, and overall national development.

Renewable energy is one of the biggest tools to achieve it.

Embracing solar energy in Oman yields significant economic, environmental, and social benefits.

Reduction in Energy Costs: By incorporating solar energy into Oman's existing electricity generation systems, the nation can successfully decrease its heavy reliance on fossil fuels. Notably, the International Renewable Energy Agency has reported significant cost reductions within the realm of solar power production.

This trend has resulted in increased competitiveness when compared to traditional energy sources. Oman's transition towards harnessing the potential of solar power can generate substantial monetary savings for the national economy and reduce overall expenditure on energy resources.

Job Creation and Economic Growth: The adoption of solar energy is projected to fuel substantial job growth in the renewable energy industry. The

development of large-scale solar projects necessitates a diverse range of qualified professionals, including engineers, technicians, and project managers.

As emphasised in Deloitte (2021), renewable energy initiatives, particularly solar projects, generate a greater number of employment opportunities per unit of energy produced when compared to traditional fossil fuel-based projects.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS:

Greenhouse Gas Emission Reductions: Solar energy stands as an environmentally friendly and sustainable source of power, releasing zero greenhouse gases during electricity generation.

By transitioning to solar power, Oman has a remarkable opportunity to significantly decrease its carbon footprint and take decisive action against the impacts of climate change.

Sustainable Resource Management: Oman's heavy reliance on fossil fuels for energy production has inflicted considerable harm on the environment and depleted natural resources.

However, solar energy offers a promising solution, providing opportunities for sustainable resource management. Unlike conventional power plants, solar

photovoltaic (PV) systems require minimal water consumption during their operational phase. This environmentally friendly attribute makes solar energy an ideal choice, particularly in arid regions like Oman.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

Access to Electricity in Remote Areas: Oman is home to numerous remote and off-grid regions that lack access to electricity. Addressing this critical issue, the implementation of solar energy solutions, specifically off-grid solar PV systems, can effectively extend electricity access to these underserved areas. The potential benefits of this initiative are substantial, enhancing the quality of life, improving education opportunities, and fostering economic activities in these regions.

Enhanced Energy Security: By embracing solar power and diversifying its energy mix, Oman can fortify its energy security. The abundant availability of solar energy within the country fosters a complementary relationship with existing energy sources.

Consequently, this integration diminishes Oman's vulnerability to both global energy price fluctuations and geopolitical uncertainties, ensuring a more resilient and secure energy supply.

OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SOLAR ENERGY SECTOR:

Solar Power Projects: The alluring realm of large-scale solar power projects beckons investors who wish to tap into Oman's abundant solar potential. Within this domain lie opportunities aplenty - ranging from utility-scale ventures to distributed solar installations.

What makes these projects particularly enticing is the combination of two key factors: a steady decrease in costs associated with solar equipment and a supportive governmental framework boasting long-term power purchase agreements alongside enticing feed-in tariffs.

Research and Development: Efforts towards investing in research and development (R&D) for solar energy have proven beneficial for investors and our nation over time. Collaboration between the government, academia, and private sector stakeholders is instrumental in propelling technological advancements in the solar industry.

Consequently, the outcomes include increased efficiency and sustainable cost reductions through innovative methods.

GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTALLY

FRIENDLY & SUSTAINABLE SOLAR ENERGY PRACTICES:

The Omani government has strongly dedicated to advancing sustainable solar energy practices. In order to achieve this goal, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals launched the National Energy Strategy 2040 which seeks to boost the presence of renewable energy, specifically solar power in Oman's energy portfolio.

Furthermore, the government has put in place several regulatory frameworks and incentives to encourage private sector participation and investment in the solar energy industry.

To conclude, transitioning towards renewable energy in Oman has many economic, environmental, and social advantages. Solar energy can lower energy costs, provide employment prospects, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and bolster energy security by promoting sustainable development.

Solar power can contribute significantly to the country's progress. Additionally, investing in the solar energy sector offers both local and international investors profitable opportunities.

The Omani government's commitment to environmentally friendly solar practices further reinforces their dedication to a sustainable energy future.

Buyout barons feast on excesses of last boom

JONATHAN GUILFORD

We all dream of turning back the clock. As the debt fuelling mergers and acquisitions becomes ever-more expensive as interest rates rise, dealmakers have particular reason to yearn for the past. Some smart investors are crafting new deals that exploit the post-pandemic merger wave's legacy of cheap credit.

The interest rate on high-yield loans to large borrowers from banks has roughly doubled to 10 per cent since late 2021, reckons investment bank Configure Partners, while private lenders now charge about 12 per cent.

That's a problem for corporate matchmakers. Corporate debt usually features change-of-

control provisions that require it be paid off if the borrower changes hands. That forces buyers to refinance old cheap loans with new expensive ones.

But there are ways for inventive financiers to repurpose financing from the now-deflated boom. Borrowers issued \$1.6 trillion of cheap junk-rated loans and bonds in 2021 alone, according to S&P Global. That opens up plenty of potential loopholes which could allow borrowers to keep their old loans even after a deal.

One option is to get a permit. Lenders explicitly allow a company's so-called "permitted holders" - typically its management or long-time investors - to assume responsibility for the debt.

This provision enabled Clayton, Dubilier & Rice to keep Cornerstone Building Brands' debt in place after taking the

maker of windows and roofing private for \$5.8 billion last year. The buyout firm first invested in the company in 2009.

This approach is especially appealing because it's one of the few areas of "stealth portability" that has crept into debt contracts, people familiar with the matter said. Syndicated loans tend to have a wider range of definitions of who qualifies as a permitted holder than bond contracts, opening up new options for dealmakers.

Close reading of the fine print can also reveal other ingenious options.

For example, one definition of a change of control is where the majority of board seats change hands. CD&R made use of this provision in February when it agreed a \$7 billion deal for Focus Financial Partners.

It bought a controlling stake in the wealth manager but allowed previous owner Stone Point Capital to retain most of the board seats. That means the company's debt can stay put, news service 9fin reported.

Public companies can also find some extra room for manoeuvre in debt contracts. Changes of control are frequently defined as non-permitted holders crossing an ownership threshold.

But bond documents may allow a buyer to effectively attribute its individual shareholders as an acquired company's new owners, thereby staying below the threshold for a change of control.

Mortgage servicer Mr Cooper's \$324 million acquisition of Home Point Capital in May used this trick to avoid refinancing \$500 million of bonds.

These provisions, known as

public-company exceptions, can be a crucial lure for snagging a buyer. Take home automation provider Vivint Smart Home's search for a buyer last year.

Prospective suitors were discouraged by the freeze in debt markets, while the company's bankers warned that it would be impossible to refinance Vivint's debt at attractive terms, according to Securities and Exchange Commission filings.

When the company eventually agreed to sell to NRG Energy in December, the merger agreement carefully spelled out that its \$2 billion of debt would be rolled over, committing both sides to measures that avoid triggering a forced refinancing.

A final trick to avoid change-of-control clauses is for companies to take out loans secured by their assets which can be transferred to

a new owner.

Blackstone ushered in a funding shift as part of its \$10 billion takeover of QTS Realty Trust in 2021 by issuing commercial mortgage-backed securities tied to the data centre group's specific properties.

These remain in place even if the operator changes hands. This helps explain why dealmaking in data centres has not been affected by the broader slump in activity.

The recent auction of Compass Datacenters attracted bids at 2021-era valuations.

Of course, these clever schemes can only go so far. Serial acquirers will need the support of lenders to finance new acquisitions.

Poisoning relationships for the sake of one transaction could be counterproductive. Deal structuring antics can also draw lawsuits. — Reuters

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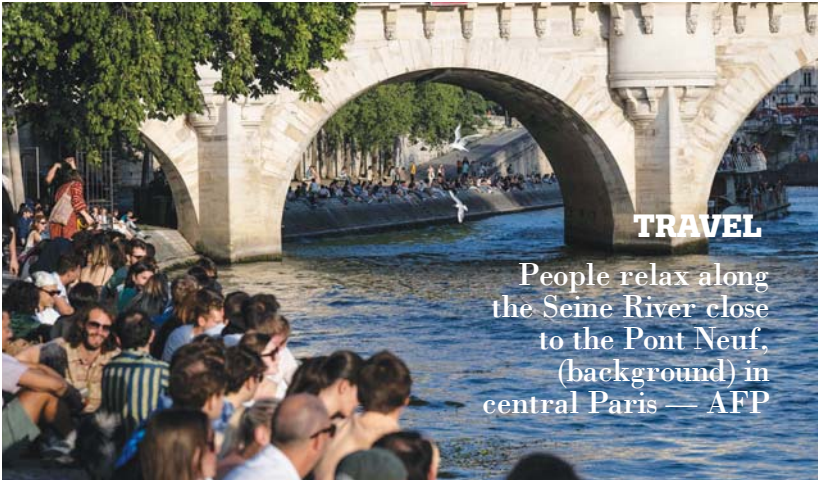
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TRAVEL

People relax along the Seine River close to the Pont Neuf, (background) in central Paris — AFP



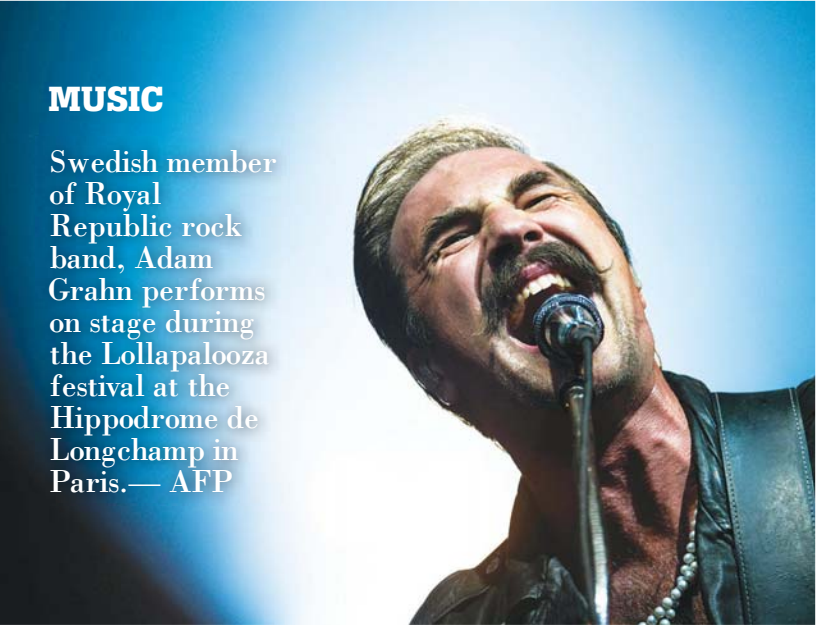
FILM

“Barbie” conquered North American box offices in its debut weekend, raking in \$155 million, estimates showed on July 23, 2023 — nearly double the cash of its second-place competitor. —AFP



BOLLYWOOD

Bollywood Indian actor Sooraj Pancholi attends Manish Malhotra fashion show during “The Bridal couture show” in Mumbai — AFP



MUSIC

Swedish member of Royal Republic rock band, Adam Grahn performs on stage during the Lollapalooza festival at the Hippodrome de Longchamp in Paris.— AFP



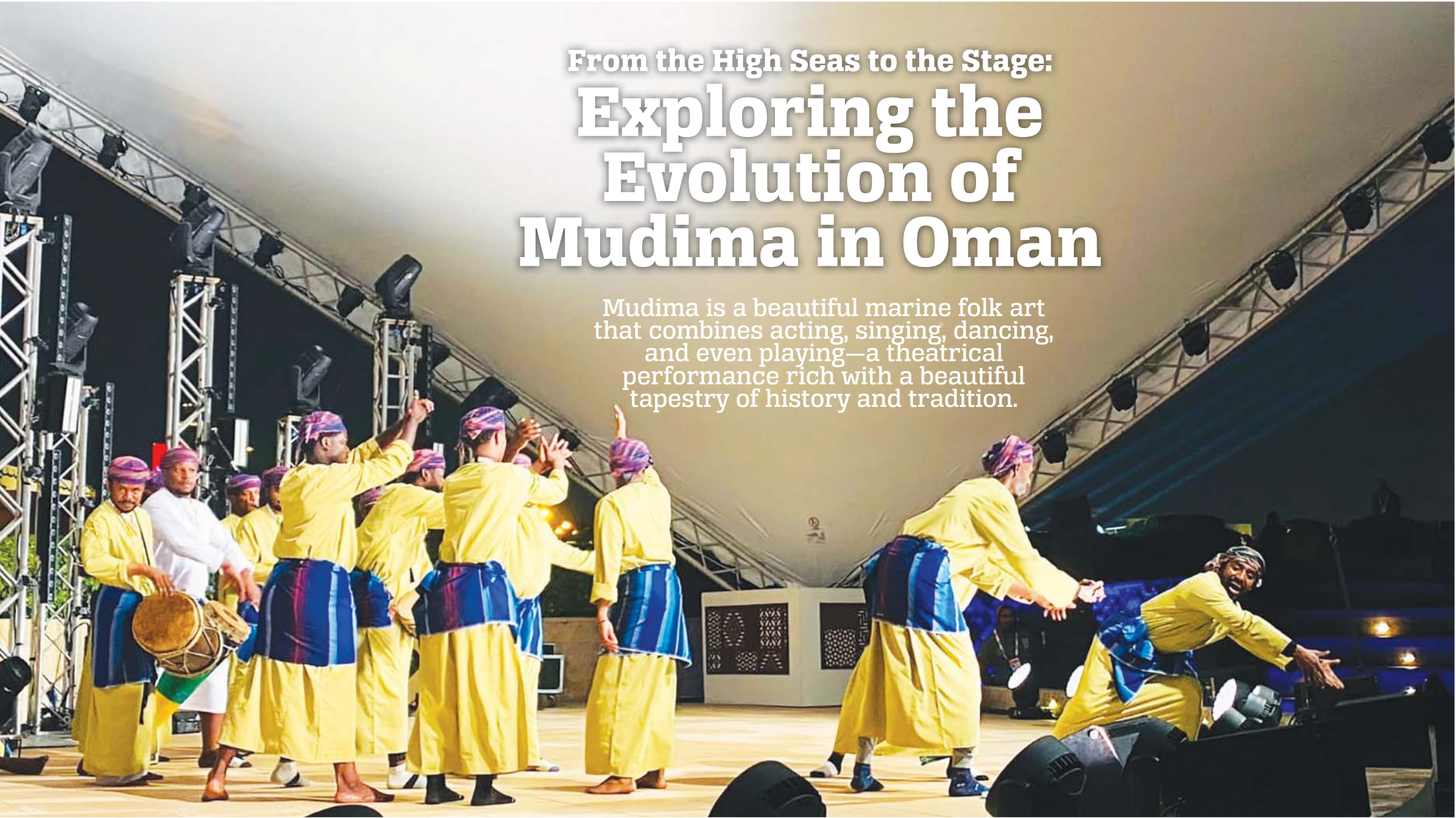
LIFESTYLE

People walk on the beach as the sun sets in Lacanau, western France — AFP

art & life

TUESDAY | JULY 25, 2023 | MUHARRAM 7, 1445 AH

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From the High Seas to the Stage: Exploring the Evolution of Mudima in Oman

Mudima is a beautiful marine folk art that combines acting, singing, dancing, and even playing—a theatrical performance rich with a beautiful tapestry of history and tradition.

ART

Grim Reaper on Glasgow streets as part of artist Banksy's hit show

IN SCOTLAND, LATE-NIGHT visitors at Banksy's Glasgow show were greeted by death on a dodgem at the Gallery of Modern Art.

On Friday evening, a figure of the Grim Reaper prowled the city's Royal Exchange Square in a remote-controlled dodgem while Stayin 'Alive by the Bee Gees blared on repeat through speakers in order to encourage passers-by to attend the show.

The Grim Reaper, first spotted in Bristol, is one of Banksy's most famous works.

It has been a feature in two previous exhibitions in New York in 2013 and at Dismaland in Weston-Super-Mare in 2015.

Outside the Goma, the reaper did donuts and charged maniacally at passers-by as it caught the attention of onlookers.

The elusive artist's first solo show in 14 years arrived in Glasgow under a shroud of secrecy last month, Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art for the first time showing stencils used by the street artist to create many of his works in his new exhibition Cut & Run.

Banksy, whose identity has never been revealed publicly, used stencils from many of his most famous artworks to create new versions for the exhibition.

The artist said he took the show to Glasgow because his favourite work



of art — the statue of the Duke of Wellington, which has a traffic cone on top of it — is situated just outside the gallery.

George and Jane Barbour were out in Glasgow when they decided to attend the show.

George said the show was “hilariously funny, adding Banksy is ‘amazing, has a great sense of humour and said the Grim Reaper

was ‘really funny’.”

Jane said: “It looked a lot of fun, I wish we could’ve got a shot! I think they could have sold tickets for that bit.”

Louise and Charlie were up visiting family when they decided to attend the show.

Charlie said they had hoped to

attend Dismaland but unfortunately missed it.

Louise said: “It’s a one off - maybe it will tour. Hopefully it’ll go down to tour the UK, but was brilliant.”

She added the reaper was “hilarious, very clever!”

Charlie said: “It’s quite interesting the use of the scythe as the top bit with the sparkler.”

John and Laura Brown found the



show both “unbelievable and ‘absolutely amazing.’”

John added: “Even if you aren’t interested in it, there’s so much to see

in it. “I thought (the reaper) was quite cool, the truck with the animals on it was quite spooky!”

Laura said: “Absolutely incredible. The whole thing was incredible.

“Real sketches and just reading everything, getting more information on him as well - so cool!”

Kayleigh and Tomash also visited the show, with Kayleigh saying it was a “very revealing” show that “humanises” Banksy.

On the reaper, she said: “That’s what pulled me in tonight actually.

“I live round the corner and I was like, ‘I dunno’, I was too busy and then I saw the sign outside saying it’s going to be open for later, so that’s why we came in. That drew us in for sure!”

When the show was launched, Banksy said: “I’ve kept these stencils hidden away for years, mindful they could be used as evidence in a charge of criminal damage.

“That moment seems to have passed, so now I’m exhibiting them in a gallery as works of art. I’m not sure which is the greater crime.”

The exhibition has been hugely popular with day tickets selling out quickly, but art fans can still take a late-night trip or turn up on the day.

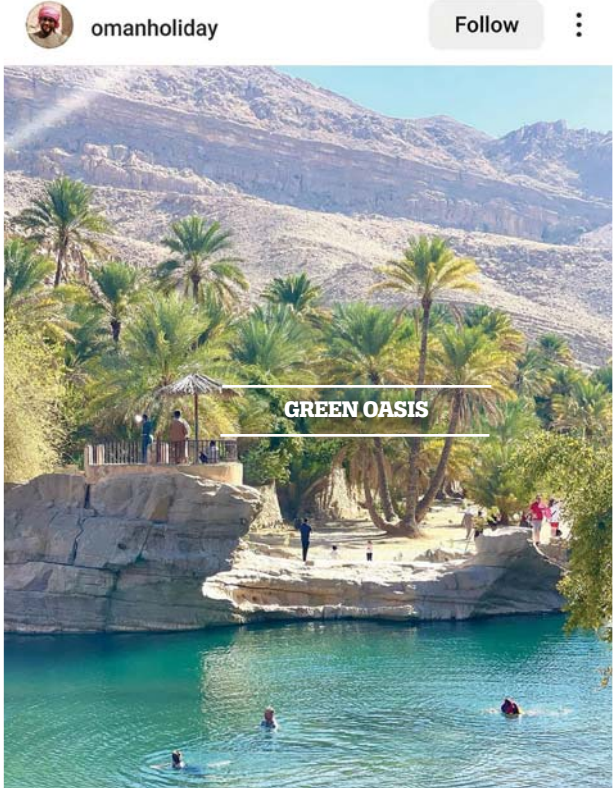
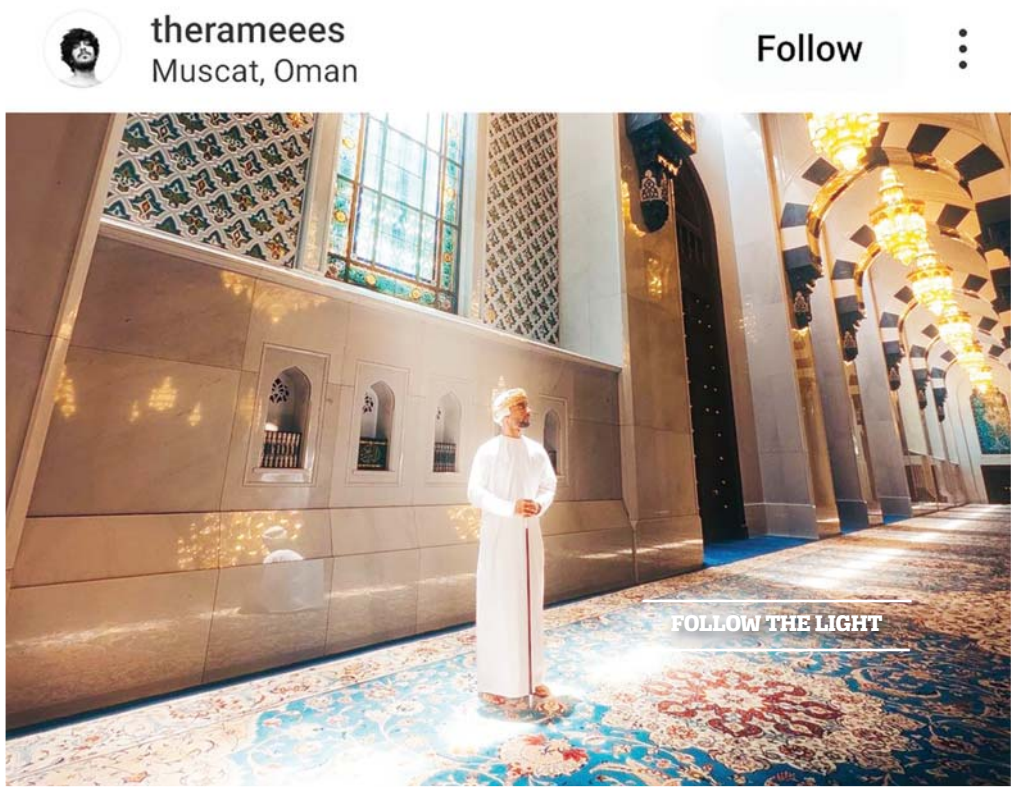
Nearby Max’s Bar on Queen Street in Glasgow is serving free Irn-Brumargaritas to anyone holding a late night show ticket.

— PA Media/dpa



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Mudima — a beautiful marine folk art

BY KHALID MOHAMMED AL BALUSHI

Omani folk dances have deep historical roots, intertwined with the nation's history and traditions. They offer insights into the country's diverse heritage, reflecting influences from various Arab, African, and Indian cultures.

These dances were performed during significant milestones such as weddings, and harvest festivals, serving as a way to express joy, commemorate victories, and strengthen communal bonds.

For the people living in Al Sharqiyah South, Al Batinah North, Qurayat and



some wilayats in Dhofar, Mudima has been a permanent fixture in community lives and celebrations.

Mudima is a beautiful marine folk art that combines acting, singing, dancing, and even playing—a theatrical performance rich with a beautiful tapestry of history and tradition.

It is said that Mudima originated in African countries and was brought to Oman by Omani sailors who traversed the seas separating the countries.

"We have been performing Mudima for several generations now. Historically, Omani sailors brought this tradition from African countries during a time when trade by sea was the biggest trend. Through the navigation of different trade routes, these countries manage to share cultures," shared Mohammed al Maqhusi.

Mohammed is the Al Ageed, or leader, of the group and conducts different performances in some specific areas of Oman. As the lead musician, he not only leads the singers but also acts as the maestro directing each member of the team that plays specific instruments.

"It started with very simple instruments in the past just to get the beat going. While on the ship sailing across waters, they used Mudima as a form of entertainment, a great way for sailors to keep in cheery spirits while exploring vast waters," Mohammed shared.

"From its humble beginnings as entertainment while out in the sea, it becomes a prominent fixture as a form of entertainment even on land. From simple drums, over time, more and more instruments were added," Mohammed explained.

Today, Mohammed and his team are a full marching band complete with singers and instrumentalists.

As its conductor, he directs the group, but they always keep the spirit of the tradition alive, with each group re-living the lives of their ancestors as sailors.

For every event, the group starts by standing in two parallel rows and walking behind each other until they reach the venue of the event.

The group then rotates in a circular ring, carrying rowing sticks with them. After some time, they put these sticks on the ground and started clapping, showing scenes that simulate the reality of life on the ship. Through their gestures and movements, they show acts like raising the sails and rowing through the waters against the backdrop of singing and clapping accompanied by the sound of drums and flutes.

As the leader, Al Ageed sings either in Swahili or Arabic and his words are then repeated by the chorus behind him. The playful dances then

take centre stage with the dancers performing graceful movements called 'chambi' showing off their skills in the middle of this circular ring. These movements are then mirrored by the person opposite him.

"In today's performances, people can now see different instruments. The main instrument is the rahmani or drum — an instrument that is struck by hand to emit a loud booming sound. Supporting it is a smaller drum called kasir struck by one hand with a dedicated stick called meka-sira which gives a sharp tone," Mohammed shared.

"We also used mucindo, the Swahili name for a long conical percussive instrument that is covered from one side. The musician uses it as a chair while playing, in addition to the tank, which is a metal tray," he added.

There are other instruments too, such as the jem, which is a large spiral shell with a hole for blowing. These were used as trumpets in ceremonies.



Bergum is a traditional musical instrument made from the horns of the Arabian oryx or ibex. The sound is produced by blowing into the opening hole near the end of the thin part of the horn. It is used as a trumpet in traditional musical styles.

In addition to this, the wind instrument kirbah or bagpipe was later on introduced to the performance. It is made of a leather bag with one or more flutes on it. The bagpipe produces sharp tones. It functions in such a way that air is blown into the bag, and when it's full of air, the player presses on the bagpipe to give the required tone.

Mohammed and his peers had been

performing under the Al Burj Group, created in 2004.

Their group has been invited across Oman to perform at different events and high-end productions. They had been to weddings and cultural festivals that showcased the versatility of Mudima.

During the time of this interview, the group has been performing at Ajwa Ashkarah which is a festival with two stops, including Al Kamil and Ras Al Hadd.

"Mudima is very versatile and can be used for different celebrations. Depending on the event, we also change the lyrics of the songs to coincide with the celebration," Mohammed said.

ENVIRONMENT

Snake hunters in Florida catch 19-foot Burmese python

A GROUP OF SNAKE HUNTERS captured the largest Burmese python ever caught in Florida this week.

The huge snake was 19 feet long and weighed 125 pounds, according to the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, an environmental nonprofit in the city of Naples that has been involved in efforts to remove invasive Burmese pythons for a decade.

The conservancy said the female snake hunters caught the female snake early Monday morning in Big Cypress National Preserve.

The largest python previously documented in Florida was 18 feet 9 inches long, according to the conservancy.

"It's the only snake I've ever seen



that scared me enough where I just didn't know what to do," said Jake Waleri, one of the snake hunters, in a video released by the conservancy. Waleri said the snake hunters wrestled with the snake for about three minutes before he got hold of the head.

"It was a fight, and it was a good one, definitely one to remember," he said.

"We brought the snake to the Conservancy to be officially meas-

ured and documented," said Waleri, 22, a Naples native. "We wanted to donate this find to science."

"It's awesome to be able to make an impact on South Florida's environment," he added. "We love this ecosystem and try to preserve it as much as possible."

Fellow snake hunter Stephen Gauta added: "It's pretty terrifying to know that these animals are so destructive to our ecosystem. But knowing that we can go out there and take care of monsters like this and get them out of the Everglades is something that makes me feel good."

Burmese Pythons have been a huge problem in the Everglades. They reproduce rapidly and eat other wildlife.

"We had a feeling that these snakes get this big and now we have clear evidence," said Ian Easterling, a conservancy biologist.

"Her genetic material may prove valuable for an eventual understanding of the founding population of South Florida. We will be collecting measurements and samples that will be distributed to our research collaborators."

The snake was not the heaviest ever captured in Florida. A 215-pound female that was captured last year holds that record. — **tca/dpa**

CHANGING WORLD

Mediterranean Sea is becoming warmer and more salty, scientists say

THE MEDITERRANEAN Sea is warming up faster and faster and is also becoming increasingly salty, according to a study by a team of Spanish scientists.

The water is warming at a rate of about 2 degrees Celsius per 100 years in the western Mediterranean and in some places, the Spanish marine research institute ICM-CSIC team said in a study published in the Journal of Marine Science and Engineering. In some places, such as near L'Estartit on the Costa Brava, the figure is even higher at 3 degrees per century.

Their results are based on the evaluation of long-term data from



the past 30 years and were measured in all water depths.

The salinity of the Mediterranean is higher than that of the Atlantic because more water evaporates than is added from rivers flowing in to the inland sea.

The exchange of waters with the Atlantic is very limited because the Strait of Gibraltar is very narrow.

Also, sea levels are rising by an average of about 2.8 millimetres per year. The accelerated rising of

sea levels has been observed since the 1990s.

Other studies show the increase in water temperature and salinity endangers biodiversity in the Mediterranean.

In the warmer waters of the Mediterranean, there are now almost 1,000 non-native species that are spreading further north and west every year, displacing native species, according to the environmental organization WWF. — **dpa**

TECHNOLOGY

A sweaty robot may help humans understand impact of soaring heat

WHAT HAPPENS TO the body when a human gets heatstroke? How can we protect ourselves in a warming planet? To answer these burning questions, Arizona researchers have deployed a robot that can breathe, shiver and sweat.

The southwestern state's capital Phoenix is currently enduring its longest heat wave in history: on Friday, the mercury exceeded 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43 degrees Celsius) for the 22nd day in a row, an ominous demonstration of what's to come in a world impacted by climate change.

For humans, such heat represents a potentially lethal threat, one that is still not fully understood. But for ANDI — a one-of-a-kind humanoid robot at Arizona State University — it's a lovely day out.

"He's the world's first outdoor thermal mannequin that we can routinely take outside and ... measure how much heat he is receiving from the environment," mechanical engineering professor Konrad Rykaczewski said.

ANDI is "a very realistic way to experimentally measure how a human person responds to extreme climate" without putting people themselves at risk, Rykaczewski says.

At first glance, ANDI — which stands for Advanced Newton Dynamic Instrument — resembles a simple crash-test dummy.

But its epoxy/carbon fibre skin conceals a treasure trove of technology, such as a network of connected sensors that assess heat diffused through the body.

ANDI also has an internal cooling system and pores allowing it to breathe and sweat. There are 35 independent thermal zones and, like humans, the robot — which cost more than half a million dollars to build — sweats more from its back.

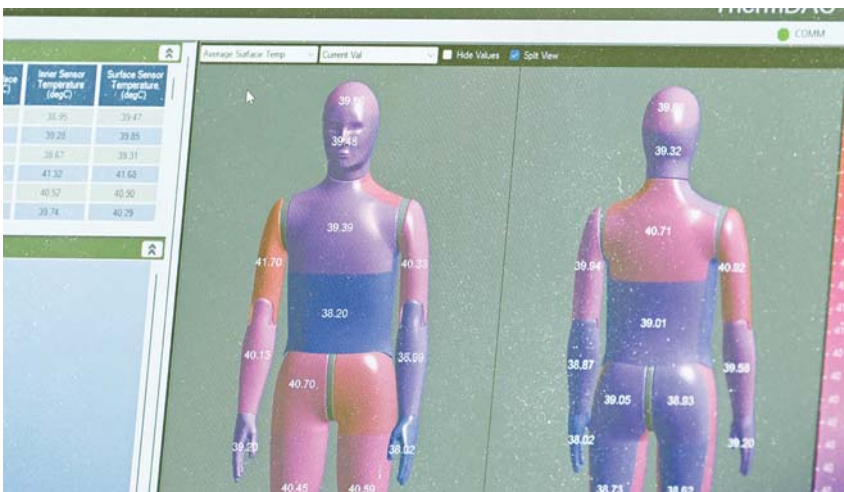
Until now, only a dozen or so mannequins of this type existed, and none of them could venture outdoors.

They were mainly used by sports equipment manufacturers to test their technical clothing in thermal chambers.

HYPERTHERMIA, A 21ST CENTURY CONDITION

Researchers hope the robot will provide a better understanding of hyperthermia — that is, when a body overheats, a condition that is threatening a growing proportion of the world's population as a result of global warming.

For obvious ethical reasons, "nobody measures core temperature increase while somebody's



getting heatstroke," says Rykaczewski. But the effects of heat on the human body are still not fully comprehended. ANDI gives researchers a chance to understand.

Accompanied by Marty (Mean Radiant Temperature), a mobile weather station that measures the heat reflected by the buildings around it, the robot is taking its first steps outside in Phoenix — an ideal laboratory in which to prepare for tomorrow's climate.

"How do we change what we wear? How do we change our behavioural patterns, and adjust them to temperatures that are of this order of magnitude?" says Rykaczewski.

Andi is also infinitely reprogrammable. The research team can make "digital twins of the mannequin to look at different segments of the population," explains Jennifer Vanos, a climatologist involved in the project.

For example, the older you get, the less you sweat. Young people will need different protection from

athletes or people in poor health. With ANDI, scientists can simulate the thermoregulatory mechanisms specific to each individual.

PHOENIX, TEST LAB FOR THE FUTURE

Their research will be useful for designing heat-resistant clothing, rethinking urban planning and protecting the most vulnerable.

In Phoenix, which opens dozens of cooling centres for the homeless every summer, their findings could guide the actions of social workers.

"How long should a person stay in a cooling centre to cool off, so

that their core temperature goes down to a level that's safe again? We can answer that question with Andi," says Vanos.

The team also dreams of developing low-cost sensors to be used on building sites to adjust working hours according to the heat actually felt on site and the health of the workers — rather than based on general weather conditions.

That could be a "step towards better safety than just these blank recommendations per city, per state, per country," Rykaczewski says.

Such specific, tailored solutions could have global impacts, redrawing entire cities.

"If the future of Paris looks like Phoenix now, we can learn a lot about how do we design buildings," says Rykaczewski. — AFP

DISCOVERY



Can Stress Cause Hair Loss?

Q: I'VE BEEN REALLY STRESSED OUT AT WORK LATELY AND HAVE NOTICED THAT MY HAIR IS THINNING AND CLUMPING IN THE SHOWER. IS IT TRUE THAT STRESS CAN MAKE YOUR HAIR FALL OUT?

A: Healthy people shed around 50 to 100 strands of hair each day, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. But if you're losing more than that, it could be a sign of a condition called telogen effluvium, or excessive hair shedding.

And telogen effluvium can certainly be induced by stress, said Dr Antonella Tosti, a dermatologist who treats hair loss at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.

Experts don't know exactly how common telogen effluvium is, in part because many people are not diagnosed with it. But women may be more likely to experience it than men, as it can be set off by pregnancy-related changes in the body, said Dr. Angela Lamb, a dermatologist at Mount Sinai in New York City.

This excess hair shedding can involve the loss of "up to a third of your hair volume," she added. But the good news is that it is usually temporary.

Unpacking the Causes

People often develop telogen effluvium between six weeks and three months after a stressful event such as a major surgery, a chronic or short-term illness (especially if it involved a fever), a pregnancy or a death in the family — basically, "anything that causes a stress or shock to your system," Lamb said.

That's because stress increases levels of cortisol in the body, Lamb said, a hormone that has been shown to disrupt hair growth.

Research suggests that this kind of hair loss can occur after people recover from Covid-19. In a 2022 study, for instance, researchers surveyed nearly 6,000 people in Brazil who had recovered from Covid within the past three months. Nearly half of those who responded



reported experiencing hair loss.

"If your hair was fine, and then you had Covid, and then six to 10 or 12 weeks later you're losing a ton of hair in the shower — that's telogen effluvium," Lamb said.

Telogen effluvium can develop in response to chronic everyday stress, too, Tosti said, such as work or relationship stress.

Tosti said that stress could also cause or worsen other conditions that lead to hair loss, such as alopecia areata, a disease in which the immune system attacks and destroys hair follicles, and lichen planopilaris, a rare inflammatory condition that can cause scalp scarring and hair loss. But Lamb noted that there is no definitive research tying stress to these two conditions.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you have been losing hair because of stress, Lamb recommended taking a daily multivitamin containing vitamin D, which is involved in hair growth, and vitamin B12, which has been shown to be deficient in some patients with telogen effluvium — though the data on this is limited. Vitamins may be especially important for people recovering from major surgery, she said, as deficiencies can be more common during this time.

Lamb doesn't recommend over-the-counter supplements specifically marketed to treat hair loss that contain high doses of biotin, such as those sold by Vegamour, Nutrafol and Viviscal. Biotin supplements have been shown to interfere with the results of thyroid hormone tests, and they can sometimes cause acne flare-ups, she said.

If you want to try to accelerate hair growth, you could try an over-the-counter, topical minoxidil treatment such as Rogaine, Tosti said. Or you can ask your doctor for a prescription for oral minoxidil or oral finasteride, which are often covered by health insurance, Lamb said.

These treatments could "help kick-start the hair to grow in faster," Lamb said. But most of the time, she added, stress-induced hair loss dissipates and hair re-grows on its own.

"You'll go through that shedding phase, usually for several weeks, maybe a few months, and then it will slow down," she said.

That said, if shedding continues after three or four months, she added, you may want to see a doctor. — NYT