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OMAN'S GAS DEMAND OUTLOOK TO REMAIN STRONG THROUGH 2043

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OMAN'S POSTAL SYSTEM HAS EVOLVED FROM TRADITIONAL TO MODERN

P11

KOHLI, RAHUL REVIVE INDIA AFTER EARLY JOLTS AGAINST AUSTRALIA

MUSCAT

HM, KING OF SPAIN DISCUSS RELATIONS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a phone call on Sunday evening from King Felipe VI of Spain. During the telephonic conversation, the two monarchs reviewed the advanced, growing, bilateral relations between the two countries and means of promoting them in various spheres. They also exchanged points of view on a range of regional and international issues of common concern. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO UGANDA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Yoweri Museveni of the Republic of Uganda, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Museveni and the people of Uganda further progress and prosperity. — ONA

OMAN SYMPATHISES WITH AFGHANISTAN

The Sultanate of Oman has expressed its sympathy with Afghanistan on the devastating earthquake that struck western Afghanistan on Saturday. In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman expressed its sincere condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims and the people of Afghanistan, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. — ONA

OPINION

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Sergey Plekhanov
Second-hand monuments

P16

KAMLA SAID AL RAHBIA
The key to business stability

OMAN, SAUDI TO PROMOTE CULTURAL COOPERATION

Within the framework of the visit of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, an official session of talks was held in Riyadh on Sunday with HH Prince Badr bin Abdullah al Saud, Minister of Culture of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. On the sidelines of the visit, HH Sayyid Theyazin and HH Prince Badr signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the Saudi Ministry of Culture. **DETAILS ON P2**

Israeli air strikes pound Gaza as death toll on both sides climbs

GAZA: Israel battered Gaza on Sunday after suffering its bloodiest attack in decades, when Hamas fighters rampaged through Israeli towns killing 600 and abducting dozens more, as the spiralling violence threatened a major new Middle East war.

Israeli air strikes hit housing blocks, tunnels, a mosque and homes of Hamas officials in Gaza, killing more than 370 people, including 20 children, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed “mighty vengeance for this black day”.

In a sign the conflict could spread beyond blockaded Gaza, Israel and Lebanon’s Hezbollah exchanged artillery and rocket fire, while in Alexandria, two Israeli tourists were shot dead along with their Egyptian guide.

In southern Israel, Hamas gunmen were still fighting Israeli security forces 24 hours after a surprise, multi-pronged assault of rocket barrages and bands of gunmen who overran army bases and invaded border towns.

DEATH TOLL SURGES CLOSE TO 1,000 ON BOTH SIDES

ISRAEL SAYS 100 CITIZENS CAPTURED BY HAMAS

3,200 ROCKETS WERE FIRED FROM GAZA STRIP

A Palestinian demonstrator rides a scooter past burning tyres during clashes with Israeli soldiers in the city of Ramallah. — AFP

Israel’s military, which faces questions over its failure to prevent the attack, said it had regained control of most infiltration points along security barriers, killed hundreds of attackers and taken dozens more prisoner.

“We’re going to be attacking Hamas severely and this is going to be a long, long haul,” an Israeli military spokesperson told a briefing with reporters.

The military said it had deployed tens of thousands of soldiers around Gaza, a narrow strip that is home to 2.3 million Palestinians, and was starting to evacuate all Israelis living around the frontier of the territory.

MORE REPORTS ON P5

First-ever marriage counselling initiative

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, OCT 8

The government has launched a pioneering national marriage counselling programme, aptly named “Tamask,” an Arabic word translating to ‘cohesion’. This programme is tailored to empower couples with the requisite

expertise and insight to forge enduring and robust relationships. Tamask will be offered to government employees and their respective spouses residing in the Dhofar Governorate. It spans a comprehensive four-day curriculum, with each day accommodating a distinct set of couples.

The curriculum of Tamask encompasses a diverse spectrum of key subjects, encompassing: Clarification of spousal rights and responsibilities; Ethical underpinnings in marital life; Focusing on the disparities in the needs of men and women; Enhancement of emotional fulfilment competencies;

Highlighting the importance of communication and dialogue; Delving into common sources of spousal discord; Stress mitigation techniques, and Conflict resolution. Steering this programme are two accredited trainers — Khalid bin Ahmed Tabook, Head of the Family Guidance and Counselling Department, ...

TURN TO P2

30%

CUT IN TOTAL VALUE OF POWER BILLS

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) has decided to increase the previously set reduction rate on electricity bills for residential category as per the directives of the Council of Ministers.

It was decided to increase the previously prescribed reduction rate set on electricity bills for the residential category from 15 per cent to 30 per cent of the total bill value for all subscribers with basic and national subsidy accounts for July and August 2023.

The authority said it will conduct a comprehensive review of electricity costs without compromising on the quality of services as part of the efforts to find alternatives and solutions to address high electricity bills during summer months for the upcoming years. The new decision, however, will not benefit owners of the residential buildings who have rented out their properties. It may be noted that an exorbitant surge in electricity bills topped the talk across social media platforms in the country last month, forcing the Nama Group to issue a statement.

Both citizens and residents have been seeking solutions as high utility bills diminish their purchasing power, especially those from the low-income groups. Residents too have been feeling the pinch though there have been no signs of the summer heat easing out even in the second week of October. According to a citizen, bills have been

A comprehensive review of electricity costs will be conducted without compromising on the quality of services as part of the efforts to find alternatives and solutions to address high electricity bills during summer

APSR OFFICIAL

touching RO 180 to RO 200.

The general reaction is that a bill of around RO 100 and above for someone with a salary of RO 500 plus is virtually unaffordable.

Even expatriates with pre-paid smart meters in their apartments are affected as they have no option but to recharge a sizeable amount every week or pay a hefty bill every month to avoid disconnections. Nama Supply Company said in a statement that it followed with great interest what was being-circulated on social media regarding the issue of electricity bills during summers.

“We thank our subscribers for their interest and direct communication with us through our various channels to inquire about their bills, which contributed in monitoring all incoming inquiries and answering them.”

ARABIAN LYNX IN MUSANDAM

The Environment Authority, represented by the National Biodiversity Survey project, registered the presence of the Arabian lynx in the western mountain range of Musandam Governorate at a height of 509 metres above sea level using the camera trap technology.




MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

INTERNATIONAL TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee in Ministry of Information announces its Tenders for the following works:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
2/2023 (2023/223/ ٢٠٢٣ / ٢٢٣ - 12 (43403) at E-Tendering	SUPPLY, DELIVERY, INSTALLATION AND COMMISSIONING OF A PLAYOUT AUTOMATION SYSTEM	Excellent Frist	21/10/2023	19/11/2023	47.500/-
3/2023 (2023/222/ ٢٠٢٣ / ٢٢٢ - 11 (43283) at E-Tendering	SUPPLY, DELIVERY, INSTALLATION AND COMMISSIONING OF (4K) SHOULDER-MOUNT CAMCORDERS AND ACCESSORIES	Excellent Frist	21/10/2023	19/11/2023	25/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
2. Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.

(For more information, please see the original circular issued by the Tender Board on the Isnad platform.)

Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am. Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically.

You are requested to provide 2 hard copies for your offer after the submission in Projects Department at Ministry of Information.

3. The Ministry has the right to:
 - 1) Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.
 - 2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:

Telephone : 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)



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omanobserver

TIME NOW TO LOOK INTO INFLATED WATER BILLS, WRONG READINGS

SHADDAD AL MUSALMI
@shadadm

Following the directives from the Council of Ministers to increase the previously set reduction rate on electricity bills for the 'residential category' from 15 per cent to an impressive 30 per cent of the total bill value, it is now time to look into the water bills, which are always mixed up with wrong readings, and inflated figures that have left many customers baffled.

According to subscribers, the water bills are coming with unjustified and

unreasonably inflated amounts – either by wrong meter readings or errors – leaving them furious. “The average monthly water bill amount jumped from around RO 20 to RO 275. There is a need to look into how such bills are inflated. I guess meter reading is not done correctly and sometimes generated based on average reading and not actual,” Amour al Tauqi, Amerat resident, said.

For some, the bill has gone up to RO 850. “We had to complain after we got a bill of RO 850, but again, the process of registering a complaint is long. This is a regular issue. Something needs to



According to subscribers, the water bills are coming with unjustified and unreasonably inflated amounts

be done,” said Adnan Rasool, a Muscat resident.

Fuad al Farsi, an Amerat resident, said his average water bill used to be below

RO10, but recent bills show the amount as RO 200. “For one year after I moved into my house, the bill was less than RO 10, and now my latest bill is RO 200. Even if that bill is for two months, I am sure my consumption can't be this high to warrant such a big bill,” he said.

When contacted, officials from OIFC and Diam said subscribers with such problems need to visit the Diam office for rectification, and people are advised to visit Diam's head office with exact readings of the water meters.

Subscribers claimed registering complaints through the application never

works. “I came to the head office, but here I was told to register the complaint through the application. I did that earlier, but no one contacted me until my water line was disconnected. I paid around RO 400 in May to change my water meter, but following that, the bill jumped to RO 750. Earlier, I used to pay around RO 30 per month. I do not know how the bill reached RO 750 for four months,” said one of the subscribers who wished to remain anonymous.

Several subscribers claimed their problems began when Diam started issuing new water bills.

EVs all set to roll on GCC roads

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Keeping a tab on fuel prices, pulling into a petrol station, and waiting to be refilled with gasoline will be a story of the past; major car manufacturers are all set to launch electric versions of their products on the GCC roads. The Geneva International Motor Show (GIMS) in Qatar has been abuzz with the idea of the launch of electric vehicles since the GIMS launch on October 6.

While some electric vehicles (EVs) are currently making a silent presence on Oman roads, others are yet to venture into the Sultanate of Oman but are in various stages from concept to production. At the same time, some are expected to wait to enter the market.

Experts and auto enthusiasts attending the GIMS Qatar opined that “For sure, electric cars are the future, and each year, more and more automakers are adding an increasing number of EVs to their lineups.” “Almost every car manufacturer is working on electric vehicles. They range from well-established existing manufacturers to new names such as Vinfast and are all set to foray into Oman with their EVs,” Iyan McCarthy, representative of ‘motorbox.com’ from Italy, said.



A range of EVs at the GIMS Qatar Expo

“While most of them are powered by traditional electricity, efforts are underway for vehicles powered by solar and other alternative energy sources,” he adds.

A range of vehicles, the majority passenger vehicles from Toyota, Lexus, Exceed, KIA, Porsche, Audi, Volkswagen, Mercedes Benz, Lucid, Tetwo, BMW, Mini and McLaren, are actively displaying their varieties that are all set to conquer the future at the GIMS Qatar.

Toyota, the leading supplier of vehicles in Oman, has an array of EVs on display at the Show with bZ4X, the brand's first mass-produced electric vehicle and is

currently the only EV the brand offers. Audi has made a dedicated effort to further highlight the region's ongoing growth as part of its electrification drive. This includes the Audi RS e-tron GT and the sleek Audi RS 7, amongst others. In addition to the Formula 1 project show car, Audi has displayed a range of other exceptional models, such as the all-electric e-tron range, the Audi RS e-tron GT and the Q8 e-Tron, besides the Audi S8 and Audi exclusive RS 7.

The BMW i5, which is expected by late 2023, is part of its latest 5-series electric variant. The base eDrive40 model features a 335-hp motor powering the rear

wheels. The 84.3-kWh battery is expected to eke out close to 300 miles of range. Its most expected M variant, the top machine in the i5 lineup, the M60 xDrive, is a dual-motor all-wheel-drive sports sedan good for 590 hp and a claimed 3.7-second sprint to 60 mph. Yet another one from the maker is the BMW i5 M, which is expected in 2026.

Similarly, Oman roads will also witness Chevrolet Equinox EV, all-electric Silverado, Chevy which has already sold nearly 300,000 units of its Equinox crossover, Ford Escape, Hyundai Tucson, Subaru Forester, GMC Hummer EV and SUV and the like ruling the automobile market of future.

Jusoor Foundation bags second place in Arab CSR Awards

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 8

In a momentous feat, Jusoor Foundation has clinched the second position at the 2023 Arab Award for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for Institutions.

Their remarkable work in the realm of partnerships and collaborative initiatives has earned them this prestigious accolade. The spotlight is now firmly fixed on their groundbreaking project, the Mobile Breast Cancer Screening Unit, a project conducted in close collaboration with Oman's Ministry of Health and the Omani Cancer Association.

This recognition is not merely an award but a resounding acknowledgment of Jusoor Foundation's unwavering commitment to social responsibility and their innovative approach to forging community partnerships. The award ceremony unfolded at the Arab Forum for Corporate Social Responsibility for Institutions, held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Jusoor Foundation's active involvement in this event vividly illustrated their dedication to fostering meaningful partnerships and collaborative efforts.

Jaber bin Sulaiman al Busaidy, the Executive Director of Jusoor Foundation, expressed enthusiasm for reaching this milestone. He stated, “This award symbolises our pledge to make a positive impact on society. Our Mobile Breast Cancer Screening Unit project transcends being just a medical initiative; it embodies unity, partnership, and a profound



This recognition is not merely an award but a resounding acknowledgment of Jusoor Foundation's unwavering commitment to social responsibility and their innovative approach to forging community partnerships.

dedication to women's health.”The Mobile Breast Cancer Screening Unit project is nothing short of a revolutionary endeavour. Picture a fully equipped mobile medical unit with a mammography section, a welcoming reception area, and a comfortable waiting space. This innovative initiative also includes an auxiliary vehicle to support the dedicated administrative and medical team responsible for the Mobile Breast Cancer Screening Unit.

What is truly awe-inspiring is the impact of this initiative in just one year of operation. The project covered the North and South Al Batinah governorates, spanning 58 different stations. During this time, a staggering 3,632 free breast cancer screenings were conducted. Out of these screenings, 98 women received positive results, enabling early intervention and potentially life-saving treatment.

Ihsaan Association celebrates Elderly Day

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, OCT 8

The Al Dakhiliyah branch of the Ihsaan Association joined hands with Nizwa Health City and Nizwa Fort to celebrate International Elderly Day recently. The theme for this year's Elderly Day is ‘Honouring the value of our elderly lives.’

The Ihsaan Association stands unwavering in its commitment to the well-being of the elderly, as evidenced by its collaborative endeavours with various government agencies and institutions dedicated to elderly care.

Its primary objective is to heighten community awareness surrounding the elderly population, shedding light on their unique challenges and the trials that accompany ageing. Furthermore, these initiatives underscore seniors' pivotal role in society, emphasising their importance as a cherished segment deserving of respect, gratitude, and comprehensive care.

The local branch of the association organised a special event at Nizwa al Shahba Fort, gathering elderly individuals



The Ihsaan Association stands unwavering in its commitment to the well-being of the elderly



hailing from diverse towns and villages across Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, all in the spirit of honouring and acknowledging their significant contributions.

The ceremony hosted by the

association's branch featured a captivating exhibition showcasing the artistry of sixty skilled artisans, coupled with a display of various facets of Oman's rich heritage, passed down through generations.



The exhibition served as a magnet for talented seniors, including calligraphers, sculptors, and other seasoned craftsmen.

In a bid to promote the health and well-being of the elderly,

the Ihsaan Association branch partnered with the Nizwa Club Rover to organise a leisurely walk aimed at raising awareness about the imperative need for seniors to embrace healthy lifestyles. The

leisurely march commenced at the entrance of Nizwa Market, meandering its way through the Al Aqar neighbourhood, with local cafes lining the path. This two-hour walk, from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm, offered a refreshing and health-enhancing activity for the elderly participants.

The branch places particular emphasis on nurturing the talents of poets and writers. In line with this celebration, a gathering of poets and musicians actively engaged in theatrical performances, constructing an immersive tapestry depicting the life experiences and contrasts of the elderly, thus bridging the gap between the past and the present.

The Castle Theater hosted a plethora of activities, including musical performances graced by the remarkable vocalists Bader al Harithy and Hossam al Obaidani. A poetry evening featured contributions from poet Salim al Riyami and the creatively gifted Hoor al Kindi. The eloquent broadcaster Salem al Badawi also took to the stage at Nizwa Castle, enriching the event with his insights and talents.

Photos by Sami al Hinai



SAFE DRIVING

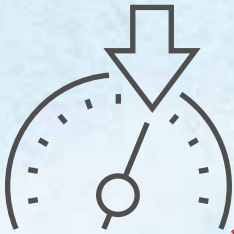
GUIDELINES NEAR SCHOOLS, HOSPITALS



MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, OCT 8

WHEN it comes to driving, safety should always be a top priority. This is especially true in areas with vulnerable road users, such as children, elderly pedestrians, and patients. The Royal Oman Police (ROP) consistently emphasises to drivers that in residential areas, close to schools, and in the vicinity of hospitals, following safe driving principles is not merely a suggestion but an indispensable requirement. ROP issued guidelines for road users, with a specific focus on safeguarding the well-being of children, especially in the vicinity of educational institutions.

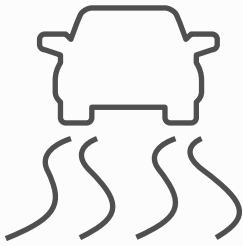
RESPECT SPEED LIMITS



One of the fundamental rules for driving in residential areas, near schools, and hospitals is to adhere to the posted speed limits. These are specifically set to ensure the safety of everyone on the road. Exceeding these limits puts you at risk and endangers the lives of pedestrians and other drivers. Always be vigilant about speed limits and adjust your driving accordingly.

AVOID RECKLESS DRIVING

Reckless driving has no place in areas where people's safety is paramount. Speeding, aggressive manoeuvres, and erratic driving behaviour should be strictly avoided. The consequences of reckless driving can be severe, leading to accidents that could have been prevented with responsible and cautious driving.

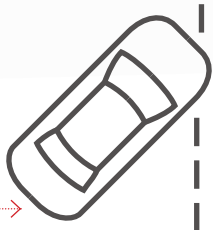


STAY IN YOUR LANE AND FOLLOW TRAFFIC FLOW

Driving against the flow of traffic or entering lanes designated for oncoming vehicles is extremely dangerous. Such actions are often taken to cut corners or save time, but they can result in head-on collisions and catastrophic accidents. Always respect the designated lanes and follow the traffic flow to ensure road users' safety.

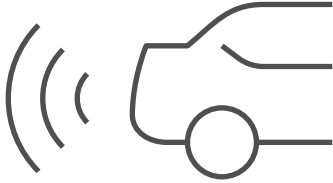
MINDFUL PARKING

When parking in residential areas, near schools, or hospitals, it's essential to be considerate of others. Avoid parking obstructing traffic, blocking driveways, or preventing emergency vehicles from accessing hospitals. Proper parking promotes road safety and demonstrates respect for your fellow citizens.



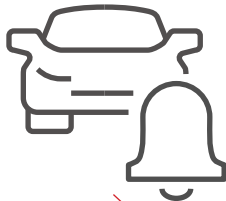
SAFE REVERSING

Reversing a vehicle in a parking lot or on a residential street demands extra caution. Before shifting into reverse, ensure no children, pedestrians, or other vehicles are in your path. Utilise your mirrors and be vigilant about your surroundings. Checking blind spots is crucial to avoid accidents while reversing.



USE ALARMS RESPONSIBLY

Vehicle alarms are designed to alert others to potential hazards but should be used judiciously. Unnecessary or overly loud alarm usage can disturb peace and create unnecessary stress in residential areas. Be considerate of your neighbours and use your alarm only when it is genuinely required.



LTI-Free Year in Unique Underground Copper Project



Mawarid Mining LLC's (Mawarid) first Underground Copper Mining Project, the Ghuzayn 3 Project, has completed a full year without any Lost Time Incidents (LTIs), demonstrating commitment to the highest Health, Safety, and environmental standards and full adherence to Oman's safety regulations for the mining industry.

The Ghuzayn 3 Project, which is one of the projects supported by the Implementation, Support, and Follow-up Unit of Vision 2040 after rigorous studies, proceeded through its first development stage over a year ago and was inaugurated under the auspices of HE. Eng. Salim Al Aafi, Minister of Energy and Minerals. The Ghuzayn 3 Project decline development has exceeded 500 meters, with the Mawarid and Gulf Rock Engineering LLC teams working closely in the planning and execution of the mining activities.

The Ghuzayn 3 Project aims to develop and mine the 6.4 million ton ore body, with a grade of 2.04% Cu, which will be processed at the Lasail Concentrator in Northern Al Batinah and exported from Oman's strategic position. Copper ore is highly valued for its use in various industries including construction, green renewable energy, and electronics.

Mr. Haitham Al Bahrani, Chief Corporate Officer at Mawarid, said: "On behalf of the team I would like to thank the government for its support and active cooperation in this project. Over the past year, we have had several visits from various government bodies, and most recently we welcomed H.E Dr. Abdullah Al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority to view the mine's developmental operations. Mawarid is also focused on adhering to environmental standards and implementing a robust environmental monitoring program. The program focuses on vibration, dust, air, water quality, and other environmental aspects in accordance with the regulations."

"We are also committed to effective sustainable practices of corporate social responsibility and In-Country Value. For example, Mawarid recently employed the first female Mining Engineering Graduate working on-site at an underground mine in Oman, Ms. Zuhour Al Maqbali," he added.

Mr. Chris Jordinson, Deputy CEO of Mawarid Mining, added: "Copper is important in a number of industries, particularly including the renewable industry, the production of wind energy, electric vehicles, and other forms of green energy. Meanwhile, mining is one of the industries identified by Oman's Vision 2040, to help bolster the Sultanate of Oman's economy. We are proud to have reached our first LTI milestone and congratulate the team on this achievement along with exceeding 500m in the decline development."



ARAB LEAGUE CHIEF HEADS FOR TALKS

MOSCOW: Arab League Chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit headed to Moscow for talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the situation in Gaza after Hamas launched the biggest attack on Israel in years.

Aboul Gheit, who served as Egypt's foreign minister during the final seven years of Hosni Mubarak's rule, will discuss the "ongoing escalation in the Gaza Strip," said a spokesman for the Cairo-based league of Arab states.

"We regard the current large-scale escalation as another extremely dangerous manifestation of a vicious circle of violence resulting from chronic failure to comply with the corresponding resolutions of the UN and its Security Council and the blocking by the West of the work of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators made up of Russia, the United States, the EU and the UN," Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

POPE CALLS FOR PEACE

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis on Sunday called for "peace in Israel and in Palestine", saying "terrorism and war do not lead to a solution".

He did not mention the Gaza Strip or the Palestinian fighters group Hamas, which launched a massive surprise attack early on Saturday.

"War is a defeat. All war is a defeat. Let us pray for peace in Israel and Palestine," he said at St Peter's Square in the Vatican.

BRITISH MAN KILLED

LONDON: A British man who was serving in the Israeli army died in the attack by Hamas fighters , his family said as another man was reported missing. Nathanel Young, 20, "was killed on the Gaza border yesterday" a family Facebook post said. —**Reuters**

Almost 1,000 killed in Israel war with Hamas



Palestinians inspect a mosque destroyed in Israeli strikes in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. – **Reuters**

JERUSALEM/GAZA: Israel battered Palestinians in Gaza on Sunday after suffering its bloodiest day in decades when Hamas fighters rampaged through Israeli towns, with hundreds killed on both sides and spiralling violence threatening a major new Middle East war.

In a sign the conflict could spread beyond blockaded Gaza, Israel and Lebanon's Hizbullah exchanged artillery and rocket fire, while in Alexandria, two Israeli tourists were shot dead along with their Egyptian guide.

Israeli air strikes hit housing blocks, tunnels, a mosque and homes of Hamas officials in Gaza, killing more than 300 people, including 20 children, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed "mighty vengeance for this wicked day".

In southern Israel, Hamas gunmen were still fighting Israeli security forces 24 hours after a surprise, multi-pronged assault of rocket barrages and gunmen who attacked army bases and towns, killing at least 600 people, according to Israeli TV, and abducting dozens more.

"My two little girls, they're only babies. They're not even five years old and three years old," said Yoni Asher who had seen video of gunmen seizing his wife and two small daughters, with her phone location now appearing in Gaza, he said.

Israel's military, which faces questions over its failure to prevent the attack, said it was still fighting but had regained control of most infiltration points along security barriers, killed



Mourners react during the funeral of Palestinian twin babies their mother and their three sisters during their funeral in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. – **Reuters**

hundreds of attackers and taken dozens more prisoner.

"We're going to be attacking Hamas severely and this is going to be a long, long haul," an Israeli military spokesperson told a briefing with reporters.

The military said it had deployed tens of thousands of soldiers around Gaza, a narrow strip that is home to 2.3 million Palestinians, and was starting to evacuate all Israelis living around the frontier of the territory.

"This is my fifth war. The war should stop. I don't want to keep feeling this," said Qassab al Attar, a disabled Palestinian in Gaza whose

brothers carried him to shelter when Israeli forces shelled their house.

The attack by Hamas launched at dawn on Saturday represented the biggest and deadliest incursion into Israel since Egypt and Syria launched a sudden assault in an effort to reclaim lost territory in the Yom Kippur war 50 years ago.

The conflict could undermine US-backed moves towards normalising relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia — a security realignment that could threaten Palestinian hopes of self determination and hem in Hamas' main backer. — **Reuters**

WORLD REACTS TO HAMAS ATTACK

UNITED STATES

"There is never any justification for terrorism. We stand in solidarity with the government and people of Israel, and extend our condolences for the Israeli lives lost in these attacks," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement released by the State Department.

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said: "Over the coming days the Department of Defence will work to ensure that Israel has what it needs to defend itself and protect civilians from indiscriminate violence and terrorism."

UNITED NATIONS

UN Middle East peace envoy Tor Wennesland said: "This is a dangerous precipice, and I appeal to all to pull back from the brink."

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Tuerk said: "This attack is having a horrific impact on Israeli civilians ... Civilians must never be the target of attack."

PRESIDENT ABBAS

The Palestinian people have the right to defend themselves against the "terror of settlers and occupation troops," the official news agency Wafa quoted Abbas as saying.

IRAN

An adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei congratulated Palestinian fighters, the semi-official ISNA news site reported. "We will stand by the Palestinian fighters until the liberation of Palestine and Jerusalem," it quoted Yahya Rahim Safavi as saying. Iran's state TV showed parliament members rising from their seats to chant "Death to Israel".

CHINA

The Chinese foreign ministry urged relevant parties "to remain calm, exercise restraint and immediately end the hostilities to protect civilians and avoid further deterioration of the situation". "The fundamental way out of the conflict lies in implementing the two-state solution and establishing an independent State of Palestine," the foreign ministry said. — **Reuters**

Gaza: blockaded enclave scarred by war and poverty

PARIS: The Gaza Strip is an impoverished Palestinian enclave that has been under Israeli blockade since 2007. It is ruled by Hamas now at war with Israel for the fifth time in 15 years. Here is what you need to know about Gaza:

5,000 years of history

In 1998, archaeologists discovered the remains of a large fortified Canaanite town, Tell es Sakan, near Gaza City that was occupied continuously from 3200 to 2000 BC. They hailed the site as being of major interest, marking the shift from agricultural to urban society. Pottery was found that could be linked to Narmer, Egypt's first king, indicating Gaza's close ties with its giant neighbour.

Cramped Mediterranean strip

One of the most densely populated places on the planet,



A Hizbullah supporter attends a rally in the southern suburbs of Beirut – **AFP**

Gaza is home to over two million people living on a 362-square-kilometre strip of land. It is bordered by Israel in the east and north, Egypt in the south, with the Mediterranean Sea to the west. After the 1948-1949 Arab-Israeli war that surrounded the creation of Israel, Gaza was placed under

Egyptian administration. Israel occupied Gaza during the 1967 Six-Day War and it was only fully returned to Palestinians in 2005, when Israel withdrew its last soldiers and thousands of settlers.

Shut-in

In 2006, Israel imposed an air,



People flee their homes amid Israeli strikes in the southern Gaza Strip. – **Reuters**

land and sea blockade on Gaza following the capture by Hamas of an Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, who was held prisoner for five years. In 2007, Israel tightened the blockade after Hamas took control of Gaza from the secular Fatah movement of Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas.

The only entrance to Gaza not controlled by Israel is Rafah on the Egyptian border.

Crushing poverty

The Gaza Strip has virtually no industry and suffers from a chronic lack of water, fuel and electricity. Around half of

the population is unemployed, according to the World Bank, and more than two-thirds are reliant on development aid.

Fifth war since 2008

This is the fifth war between Palestinian fighters in Gaza and Israel following Israel's withdrawal from the territory in 2005. The four previous wars in 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2021 were marked by devastating Israeli air strikes on the enclave and barrages of rockets raining down on Israel from the other direction.

The deadliest by far was the seven-week conflict in July-August 2014, which killed 2,251 Palestinians and 74 Israelis, including 68 soldiers.

Israel had flattened parts of Gaza with the stated goal of stopping Palestinian rocket fire and destroying infiltration tunnels. — **AFP**



Hong Kong closes schools, raises warning for Typhoon Koinu



A car passes by power lines downed by the high winds from Typhoon Koinu in Taiwan's southern Pingtung County. – AFP file photo

HONG KONG: Hong Kong issued its second-highest storm warning signal on Sunday, prompting the closure of some transport services and schools, as Typhoon Koinu skirted the financial hub, bringing rains and powerful gusts.

Koinu comes just a month after Hong Kong was lashed by Typhoon Saola, which triggered its highest “T10” storm alert.

A week after that, the city experienced its highest rainfall in nearly 140 years, flooding subway stations and malls, and causing landslides.

Hong Kong’s weather observatory on Sunday warned of strong winds and intense rain bands as Koinu moved towards the Pearl River Estuary and was expected to skirt as close as 70 kilometres south of the city before midnight.

Typhoon Koinu was a “T8” signal for most of the day on Sunday — the second-highest in Hong Kong’s warning system. The warning level is triggered when a storm’s maximum

Koinu is a mature typhoon with its eyewall edging closer to the seas south of the territory

THE HONG KONG OBSERVATORY

sustained wind speed reaches 117 kilometres per hour. At 7 pm, the weather observatory raised the warning signal to “T9”.

“Do not go outside and stay away from exposed windows and doors. Make sure you have a safe place to shelter,” it said.

Schools, daycare centres, cargo terminals, ferries and buses suspended operations for the day or the afternoon.

Around 90 flights were cancelled and 130 others delayed throughout the day due to the storm, according to Hong Kong’s Airport Authority. — AFP

Death toll from ‘unprecedented’ Afghan quakes doubles to 2,000

HERAT: The death toll from a series of earthquakes in western Afghanistan rose sharply again on Sunday to more than 2,000, with nearly 10,000 injured, as rescue workers dug through razed villages for vanishing signs of life.

More than 1,300 homes were toppled when Saturday’s magnitude 6.3 quake — followed by eight strong aftershocks — jolted hard-to-reach areas 30 kilometres northwest of the provincial capital of Herat, according to officials.

In rural Zinda Jan district, dozens of households were reduced to jumbles of broken masonry, where makeshift rescue teams dug trenches in the hope of unearthing survivors.

“Our people witnessed an unprecedented earthquake,” said disaster management ministry spokesman Mullah Janan Sayeq, putting the number of dead at 2,053 and injured at 9,240 across 13 villages.

“For the treatment of the victims of the incident we are doing our best,” he told reporters in Kabul.

“On-site search operations in the affected area are ongoing,” he added, warning the fatality figures would likely rise higher still.

One further aftershock of magnitude 4.2 hit the same area around 7:00 am on Sunday morning, according to the United States Geological Survey.

In Sarboland village of Zinda Jan district, homes were ruined near the epicentre of the quakes, which shook the area for more than five hours.

Gutted homes showed personal belongings flapping in the harsh



Afghan residents clear debris from a damaged house after earthquake in Sarboland village of Zende Jan district of Herat province. – AFP

wind, as women and children lingered out in the open preparing to spend the night under an open sky.

Multi-generational extended families generally live under the same roof, meaning disasters like Saturday’s quake can devastate local communities.

In Herat city, residents fled their homes and schools, while hospitals and offices evacuated when the first quake was felt. There were few reports of casualties in the metropolitan area.

Herat province has also been

In Sarboland village of Zinda Jan district, homes were ruined near the epicentre of the quakes, which shook the area for more than five hours

hit by a years-long drought that has crippled many hardscrabble agricultural communities.

Afghanistan is frequently hit by earthquakes, especially in the

Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates.

More than 1,000 people were killed and tens of thousands left homeless in June last year after a 5.9-magnitude quake struck the impoverished province of Paktika.

“The Herat earthquake is worse than the eastern earthquake that happened last year,” said disaster agency spokesman Janan.

“Not only by the magnitude and depth, but also more areas are affected and destroyed.”

DR Congo leader files bid for re-election amid crowded race

KINSHASA: DR Congo’s leader Felix Tshisekedi has submitted his candidacy for a second term in office, joining a crowded list of presidential hopefuls including opposition heavyweights and a Nobel Peace Prize winner.

The turbulent central African nation, a vast and impoverished country of about 100 million people, is due to hold parliamentary and presidential votes on December 20.

Tshisekedi, who came to power after an election in 2018, officially submitted his candidacy for a second five-year term in office in the capital Kinshasa.

He thereby joins over a dozen opposition candidates, including

political heavyweights and senior members of the previous administration, but the opposition is far from unified.

Given the fractured opposition, the 60-year-old president is thought to stand a strong chance of winning again. “He’s in a good position,” said Congolese political scientist Christian Moleka.

“He’s the incumbent, he has the resources of the state, people still believe in him and he’s managed to build strategic alliances,” he added.

The divided political opposition would need to unite around a single candidate to stand a chance of beating Tshisekedi, according to Moleka.

But that possibility appears



Special force members of the presidential guard, stand guard after President Felix Tshisekedi Tshilombo filed his candidacy in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. – Reuters

slim. Several opposition figures who have something to prove have thrown their hats in the ring.

Moise Katumbi, a business magnate and former governor of then-Katanga province is amongst those running. He had been barred from contesting the 2018 vote.

Fellow candidate Martin Fayulu says he won the popular vote in 2018 and that Tshisekedi took the presidency illegitimately.

Nobel-Prize winner Denis Mukwege’s entry into the race has complicated matters further.

Moleka said the “electoral process is built on a high level of mistrust” which could lead to disputed results.

The possibility of instability

is “explosive,” he added, given the backdrop of insecurity in the DRC’s east. Armed groups plague much of the mineral-rich east of the country, a legacy of regional wars that flared during the 1990s and 2000s.

One such group, the M23, has captured swathes of territory since launching an offensive in late 2021, and edged close to the eastern city of Goma. Two former prime ministers who served under ex-Congolese president Joseph Kabila are also running: Augustin Matata and Adolphe Muzito.

The DRC’s electoral commission is due to publish the list of provisional presidential candidates on October 25. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

DUSHANBE

Toxic storms blamed on climate change cloud

The air was dry and warm and the skies over Dushanbe were grey without a hint of sun during another recent toxic sand storm that enveloped the capital of Tajikistan. Storms like this, which experts say are being caused by climate change, are becoming increasingly frequent across Central Asia, harming its inhabitants.

The imposing mountains around Dushanbe were barely visible through the haze and hulks of apartment blocks under



construction stood like ghostly apparitions. Tajikistan was ranked one of the top 10 most polluted countries in the world in the 2022 IQAir air quality index. — AFP

ISTANBUL

Erdogan to open state’s first new church

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan planned on Sunday to inaugurate the first church built with government backing in overwhelmingly Muslim Türkiye’s 100-year history as a post-Ottoman state.

The Mor Ephrem Syriac Orthodox Church’s opening marks an important cultural and political moment for Türkiye.

Erdogan laid the first stone for the church’s construction for Istanbul’s 17,000-strong Assyrian Christians in 2019.



“This is the first newly built church to open its doors since the founding of the Turkish Republic,” Istanbul Syriac Kadim Foundation president Sait Susin said. — AFP

GUWAHATI

Flood toll up to 77 as waters recede

At least 77 people are confirmed dead in the floods that hit India’s northeast, authorities said on Sunday, with destroyed roads and bridges leaving thousands more still cut off despite waters receding. “A total of 29 bodies have been retrieved from different parts of Sikkim,” state relief commissioner Anilraj Rai said.

In neighbouring West Bengal state, Jalpaiguri district police said that another 48 bodies had been recovered. More than 100 people are still missing, according to



official figures.

Water levels along the Teesta river “returned to normal” four days after the floods hit, an official from Sikkim’s state disaster control room said. — AFP



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In brief

■ OSLO



GAS PIPELINE SHUT AFTER SUSPECTED LEAK

A subsea gas pipeline connecting Finland and Estonia was shut early on Sunday after an unusual drop in pressure probably caused by a leak, Finnish gas system company Gasgrid and Estonian operator Elering said.

Gasgrid said the cause was not yet known, but gas supplies were stable for now.

“I do not want to speculate at all on the cause of the leak,” senior Gasgrid executive Janne Gronlund said.

The 77 kilometre Balticconnector pipeline crosses the Gulf of Finland, an arm of the Baltic Sea that stretches eastwards into Russian waters and ends at the port of St Petersburg. — **Reuters**

■ BEIJING



2 DEAD AFTER AVALANCHE HITS SHISHAPANGMA

An American mountaineer and her Nepali guide were killed in an avalanche on Mount Shishapangma in Tibet, southwest China, tour companies said on Sunday, with two still missing and one seriously injured.

The accident occurred “at an altitude of between 7,600 and 8,000 metres”, China’s state news agency Xinhua said, citing the Tibet Sports Bureau.

Efforts were complicated by the fact that “helicopters cannot be used” on the mountain due to Chinese restrictions.

The pair finished the feat in 92 days when they reached the peak of Pakistan’s K2 in July.

— **AFP**

■ GUAYAQUIL



SEVENTH SUSPECT IN CANDIDATE MURDER DIES

A seventh Colombian prisoner accused in the August assassination of Ecuadoran presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio has died behind bars, authorities in Quito said.

The Colombian who died in the capital’s El Inca prison — like the six killed on Friday in a prison in port city Guayaquil — was “linked” to the murder of presidential candidate and anti-corruption crusader Villavicencio.

President Guillermo Lasso announced a “reorganisation” of the country’s police leadership, with the force’s general commander, investigations chief and prisons director removed from their posts. — **AFP**

Dozen injured in Russian attack on Ukraine’s Kherson region

KYIV: A dozen people were wounded, including a 27-year-old woman and her 9-month-old baby, in a Russian attack on the southern Ukrainian region of Kherson, its governor said on Sunday.

“The Kherson region experienced another terrible night,” Governor Oleksandr Prokudin wrote on Telegram.

The woman and the infant were hospitalised with moderate wounds, he said, adding that a 33-year-old Red Cross medic was also wounded.

Several houses and gas pipelines were damaged in the attack.

Over the past 24 hours, Russian forces carried out 59 attacks on Kherson, the region’s administration said, including 19 instances of shelling of Kherson city, the region’s administrative centre.

There was no immediate comment from Russia to verify the attacks.

Recently, Russia carried out new drone attacks on Ukraine overnight and killed two people in shelling of the southern city of Kherson, Ukrainian officials said.

The Ukrainian military said air defences had shot down 24 of the 29 drones launched in attacks on the southern regions of Odesa and Mykolaiv, and on the central region of Kirovohrad.

It said Russia had continued its strikes on Ukraine’s south, home to Ukrainian Black Sea and river ports, but gave few details of the latest wave of attacks that Kyiv says have focused on port and grain



The photograph shows debris of a missile next to a residential building damaged as a result of shelling in the village of Peresichne, Kharkiv region. — **AFP**

infrastructure.

“The enemy continues its attempts to destroy the port and other infrastructure of the south, is terrorising the central regions as well,” Ukraine’s southern military command said.

Nine of the drones that were destroyed were shot down over the Kirovohrad region, regional governor Andriy Raikovich said.

Russia has frequently carried out air strikes since the start of its full-scale attack in February 2022, and Ukraine has launched a counteroffensive in the south and east that it says is gradually

Over the past 24 hours, Russian forces carried out 59 attacks on Kherson including 19 instances of shelling of Kherson city, the region’s administrative centre

making progress.

Although Moscow denies deliberately targeting civilians, many have been killed in attacks

that have hit residential areas as well as energy, defence, port, grain and other facilities.

Russia has frequently carried out air strikes and shelling on Ukraine since the start of its full-scale war in February 2022. Ukraine says its counteroffensive in the south and east is gradually making progress.

Both sides deny targeting civilians, but thousands of civilians in Ukraine have been killed in attacks that have hit residential areas as well as energy, defence, port, grain and other facilities.

— **Reuters**

Sensing power, UK Labour holds annual conference



Britain’s Labour Party Deputy Leader Angela Rayner and Party Leader Keir Starmer applaud on the opening day of Britain’s Labour Party annual conference in Liverpool, Britain. — **Reuters**

LONDON: The leader of Britain’s Labour opposition on Sunday warned the party to keep its feet on the ground as it eyes a return to power after more than a decade out of office.

Keir Starmer’s words of caution came as deputy leader Angela Rayner kicked off what could be the party’s last annual conference before the next general election, with a raft of pledges to strengthen workers’ rights. She said Labour would put legislation before parliament to give workers a better deal including abolishing fire and rehire policies by employers, which often see staff taken back on worse terms. “Our movement has never been so unified, so focussed around one aim — to give Britain its future back,” Rayner told the conference.

Labour has enjoyed double-digit poll leads for months and has been buoyed by a big local election win in Scotland on Thursday.

But Starmer said the party would not be taking anything for granted.

The conference comes as Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s government has been battling stubbornly high inflation, a cost of living crisis and strikes across the economy including the state-run National Health Service. — **AFP**

Mid-term state poll test for Scholz’s coalition

FRANKFURT: Germans cast ballots in two key state elections on Sunday in a test for Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s fractious coalition halfway through its term, while the resurgent far right may get another boost.

A surge in immigration and economic woes are top issues for the nearly 14 million people eligible to vote in Bavaria, the country’s biggest state, and in Hesse.

With the combined voter base making up almost one in five of Germany’s electorate, and both states qualifying as economic heavyweights among the country’s 16 regions, the elections are seen as a crucial indicator of the population’s mood.

After forming a three-party coalition two years ago, Scholz has had to contend with Russia’s attack of Ukraine and the ensuing energy crisis, which plunged Germany into recession.

Adding to the problems, the chancellor’s coalition — comprising his centre-left SPD, the Greens and the pro-business FDP — has been consumed by bitter infighting on issues ranging from climate laws to spending cuts.

“The parties that form the federal government are in a bad starting position here,” Arndt Leininger said, a political expert.

“In both states, all three parties are currently below their results in the last regional elections,” he said.

Not helping the cause of the SPD and its coalition partners, both states are conservative strongholds, with Hesse ruled for



Bavarian State Premier and leader of the Christian Social Union (L), Markus Soeder, casts his vote during the Bavarian state election, in Nuremberg, Bavaria, Germany.

— **Reuters**

24 years by the main opposition CDU and Bavaria since 1957 by the CSU, headed by Markus Soeder.

Meanwhile the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is forecast to make gains after a recent surge in poll ratings at the national level and a string of local election victories.

While the AfD is not expected to enter government in either state

— its strongholds are in eastern Germany — further progress would ring alarm bells anew about the party’s growing popularity.

The AfD is traditionally an anti-immigration party but has also focused on attacking the coalition’s climate policies, driven by the Greens, that have been unpopular, with critics saying they could unduly burden households.

Immigration has emerged as

In both states, all three parties are currently below their results in the last regional elections

ARNDT LEININGER
a political expert

a central theme for the elections as Germany — like elsewhere in Europe — faces a surge of new arrivals, reviving memories of a major influx in 2015.

In a recent survey Bavarians cited immigration as the most important subject and state premier Soeder, whose CSU is the sister party of the CDU, renewed calls for a tougher approach.

— **AFP**

The writer is Associate
Professor, Dept of
English Language
and Literature Sultan
Qaboos University

The Nobel Prize for Literature identifies someone who has contributed to literary styles, genres, or innovative ways of speaking about human experiences. In 2016, for example, rock

The Nobel Prize is not known for being ahead of the social curve. The first woman to win the prize, for example, was in 1909 with the next one in 1926, a gap of more than 15 years. After Rabindranath Tagore in 1915, Wole Soyinka was the first coloured person to win the award in 1986 and Toni Morrison the first Black woman awardee

As Jon Fosse's works show, one of the limitations of gaining recognition in literature is the absence of translation which would showcase a work for an international reader. But with an increase in readership and a rising market for translation, literary works from various parts of the world will continue to vie for international recognition.



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Be fair to yourself...

Longing to have a happy life with a decent living is a wish of all. However, each one is pursuing this dream in a different way; some are in a rush to get the easy life, perhaps they think of certain ways to shortcut the journey. On the other hand, others are slow and more careful to reach the destination. That is why people are taking different approaches and directions. Possibly, chasing their dreams is based on the sequence of priorities in their lives. After all, happiness is what everyone is after as a common factor.

On the career development front, for instance, there are people who think to change their jobs every now and then. To them, that is how they gain more experience and learning from life or they like changing jobs every couple of years. In contrast, there are those job-seekers who are struggling to find any kind of job just for the sake of making a living. All that matters to them is to get paid. On the contrary, there are those elders who already had enough experience, challenges and struggles in life. Thus, they are looking forward to the days of retirement and having a rest after all the hard years of work.

Everyone has a different interest, depending on their attitudes and mindset! To each one of those different types of people, life is being unfair. The employed ones are not happy with what they got or what they are currently doing for a living. Thus, they regard life is unfair as they have not had the good opportunities like others. To the job-seekers, life has not been fair with them for not offering the job opportunities they have been dreaming of; though some have got a job at least.

To the retired or about to retire people, some regret the old days they have sacrificed over the past years and



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translator and a
communications
professional

IT IS HUMAN
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THEY GET

now they are coming to retirement time. Likewise, they could be unhappy with the compensation, which they will receive in return for their retirement after long years of employment. Probably, the retirees might believe that the end-of-service benefits and compensation is unjust to them for what they had delivered and achieved. It is all based on your employer, your job, your wage as well as the number of years of service.

Eventually, it is one's hard work and fate of what he/she gets in this life. Everyone should have some faith and satisfaction to accept what he/she is being granted. But it is human nature that they would never be happy with whatever they get; always they are greedy to get more and more. This is not always the case with people, but sometimes they come to this stage of depression or disappointment due to an unpleasant incident or a failure that they have experienced.

People's feelings are mostly behind the type of attitudes and beliefs they express in different situations. Sometimes, they blame colleagues, friends or family members for whatever feelings or attitudes they have. Not only that, but they attribute that others are being unfair with them and they are the reason behind their failure or disappointment at work or personal life.

Regardless of what happens, it is only them who will face the music for their attitude. Therefore, one should look at the positive side of whatever is experienced; there is always a learning behind it. The lesson will be received sooner or later, so one has to take every challenge positively. Every human shall never ever put the key of own happiness in someone's else pocket; it is under your control to be whoever you want to be!

THE WORLD'S LARGEST REGATTA



A general view during the Barcolana Sailing Regatta and the Winged Victory statue on top of Faro della Vittoria, Trieste, Italy, on Sunday. The Barcolana is the largest sailing regatta in the world. – Reuters

Multilateral development banks must participate in debt relief

The urgency of tackling the developing world's sovereign-debt crisis continues to grow. As global temperatures rise and the threat of irreversible damage to the planet looms, onerous debt burdens are preventing many low-income countries (LICs) in Africa and elsewhere from investing in climate action. Progress on debt relief under the G20's Common Framework for Debt Treatment has been stymied by creditor disputes, foreclosing any possibility of a timely and meaningful resolution.

The question of whether multilateral development banks (MDBs) will take losses alongside other creditors has been particularly contentious. While the G20 has asked MDBs to develop options for burden sharing, no systematic plan has emerged. China, in contrast to the Paris Club of sovereign creditors, insisted that MDBs take a haircut, before softening its stance during this year's Spring Meetings of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund. Yet the demand for MDB involvement was reiterated at the recent BRICS summit.

Rightly so. As we show in a new report, the participation of MDBs in sovereign-debt restructurings is not only feasible but also necessary to break the current deadlock. For starters, at least half of the total external sovereign debt stock in 27 debt-distressed countries – many of which are LICs or small island developing states (SIDS) – is owed to multilateral creditors. Thus, even if all bilateral and private debt were



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cancelled, exempting MDBs from debt restructuring would prevent some of the world's most vulnerable countries from achieving a full recovery.

Second, perception matters. The participation of all external creditors, including MDBs, in debt restructuring would remove any impression of unfairness or free riding, in turn making bilateral and private creditors more amenable to negotiation.

Third, the debt relief generated through burden sharing would align with the MDBs' core mandate of supporting sustainable economic development and eliminating extreme poverty. If the crisis remains unresolved, debt-distressed countries will be unable to make progress toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, let alone achieve them by 2030. Only with more fiscal space can governments invest in high-priority areas.

Finally, a protracted debt crisis would result in significant costs for the MDBs' concessionary lending arms: as LICs' debt-distress indicators rise, so, too, must the grant element of MDB assistance. Consider the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank's lending arm for the poorest countries. According to our estimates, IDA grants based on debt-sustainability criteria rose from \$600 million in 2012 to \$4.9 billion in 2021 – that is, from 8 per cent to 36 per cent of

its commitments. Accelerating progress on debt relief would therefore be in MDBs' best interest.

To be sure, MDBs lend on more favourable terms than other creditors. As such, fair rules for comparability of treatment (CoT) that account for lending costs are required to achieve an equitable distribution of losses.

Using fair rules, we estimate that a debt write-off of \$55 billion – a 39 per cent haircut – for 41 IDA-eligible countries and SIDS facing debt distress would result in a loss of \$8 billion for MDBs, compared to \$27 billion for private creditors. This scenario would cost the IDA \$2 billion, significantly less than what it is spending on grants tied to debt-distress indicators. If these debtor countries received a more generous reduction of 64 per cent – similar to the relief provided during the Heavily Indebted Poor

Countries Initiative – overall MDB losses would amount to \$25 billion.

And if MDBs participated in debt relief for a larger group of 61 countries facing severe debt problems – including middle-income countries like Egypt, Nigeria, and Pakistan – a 39 per cent haircut would cost them \$37 billion using fair rules for CoT. This is hardly a trivial sum. But by accepting this loss, MDBs could unlock \$305 billion in overall debt relief – including \$209 billion from private creditors. In other words, each dollar contributed by donors through MDBs could translate into a whopping \$7 of total debt relief.

Sharing the burden of debt relief need not threaten MDBs' high credit ratings nor their privileged access to low-cost capital. Based on past sovereign-debt restructurings, MDBs could rely on donor contributions and

internal resources to back up losses from debt relief. Moreover, MDBs could revive institutional arrangements such as the World Bank's Debt Relief Trust Fund and tap their precautionary balances once they receive fresh capital injections.

If we are serious about addressing the mounting debt crisis in the Global South, MDBs must be willing to take a haircut. It is the only way to make progress toward debt restructuring. But, to ensure equitable burden sharing, losses must be determined using fair rules for CoT that incorporate the cost of lending and concessionary elements. Debt relief comes with a price, but it is a price worth paying to put vulnerable countries, and the world more generally, on a path to climate resilience and sustainable development.

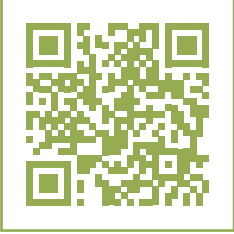
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IDA grants based on debt-sustainability criteria rose from 8 per cent to 36 per cent of its commitments.

sport

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Saham thump Nizwa to enter HM Cup last 16

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 8

Saham club qualified for the round of 16 in His Majesty the Sultan's Cup, setting a date with Dhofar, after defeating Nizwa club 5-2 in an exciting match that extended to extra-time.

The initial minutes of the first half were not exciting, with few opportunities and neither team showing strong offensive play. The teams exchanged possession of the ball, but without real danger until the 13th minute when Saham's Mohammed Fawzi had a chance to score the first goal, which Nizwa's defence managed to clear.

Nizwa's team quickly responded and succeeded in taking the lead in the 20th minute after a defensive error by Saham players, but Nizwa's lead didn't last long as Suleiman Al Maamari narrowed the gap by scoring a goal for Saham in the 25th minute. Then, both teams tried to reach the goal but all attempts were not seriously dangerous, ending the first half with a 1-1 draw.

The second half saw continued exchanges between the two teams. From a counter-attack, Nizwa's Ayoub al Salimi managed to score the second goal and take the lead for Nizwa. Saham managed to equalise in the 80th minute with a goal by Mohammed al Balushi. Consequently, the match ended

in the original time with a 2-2 draw, requiring extra-time.

In the first period of extra-time, Saham intensified their attack and focused on hitting the net. Mohammed al Balushi scored two consecutive goals, and had an assist to his teammate Abdullah al Abdulsalam who scored the fifth goal, ending the first half of extra-time with Sohar leading 5-2.

In the second half, Nizwa were unable to penetrate Saham's defence, ending the match with Saham winning 5-2.

With this victory, Saham advanced to the round of 16 to face Dhofar.

On the other hand, the qualification matches for the HM's Cup round of 16 have been completed.

The last 16 round matches are scheduled for October 19, 20 and 21. The match between Sohar and Al Seeb stands out as one of the prominent matches, to be held at the Sohar Sports Complex. On the other side, defending champions Al Nahdha will face Sur Club at Al Buraimi Sports Complex. The other matches will witness exciting encounters between Fanja and Al Khaburah, Al Nasr and Al Talea, Salalah and Bahla at Nizwa Sports Complex, Al Rustaq and Ibri and Oman Club and Al Mudhaibi. The round of 32 matches saw a total of 24 goals scored.



Nizwa professional trying to pass through Saham players



Asad al Raisi



Ahmed al Riyami



Bader al Jassasi

THRILLING START TO WTT CONTENDER MUSCAT 2023

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 8

Hungary's Nandor Ecseki made a perfect step towards securing a ticket to the men's singles main draw as he defeated Hamid Shams of Iran on Sunday in the opening round of the preliminary qualification at WTT Contender Muscat 2023 in the indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

With the triumph, the 26-year-old will meet Noshad Alamiyan from Iran in the second round. The winner from this match will move to Round 3 which will be the

last step to the main draw.

This is the third successive edition that Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) has managed to bring the high profile event to the Sultanate of Oman after two editions in the previous year. The hosting of this world class tournament showcased Oman in the world map of table tennis.

Oman's young paddler Ahmed al Riyami produced a top show against Pau Yik Man before he lost the encounter 3-1 (6-11, 11-7, 11-6, 11-3). Al Riyami managed to bounce back strongly in the second set as he won 11-7 before losing his focus in the third and

fourth set to concede the match. Pau Yik Man will take on Martin Allegro from Belgium on Monday in the second round.

The mega TT tournament in Muscat will feature matches on Monday for the preliminary qualification of women's singles competitions during morning and afternoon sessions.

Local player Badar al Jassasi received a 3-0 (2-11, 3-11, 5-11) loss against You Kwan To from Hong Kong in the first round of the men's singles. Al Jassasi worked hard to compete against the opponent, ranked 269, who managed to end the match

on winning note by his vast experience.

Oman's Asad al Raisi was defeated by Li Hon Ming from Hong Kong 3-0 (11-2, 11-7, 11-2). The Omani runner-up of the national singles championship pressed hard in the second set but the Hong Kong player put up a top show to win the match. Li Hon will meet OH Hunsung from South Korea on Monday.

Oman's Muhannad al Balushi will commence his campaign on Monday as he will face Huang Yan Cheng from Chinese Taipei while Mohammed al Mutawa will meet Chan Baldwin from Hong Kong.

Al Nahda top OL with win over Sur

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 8

Al Nahda club advanced in the Omantel League standings after an exciting victory over Sur Club with a score of 3-2 in the postponed match of the fourth round.

The first half started with pressure from Al Nahda as they managed to score an early goal in the third minute. Algerian player Bilal Ben Sahra capitalised on a defensive error by Sur to put the ball into the net. Sur tried to respond and equalise after the goal, and their forwards had several opportunities, but they couldn't capitalise on them effectively.

On the other hand, Al Nahda capitalised on counter-attacks and long balls to create offensive

opportunities. Sur continued their pressure in search of an equaliser. In the 43rd minute, Sur scored the equalising goal through their professional player Roy Labi, who received a cross from Badr al Farsi and directed it into Al Nahda's net, ending the first half in a draw with 1-1.

The second half started quickly, with both teams exchanging attacks and attempting to score the lead goal. Al Nahda's Abdullah Fawaz had a dangerous opportunity in the 48th minute, but Sur's defence cleared the ball. On the other side, Sur's Mohammed Nasser missed a chance. Then, in the 56th minute, Al Nahda scored their second goal through Ahmed al Matroushi, who capitalised on a corner kick and sent the ball into Sur's net.

After taking the lead, Al Nahda retreated and adopted a counter-attacking style of play. Sur had several dangerous attacks, but Al Nahda's goalkeeper and defenders kept them at bay. Afterwards Bilal Ben Sahra scored the third goal for Al Nahda in the 74th minute.

Sur quickly responded and narrowed the gap in the 83rd minute by scoring their second goal through professional player Kleiton Ruben. The two sides exchanged attacks in the last minutes without scoring any further goals. The match ended with Al Nahda winning with a score of 3-2.

With this win, Al Nahda increased their points to 14, taking the first position in the league from Al Seeb, who have 13 points. As for Sur, their points remained at 9, placing them in fifth position.





KOHLI, RAHUL LEAD INDIA OUT OF PERIL TO BEAT AUSTRALIA

CHENNAI: Virat Kohli and KL Rahul hit defiant knocks to lift India from a perilous three down for two runs to a six-wicket win over Australia in their opening Cricket World Cup match on Sunday.

Chasing a tricky target of 200, India lost three batsmen, who all failed to score, inside two overs before Kohli (85) and Rahul (97 not out) put on 165.

Victory was secured with 52 balls to spare.

Spinner Ravindra Jadeja returned figures of 3-28 to help bowl out Australia for 199 in 49.3 overs in the 150th ODI meeting between the two cricket giants.

Australia's fast bowlers then came out all guns blazing to rattle the Indian top-order after left-arm quick Mitchell Starc sent back Ishan Kishan for a duck in the first over.

Josh Hazlewood struck twice in the next to remove skipper Rohit Sharma lbw and then Shreyas Iyer caught at cover also for nought to silence the home crowd of 32,531.

Hazlewood nearly made it four down when he got Kohli to top-edge a delivery only for Mitchell Marsh to drop a skier. Kohli was on 12 at the time.

Kohli made the most of the reprieve as the star batsman reached his 67th ODI half-century and raised his bat to acknowledge the loud cheers.

Rahul soon reached his fifty in the 28th over as India went to 106-3 and in control.

Kohli finally fell to Hazlewood caught out at mid-wicket and walked off to standing ovation.

Rahul hit the winning six with

Hardik Pandya at the other end.

"I had just taken a shower and was hoping to put my feet up for half an hour after the fielding innings, but I had to come in," said Rahul of his unexpectedly early arrival at the crease.

"Virat said that I should play like Test cricket for a bit."

Australia captain Pat Cummins admitted his team had been "50 runs short".

"Facing the spinners was tough and it was the kind of wicket you had to get yourself in."

Five-time champions Australia won the toss and elected to bat first but faltered.

Jadeja stood out in his 10 overs of left-arm spin. Fellow spinner Kuldeep Yadav and fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah took two wickets each.

Australia lost an early wicket before veteran batsmen David Warner (41) and Steve Smith (46) hit back in a partnership of 69.

Kohli made an early impact with a diving slip catch to send back Marsh, for a six-ball duck, off Bumrah.

The left-handed Warner reached 1,000 World Cup runs, passing Indian batting great Sachin Tendulkar's previous best landmark. Warner needed 19 innings to Tendulkar's 20.

Kuldeep, a left-arm wrist spinner, broke the stand to send back Warner, caught and bowled.

Jadeja bowled Smith to deny the former captain his fifty and then struck twice in his next over including wicketkeeper-batsman Alex Carey for a duck to rattle the opposition batting.

— AFP



India's KL Rahul and Virat Kohli in action. – Reuters

Williamson to miss second game

HYDERABAD: New Zealand captain Kane Williamson will miss Monday's World Cup clash against the Netherlands but is expected to return to the team later in the week, said coach Gary Stead on Sunday.

Williamson is still recovering after six months out with a knee injury although he did feature in the World Cup warm-up series last week.

He sat out New Zealand's nine-wicket rout of champions England in the tournament opener on Thursday and will watch from the sidelines again in Hyderabad on Monday.

However, Stead said Williamson is expected to play in the third game of the tournament against Bangladesh in Chennai on Friday.

"He is progressing really well but his fielding needs to be higher and needs trust in his body," said Stead.



Kane Williamson during Pakistan and NW match ahead of World Cup. – AFP

"We're confident he will be ready for the third game to start his tournament."

Williamson is the current squad's top scorer in ODIs with more than 6,500 runs and 13 centuries.

Stead said veteran fast bowler Tim Southee, who also missed the victory over England, is available for selection after recovering from a dislocated thumb.

Meanwhile, New Zealand all-rounder Glenn Phillips on Sunday stressed that the Black Caps must keep their feet on the ground after the convincing win over England.

Runners-up in the last two World Cups, New Zealand upstaged England in Ahmedabad, riding on brilliant centuries from Devon Conway and Rachin Ravindra.

— AFP

Pakistan coach Arthur has inside knowledge of 'dangerous' Sri Lanka

HYDERABAD: Pakistan coach Mickey Arthur admits he knows Sri Lanka's "strengths and weaknesses" inside out having spent two years at the helm of his Asian rivals.

Former champions Pakistan and Sri Lanka clash at the World Cup in Hyderabad on Tuesday, allowing Arthur the opportunity to renew his acquaintance with players he helped develop as coach between December 2019 to November 2021.

"Yeah, I know their strengths and weaknesses so we will have plans put in place for all of them," Arthur told AFP.

"They are a dangerous side so we will have to be at our best to beat them."

Pakistan defeated the Netherlands in a nervy performance by 81 runs in Hyderabad on Friday to open



Mickey Arthur speaks during a press conference – AFP

their World Cup campaign.

They overcame a top order failure, recovering from 38-3 before posting a challenging 286 with half centuries from Saud Shakeel and Mohammad Rizwan.

They then bowled out the Netherlands for 205 in 41 overs.

"I enjoyed the first win even though it wasn't a great performance," admitted Arthur.

"But we did enough to win and when the game was on the line we had players standing up."

— AFP



Uniformed personnel salute as the Chinese national flag is lowered during the closing ceremony. – AFP



Japan's governor of Aichi prefecture Ohmura Hideaki (L) and Japan deputy mayor of Nagoya Nakata Hideo (R) take part in the handover of the torch during the closing ceremony. – AFP



Gold medallists China's Chen Qingchen and Jia Yifan pose with silver medallists South Korea's Baek Hana and Lee Sohee and bronze medallists Japan's Yuki Fukushima and Sayaka Hirota and South Korea's Kim Soyeong and Kong Heeyong. – Reuters

Record-breaking China brings curtain down on Asian Games

HANGZHOU: Hosts China racked up a record 201 gold medals before the curtain came down on two weeks of tears and triumphs at the Asian Games in Hangzhou on Sunday. The 19th and biggest Asiad concluded at the 80,000-capacity Olympic stadium with China handing over to Japan for 2026 at a celebratory closing ceremony.

Dancers holding lit-up props fanned out towards the audience in a performance evoking ocean waves while the words "love Asia" were projected on a big screen.

The Games are normally every four years but Nagoya-Aichi has a shorter run-up because Hangzhou was postponed by a year due to China's now-abandoned zero-Covid measures. Speaking at the closing ceremony, a spectator surnamed Xia said that the Games made her feel "very moved and proud". "The Chinese team did great," she said.

Taiwan's Gu Shiau-shuang won the final gold earlier in the day when she successfully defended her title in women's karate.

But it was the hosts who dominated over much of the fortnight, their 201 golds beating the 199 they collected at Guangzhou 2010.

Their exploits across the 40 sports at the Games reinforced China's status as Asia's sporting superpower, topping the medals table at every Asian Games since 1982.

The competition will be much stiffer in less than 10 months at the Paris Olympics.

With about 12,000 athletes, this was the biggest Asian Games in history and had more competitors than the Olympics.



Performers participate in the closing ceremony of the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou. – AFP

The Games were China's chance to show it was business as usual following the Covid policies that largely sealed its borders.

Crowds waving mini Chinese flags regularly filled the 54 venues.

"Technically we have had one of the finest Asian Games ever," said Olympic Council of Asia acting director general Vinod Kumar Tiwari. "We have had 97 Games records, 26 Asian records and 13 world records, so the standard has been very, very high and we are very happy with it."

World records tumbled in shooting and weightlifting, with North Korea celebrating their return to the global sporting arena after four years away by hoovering up six weightlifting golds.

But the hoisting of their flag — in contravention of World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) sanctions — was a running controversy in Hangzhou that was never resolved.

North Korea's athletes, wearing

dazzling white blazers, again waved their flag at the closing ceremony.

The scourge of doping was never far away. Seven athletes failed drugs tests and more will likely be announced in the coming days.

PARIS ON HORIZON

The Olympics on the horizon added extra spice. Nine sports, among them boxing, break dancing and tennis, served as qualifiers for Paris.

Breakdancing was appearing at the Asian Games for the first time, ahead of its Olympic bow, while eSports was a huge hit on its full debut.

Overwhelmingly young spectators packed out the futuristic 4,500-seat eSports arena and tickets were the most highly sought after at the Games. Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok, who was followed by frenzied crowds from the moment he landed, won gold with South Korea in League of Legends — and earned an exemption from military

service back home.

Chinese swimmers Zhang Yufei and Qin Haiyang were named the Games MVPs and it was in the pool where the hosts were especially impressive.

They won 28 swimming golds — Zhang and Qin accounting for 11 of them — to send a warning of what they can do in Paris.

Japan were a distant second in the final medals table with 52 golds, down from 75 at Jakarta in 2018, and South Korea third on 42. India's pinpoint archers and shooters helped propel the country to 107 medals, their best showing ever.

"If you're analysing why we won less medals than last time, China dominated and India did surprisingly well," said Japan's chef de mission Mitsugi Ogata. The small contingent of women in the Afghan team did not win a medal but their mere presence sent a defiant message to their country's ruling Taliban government. — AFP

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Research reveals 30% surge in fish species in Oman



Fishermen unload fish from a boat after they returned with the day's catch at a harbour in Muscat, in this illustration photo.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, OCT 8

In a workshop held on Sunday, Dr Fatima al Kiyumi, Assistant Director of the Directorate-General for Fisheries Research at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources, proudly unveiled the results of an extensive research project focused on fish species in Oman.

The study has identified a remarkable 30 per cent increase in the number of fish species found in Omani waters, elevating the Sultanate of Oman's position as a diverse and thriving hub for marine biodiversity.

The comprehensive research conducted by Dr al Kiyumi and her team has successfully identified a total

of 51 fish species in Oman, surpassing the previous count.

Of these newly discovered species, 11 are entirely new to science, delighting marine biologists and further cementing Oman's reputation as a hotspot for unique and undiscovered aquatic life. This momentous finding has been meticulously documented in a dedicated scientific guide, which serves as a valuable resource for researchers and scientists alike.

Out of the 51 fish species identified, 31 are commercially traded at landing sites and fish markets across the country. This means that the newfound knowledge will have a direct impact on Oman's fishing industry, opening up new opportunities and avenues for economic growth.

TURN TO P15

Oman's gas demand outlook to remain strong through 2043

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 8

Gas demand in the Sultanate of Oman is anticipated to range between 37.7 billion cubic metres (BCM) per annum in a low-case scenario to as high as 54.5 BCM in a high-case scenario through to the year 2043, underscoring natural gas's continued role in sustaining economic growth amid a planned transition to greener energy fuels.

The outlook for gas demand growth in Oman is a key part of a report compiled by UK-based Gas Strategies Group Ltd, an independent leading global gas and LNG commercial advisory firm, which was commissioned by OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) to prepare a market study on the natural gas industry and the gas transportation network in Oman.

OQGN, which owns and operates the country's Natural Gas Transportation Network (NGTN), has just wrapped up a landmark public subscription covering 49 per cent of its share capital.

Summing up the high-level findings of Gas Strategies' market report, OQGN said: "Gas Strategies expects gas demand in Oman to remain stable over the next 20 years, with gas supply for LNG exports being an important foundation source of demand."

Diversification of gas demand across sectors and geographically across the country provide resilience to total gas demand and, accordingly, to the utilisation of the network on a regional basis."

It further added: "Gas Strategies expects that flows



Gas production facility pictured in Oman.

DIVERSIFICATION OF GAS DEMAND ACROSS SECTORS AND GEOGRAPHICALLY ACROSS THE COUNTRY PROVIDE RESILIENCE TO TOTAL GAS DEMAND AND, ACCORDINGLY, TO THE UTILISATION OF THE NETWORK ON A REGIONAL BASIS

through the NGTN will continue at least for the next 20 years, with no meaningful reduction in throughput over that timeframe." In comparison, OQGN – which oversees the roughly 4,000 km long Natural Gas Transportation Network (NGTN) — transported 39.4 BCM of gas in 2022.

These volumes came primarily from six producers – Petroleum Development Oman (53 per cent), BP Oman (39 per cent), Dolphin Energy (5 per cent), Oxy, OQ Exploration & Production, and Ara Petroleum. Consuming these

volumes were a total of around 130 consumers distributed across critical sectors, including power and water, petrochemicals and refining, industries, manufacturing clusters, and others.

Significantly, Gas Strategies singled out the central-case as the most likely of the three scenarios expected to play out over the next two decades through to 2043. In this scenario, continued strong activity in the upstream hydrocarbon sector is expected to support strong GDP growth.

"The economy begins to pivot towards new energy sectors in the 2030s. Increased penetration of renewable power generation and new industrial and petrochemical facilities being built with green feedstocks leads to reduced scope for gas demand growth in the 2030s.

Nevertheless, total gas demand

in 2043 can be expected to be higher than it was in 2022.

Considering multiple factors, including the continued upstream gas production and the low likelihood of accelerated renewable energy investment, Gas Strategies considers this Central Case the most likely scenario," OQGN stated, citing the consultant's findings.

Buoyming hopes for higher gas volumes to come on stream is a raft of ongoing exploration projects.

They include the following Exploration & Production Sharing Agreements signed with (i) Shell and TotalEnergies in September 2022 covering undeveloped gas discoveries in Block 11 in western Oman; (ii) TotalEnergies and PTTEP in February 2022 for Block 12, and (iii) Eni and BP in July 2019 for Block 77 in central Oman.

SAI questions effectiveness of Oman's tourism plan

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, OCT 8

The State Audit Institution (SAI) recently questioned the effectiveness of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism efforts in regards to tourism promotion. In a chapter titled, the "Performance Audit of Tourism Promotion Efficiency and Effectiveness", SAI listed a list of the Ministry's shortcomings.

To begin with, the report noted the difficulty in measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of 12 external representation offices in attracting tourists, which was disproportionate to the funds allocated to those offices.

According to the report, the budget allocated to those offices is valued at RO 5.6 million and

made up for 33 per cent of the total actual expenditure of the tourism sector development and marketing project for the years 2017 to 2021.

As a result, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has agreed to implement clear performance indicators for the tourism representation offices. In addition to collaborating with some of the Sultanate of Oman's embassies to carry out marketing and promotion works.

Furthermore, the report questioned the viability of promotional activities and programmes carried out by the Ministry during the period from 2017-2021. According to SAI, despite spending RO 3.4 million during that period on promotional programmes and activities, the



State Audit Institution headquarters in Muscat.

Ministry has failed to provide any clear evidence concerning the effectiveness of these various promotional activities in promoting the Sultanate of Oman.

As a result, the Ministry has collaborated with the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) to provide tools to measure the effectiveness

of tourism promotion activities and programmes.

Moreover, the report indicated that from the period spanning from 2017 to 2021, the number of visitors to Oman did not exceed 4.7 per cent of the total number of visitors to the GCC States during 2017-2020.

Consequently, a team was formed to improve tourism indicators in collaboration with the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Additionally, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism will consider the use of tools to track visitors at tourist sites, and conduct surveys.

Lastly, the report noted that the Ministry failed to implement some recommendations outlined in The Oman Tourism Strategy regarding the development

of the official website (Oman Experience), "despite its great significance".

These include: the failure to list all the available tourism facilities, hotels, hotel apartments and tourist attractions on the website, the absence of a feature to link the locations in the trip system with various navigation applications, the lack of a calendar for events and activities that might attract tourists and the lack of a direct booking feature on the website.

As a result, the website is currently being updated, and a new website will be launched with the above recommendation as part of the digital transformation project according to the report. Additionally, a public tender will be floated for the preparation of the events and activities calendar.

NBO Muzn launches cashback campaign

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Islamic Banking window, Muzn, is excited to announce the Muzn Cashback Campaign, an exciting opportunity for salaried employees across Oman to enjoy exclusive rewards and Sharia compliant products.

Under this campaign, customers can enjoy a 10 % cashback on their new salary credits, with cashback limit up to RO 500 .

It is a simple and lucrative way to make the most of your earnings.

As a new employee, you can easily transfer your salary to Muzn Islamic accounts to begin benefiting from this exclusive offer right away.

Salima al Marzouqi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at National Bank of Oman Muzn Islamic Banking, expressed her enthusiasm for the campaign, stating, "We are thrilled to introduce the Muzn Cashback Campaign, a testament to our dedication to rewarding our customers for choosing Muzn Islamic accounts as their trusted banking solution.

This campaign is an extension of our commitment to delivering innovative financial solutions and exceptional value-added services, empowering our customers to make the most of the unparalleled and pioneering products and



services."

NBO Muzn has been working diligently to expand its retail banking offerings, providing tailored financial solutions with a steadfast devotion to the highest standards of Sharia compliance at its core.

Under the umbrella of Muzn, customers can explore a diverse retail portfolio, complemented by best-in-class service across various branches across the country.

Muzn Islamic accounts are thoughtfully designed to adhere to Islamic principles, ensuring that customers' financial decisions align with their ethical beliefs.

As trailblazers in transforming the digital banking landscape, customers can easily bank digitally using the NBO Muzn App as well for online banking.

Exhibition on fire, safety and security starts today

MUSCAT: The Exhibition on Fire, Safety and Security (OFSEC), will be inaugurated today (October 9) by Major General Abdullah bin Ali bin Hamad al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police & Customs for Operations, Royal Oman Police. The exhibition is from October 9 to 10, 2023, from 9am – 6pm at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Muscat.

OFSEC in its 7th Edition will bring together over 90+ exhibitors from over 20 countries who will showcase their avant-garde solutions, latest technologies, cutting edge innovations, cost-effective products and services to meet the requirements of governments, businesses, industrial and commercial entities, aviation, construction, infrastructure, transportation, manufacturing, oil and gas and utilities sectors.

OFSEC is designed to meet the needs of the local, regional and international markets by linking practitioners, suppliers, distributors and manufacturers from the fire, safety and security industry, with key decision makers from the government and private sectors making it a definitive networking platform, where new



projects and partnerships are initiated and visionary objectives are implemented.

This event also aims to create synergy and strengthen the collaboration between the authorities and the industries.

The event will lay foundation and be the gateway to the current and future market trends in the fire, safety and security sectors, for the industry professionals to communicate, share ideas, identify solutions, to operate effectively and efficiently and stay abreast with the latest global trends. OFSEC will confluence and strengthen local and international business engagement and encourage investment.

The OFSEC Summit will feature an expansive line-up of 30+ stellar speakers, case

studies, panel discussions, unique presentations providing access to a wealth of industry leading knowledge, sharing best practices and experiences, spotlighting trends, information exchange, insights and outlooks with actionable takeaways.

The Summit is the definitive meeting place facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue with power packed networking opportunities among C-Level executives, leading industry experts, decision makers, policy makers and government officials from across the value chain to foster collaboration, discuss current challenges, business opportunities, develop market strategies, share knowledge and identify solutions aimed at shaping the future of fire, safety and security.



Vodafone Oman now offers iPhone 15 and AirPods Pro

MUSCAT: Vodafone Oman is offering iPhone 15 and iPhone 15 Plus with a gorgeous new design and a powerful 48MP Main camera with a new 2x Telephoto option, A16 Bionic chip, and USB-C; iPhone 15 Pro and iPhone 15 Pro Max, Apple's lightest Pro models ever, with a strong and lightweight titanium design, powerful camera upgrades including a more advanced 48MP Main camera system, A17 Pro, and USB-C; and AirPods Pro (2nd generation) with USB-C.

The devices are available with Vodafone Oman's extensive range of postpaid BLACK and prepaid RED packages. BLACK offers simple plan choices, great value and transparency across four packages — Explore, Elite, Pioneer and Ultimate — and are the Sultanate of Oman's first postpaid packages to benefit from full digital onboarding, from just RO 12 per month. Customers benefits include extended data validity and the global appeal of being able to connect in 28 countries without extra roaming costs, in addition to unique value-add features such as up to 6GB World Roaming per month and competitive domestic data and minutes.

BLACK Explore includes 25GB of data and 500 minutes (plus 500 bonus minutes) as standard for only RO 12 monthly; BLACK Elite offers 35GB, unlimited minutes, 100 international minutes to 25 countries and 1GB World Roaming for RO 16 monthly; BLACK Pioneer gives customers 80GB, unlimited minutes, 200 international minutes and 4GB World Roaming for RO 24 monthly; and BLACK Ultimate features 110GB, unlimited minutes, 500 international minutes and 6GB World Roaming for RO 36 monthly.

For complete pricing and availability details please visit <https://www.vodafone.om>.

Liva CEO awarded 'Insurance CEO of the Year'

MUSCAT: Driving the journey of excellence and setting new benchmarks in the insurance industry, Liva Insurance CEO, Hanaa al Hinai was recently honoured with the title 'Insurance CEO of the Year' at Alam al Iktisaad Awards 2023. This prestigious accolade reflects the company's continuous efforts to redefine insurance solutions and achieve a paradigm shift in the insurance industry in the Sultanate of Oman.

Held under the auspice of HH Sayyid Malik bin Shihab al Said, in the presence of business leaders, dignitaries, and key decision-makers from a cross-section of the industry, the Alam al Iktisaad Awards felicitated the best-performing Omani companies who drive a catalyst change in the nation's economy and distinguished achievements.

On this occasion, Hanaa al Hinai, CEO of Liva Insurance said, "We are delighted to have been conferred with



Hanaa al Hinai, CEO of Liva Insurance, receiving the award.

this prestigious accolade. It is a testament to the entire team's effort and dedication to successfully achieving the company's strategic goals.

We focus on our strategic plan on developing competencies, enhancing innovation, and an insightful future outlook, which has paved the way for us to maintain an outstanding record of growth and excellence. At Liva, we strongly believe that our clients are the key growth drive for the company, and we are relentlessly working on catering to the needs and

aspirations of our client base by offering innovative insurance services and products.

With the vision of creating a fully integrated multi-line insurance powerhouse in the region, we are steadfast to spearhead the development of the insurance industry of the nation." Hanaa's exceptional leadership and unwavering dedication inspired her team to successfully complete the integration of the two largest insurers propelling Liva to become a prominent force in the insurance sector.

ahlibank opens new Ibri branch

MUSCAT: In a strategic decision to enhance accessibility, ahlibank, has recently relocated its Ibri branch. A grand opening event was held in celebration and was graced by the presence of Najeeb bin Ali al Rowas, Governor of Al Dhahirah.

This new location has been carefully chosen to cater to the bank's growing customer base in the vicinity, and aligns with its objective of bringing innovative banking solutions to the Sultanate of Oman.

The event was held at the new location in Ibri. Alongside the Governor of Al Dhahirah, several managers and heads of ahlibank attended the opening celebration.

This is the 24th ahlibank branch in Oman and stands as a testament to the bank's unwavering commitment to provide the best for its clientele by being closer to them both physically, and digitally.

Aside from the host of products and services offered by the bank, a well-experienced

and skilled team at the branch will provide services for SMEs through 'Amaali', the Value Plus Account that brings a host of financial solutions to support new or growing businesses in the vicinity.

Offering several exclusive privileges and benefits to the bank's premium customers, the new ahlibank Ibri branch will also provide an advanced and personal banking experience that goes beyond meeting customer's expectations, through its Al Nukhba account.

Muneer al Balushi, AGM - Head of Retail Distribution at ahlibank, said, "Upon relocating the branch, we at ahlibank are driven by our dedication to staying attuned to our customers' evolving needs and preferences.

Our new branch in Ibri reflects not only our ambition for growth but also our mission to create an environment where customers can easily access a comprehensive range of banking products and services."

Lincoln Corsair SUV now with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Owning a Lincoln Corsair SUV and benefit with service 5 years / 100,000 kms and 1 year registration. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Lincoln showroom Al Wattayah.)

The two-row Lincoln Corsair SUV is impressive and packed with refined power and a wealth of purposeful technologies.

Making every drive effortless and smooth is a standard 2.0 L turbocharged four-cylinder that is paired to an 8-speed automatic transmission with SelectShift capability for agile performance.

The Corsair raises the bar on driving excitement with its



Lincoln Co-Pilot360 driver-assist features.

The Corsair enhances ownership experiences with its

Lincoln experience that includes features like Lincoln embrace with illuminated door handle pickets, Lincoln approach detection system, Lincoln dynamic signature lightning, LED daytime running lamps, tail lamps and premium ambient lighting.

Offering some of the finest luxury experiences on the road is the Corsair's interior design which lends a visual calmness to the space, which is crafted with supple, hand-selected materials.

Breaking up the elements, particularly the cantilevered console, emphasises volume and enhances practicality with

additional front-row storage.

Music lovers can revel in comfort with the specially tuned 10-speaker Lincoln premium audio system which is designed to ensure audio quality and accuracy for each cabin size and acoustics.

Multiple power outlets are located throughout. Corsair is equipped with dual-zone climate control, intelligent access with push button start, instrument cluster with 12.3" colour display and more.

Additional technologies are seamlessly integrated through SYNC 4 with enhanced voice communications and

entertainment system and 13.2" LCD capacitive touchscreen in centre stack with swipe capability and navigation system.

The Lincoln Corsair is equipped with Lincoln Co-pilot 360 2.1 Vision with has features like auto high beam headlamps, blind spot detection with cross traffic alert and trailer coverage, distance indication alert, lane keeping system, evasive steering assist, rear cross traffic braking, 360-degree camera with front and rear camera washer, intelligent adaptive cruise control 2.0, pre-collision assist with automatic emergency braking and more.



Transport ministry unveils executive programme for Oman Logistics Centre

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology unveiled the executive programme for Oman Logistics Centre 2023-2025. The programme aims to increase the value of investments and economic diversification in the transportation and logistics sector.

The executive programme for the transport and logistics sector targets several areas, including the private sector, investments, international cooperation, economic diversification, financial sustainability, the labour market and employment, as well as governance of the state's administrative apparatus, resources and projects.

It also aims to increase the value of investments in the transportation and logistics sector to RO 2.5 billion by 2025.

Further, the programme focuses on economic diversification and financial sustainability to raise the growth of government revenues from the transport and logistics sector. It also targets increasing returns in the land transport sector to RO 18 million in 2025, and raise the percentage of employment opportunities in sectors related to transport, logistics, communications and information technology from 19% in 2023 to 21% in 2025.

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport,



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali

Communications and Information Technology said that the transport and logistics sector is witnessing growth at an accelerated pace, as its contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the Sultanate of Oman during 2022 reached approximately RO 2 billion.

Al Maawali added that the Ministry seeks to make the logistics sector the second largest contributor to the Omani economy by 2040.

For his part, Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, said that the Sultanate of Oman ranks fifth in the Arab world and regionally and 43rd internationally in the Logistics Performance Index (LPI) issued by the World Bank in 2022.

He pointed out that the percentage of land transport activities' contribution to the total contribution of the logistics sector to the GDP in 2022 amounted to 60%. Contribution of other activities stood as follows: water



Special guests and participants during the unveiling of the Oman Logistics Centre.



A cooperation agreement was signed with Oman Energy Association (Opal).

transport activities 6.7%, air transport activities 3.2%, while the contribution of warehousing and support activities for transport and mail reached about 30%.

Al Shamakhi said that the growth of exports in the logistics sector through Omani ports in 2022 reached 21%, while the growth of imports reached about 18% and re-exports grew by 3%.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced during the ceremony the launch of the 'Best Practices in



A cooperation agreement was signed with Khazaen Economic City.

the Logistics Sector Award' which is to be awarded for the most innovative projects in logistical activities over the past 12 months.

The award aims to raise the efficiency of the sector, enhance the competitiveness of companies, and enhance the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the logistics sector. Moreover, the award covers the activities of warehouses, shipping agents, air transport, sea transport, land transport, customs brokers, ports and free zones, ground handling and cargo agents.

It also includes the categories of Omanisation, health and safety, environment, best operational technical practices, as well as Omani products and services.

Furthermore, Oman Logistics Centre was established by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology in 2015. It is concerned with following up and implementing the Sultanate of Oman's logistics strategy 2040 and working on making logistics services as one of the main components of the economy.

The strategy, which was launched in 2015, aims to place Oman in the classification of global logistics and industrial indicators.

It also targets increasing the contribution of the logistics sector to the growth of the gross domestic product, expanding job opportunities in the logistics sector, in addition to raising the share of the Omani market globally in the field of logistics services.

The national logistics strategy is

based on facilitating trade through a qualitative shift in the transaction processing systems that govern the movement, inspection and financing of the freight market across borders, ports, airports and the entire supply chain.

On the sidelines of the ceremony, a cooperation agreement was signed between Oman National Transport Company (Mwasalat), one of the Asyad Group's companies, and Oman Energy Association (Opal), related to the field of vehicles and logistical transport.

The agreement aims to enhance joint efforts to support the establishment of a framework for qualification and training and raise the efficiency of workers in companies specialised in the fields of energy, minerals and related sectors.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology also signed an agreement to establish Khazaen Logistics Complex with Khazaen City to clear transactions and facilitate procedures within Khazaen Economic City.

Further, Khazaen Dry Port Company signed an agreement with another company to provide one-stop services at Khazaen Dry Port. As part of the ceremony, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) launched two-week workshops to attract investments in transport and logistics. — ONA

Oxy Oman fetes 130 graduate engineers and geoscientists



Graduates pose for a photo after the ceremony.

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, OCT 8

Oxy Oman, a key player in the region's energy sector, celebrated on Sunday, October 8, 2023, the successful graduation of 130 engineers and geoscientists who had recently completed its intensive Engineering and Geoscientists Fresh Graduates Development Programme.

This three-year initiative is designed to equip fresh technical graduates with the skills and knowledge necessary to excel in their careers within Oxy Oman's operations. The ceremony was held at the Grand

Hyatt Muscat under the auspices of Mohsin bin Hamad bin Saif al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

The event witnessed the participation of key executives, including Steven Lauver, President and General Manager at Oxy Oman. At the heart of this achievement is Oxy Oman's strategic Human Resources vision, designed for enduring recruitment and the nurturing of its human capital.

Over 25 specialists from various company departments actively contributed to this programme's development,

supported by a dedicated team of 80 employees who executed the programme under the auspices of the Learning and Development Department.

Steven Lauver, President and General Manager of Oxy Oman emphasised the company's commitment to bolstering Omani job seekers throughout their operational activities.

The overarching objective is to empower these individuals with the skills required to emerge as future leaders in their chosen fields. This vision aligns seamlessly with the Omani government's broader mission of providing diverse employment

opportunities and comprehensive training for its youth, thereby fostering meaningful employment prospects, he said.

Lauver also expressed a sense of pride in the company's robust hiring strategy, which not only resulted in over 3,600 direct employment opportunities but also achieved an impressive 95 per cent Omanisation of Oxy Oman's workforce.

This graduation event is emblematic of Oxy Oman's strategy to support initiatives that contribute to economic growth, sustainable development, and positive impacts within neighbouring communities.

FROM PAGE 13

Fishermen and traders can leverage this information to diversify their catch and explore previously untapped markets. The research findings were unveiled at a workshop hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, on Sunday, titled 'the National Colloquium of Dish Fisheries and Wealth in Oman'.

The event, held under the auspices of Eng Yaqoub bin Khalifa bin Khamis al Busaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries, aimed to spotlight Oman's diverse fish and marine life, emphasising the significance of sustainable fish stocks for dish fish.

Dr Al Kiyumi said, "The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources, through the Directorate-General for Fisheries Research, is dedicated to studying and preserving marine biodiversity, including cartilaginous fish like sharks and rays.

These species play a vital role in Oman's fisheries, with over 97% consumed locally, contributing significantly to food security.

However, due to their dwindling global population, some species face a devastating decline, becoming one of the world's most endangered vertebrates and prone to accidental hunting."

The induction materials presented during the workshop shed light on the ecological significance of the newfound fish species and emphasised the need for sustainable fishing practices to preserve Oman's marine ecosystem.

This scientific knowledge will enrich the understanding of fish biodiversity in Oman and contribute to the development of effective conservation strategies.

Dr Al Kiyumi noted the significance of the research, culminating in a national seminar dedicated to showcasing Omani dish fish and their remarkable biodiversity. The workshop delved into themes such as assessing the risk of local and global extinction, classifying dish fish in local markets, and practical applications for data collectors and fish controllers at markets and landing sites. This comprehensive initiative is a testament to Oman's commitment to preserving its rich marine heritage.



Participants are seen during the workshop hosted by Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Financial literacy: The key to business stability

In the ever-changing world of business, many factors contribute to a company's success. However, among these multifarious elements, financial literacy stands tall as a cornerstone. With globalisation, technological advancements, and evolving market dynamics, understanding the nuances of finance becomes indispensable for any entrepreneur aspiring for lasting success.

Understanding financial literacy

Before diving deep, let's demystify what financial literacy truly entails. At its core, financial literacy is the ability to understand and effectively use various financial skills, including personal financial management, budgeting, and investing. It's more than just being able to balance a checkbook; it's about understanding the long-term implications of financial decisions for a business.

Why financial literacy is



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The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant.

crucial for business stability

- 1. Risk management:** One of the prime benefits of being financially literate is understanding the various risks associated with business. Whether it's credit risk, operational risk, or market risk, understanding these can help entrepreneurs make informed decisions.
- 2. Effective resource allocation:** With financial literacy, businesses can allocate their resources more efficiently, ensuring every penny spent contributes to the bottom line.
- 3. Fostering trust with stakeholders:** Investors, creditors, and even employees have more confidence in leaders who demonstrate a sound understanding of financial principles. This trust translates to easier access to credit, better investment terms, and a motivated workforce.
- 4. Informed decision making:** Entrepreneurs often face complex decisions — from

pricing strategies to investment opportunities. Financial literacy offers the tools to evaluate these opportunities objectively, considering both short-term gains and long-term sustainability.

- 5. Future preparedness:** Businesses, especially startups, often operate in volatile environments. Financially literate entrepreneurs can better forecast and prepare for financial downturns, ensuring their venture remains stable in uncertain times.

Building financial literacy

A continuous endeavour Building financial acumen is not a one-time task. It's a continuous journey that evolves as the business landscape changes. Here are some steps to enhance financial literacy:

- 1. Professional training:** Numerous online courses and workshops specifically cater to financial literacy for entrepreneurs. Investing time in these can yield significant

dividends.

- 2. Hire expertise:** While it's crucial for leaders to have a fundamental understanding, they need not be experts. Employing or consulting with financial experts can bring in-depth insights into the business.
- 3. Stay updated:** The financial world is dynamic. Regulatory changes, market fluctuations, and global events can impact business finance. Subscribing to financial news sources, attending relevant webinars, and networking with financial professionals can help entrepreneurs stay abreast of changes.
- 4. Practical application:** Theory and practice can sometimes diverge. Implementing what one learns, reviewing the outcomes, and iterating is the best way to truly internalise financial concepts.

A glimpse into the future

As businesses evolve, the demands on an entrepreneur shift. With a solid foundation in

financial literacy, they're better equipped to handle these changes, ensuring their business doesn't just survive but thrives. And while understanding finance is pivotal, the way a business models itself is equally critical.

Coming up

How does a business ensure it's not just surviving, but scaling? What makes a business model robust enough to handle rapid growth and expansion? As we delve into the intricacies of finance, it's imperative to understand the structure on which a business is built.

Stay tuned for our next piece, "Exploring Business Models for Scalability." Discover the foundations and strategies that allow businesses to expand effortlessly while maintaining their core values and operational integrity.

Prepare to dive deep into structures that have supported some of the world's most successful businesses in their scaling journey.

How finance became the problem

Finance used to be a means to an end, not an end in itself. From food and housing to family vacations, everything in our daily lives must be paid for one way or another. If we don't have cash on hand, we turn to a lender for a credit line. Companies do the same. They routinely finance their operations by borrowing or issuing equity stakes to investors, who will part with their money in the expectation of future returns. By bringing these counterparties together, capital markets play a crucial role in the economy. So far so good.

But finance is no longer just an intermediary that channels money from savers to borrowers. No longer are its functions confined to putting money in the hands of people who will pledge to pay back the principal, plus interest, in the future. On the contrary, finance is now in the driver's seat, setting the agenda for others, including governments.

There are two big problems with this: finance is both dumb and dangerous. It is dumb because it can only read numbers, unable to understand, much less assess, difficult social problems or complex business or engineering strategies.

And it is dangerous because the people at the helm of financial institutions think they are smarter than they are, which leads them to assume that they should steer the ship.

If you are looking only at price tags, ruling the world seems easy. Everything becomes comparable, and you need only buy low and sell high to make a profit.

Unless you are one of the few moral investors who wants to feel good about where you direct your money, the nature of what you are buying or selling matters little. The price mechanism dispenses with the need to understand an asset's real-world qualities, negative attributes, or possible side effects.

In fact, the less investors know or care about such matters, the more liquid the market. Hence, assets that have been around



KATHARINA PISTOR

The writer, a Professor of Comparative Law at Columbia Law School, is the author of *The Code of Capital: How the Law Creates Wealth and Inequality* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

OVER TIME, FINANCE HAS EVOLVED FROM PLAYING A CRUCIAL BUT MERELY INTERMEDIARY ROLE IN THE ECONOMY, TO BECOMING THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND MOST DECISION-MAKING, EVEN BY GOVERNMENTS. FINANCIALISATION HAS BECOME SO DEEPLY ROOTED THAT WE SEEM TO HAVE UNLEARNED POLITICS.



A money exchange trader holds US dollar banknotes at his shop in Beirut, Lebanon. — Reuters

for a long time — such as shares of oil and gas companies — are more attractive than newer ones. The prices of assets that lack an established record are less reliable, regardless of the benefits they might offer. Finance thus dispenses with the need for debate. If everybody can see what the price is, there is nothing left to discuss. If you believe an asset is overpriced, you can short it. Markets do not need political deliberation; they get things done here and now by allocating and reallocating resources to the highest bidder.

But this tendency to replace problem-solving with pricing is not limited to market players. Many governments — either voluntarily or involuntarily — have embraced the same approach, even if only to comply with conditions demanded by their creditors.

As a result, in the United States, the Congressional Budget Office must price the costs and benefits of legislation, and courts have occasionally struck down agency actions that did not include such an analysis. For example, the designation of the insurance company MetLife as a systemically important financial

institution was successfully challenged on these grounds.

Yet reducing everything to a number comes at a cost, too. It requires us to pretend that price differentials between goods and services are the only thing that matters, even though we all know better. It leads us to lump together factories and commodities with nature, health, happiness, the climate, and life itself. And it pushes us simply to ignore issues that cannot be priced, such as matters of justice.

We can thank this reductive view of the world for "solutions" such as the use of securitisation to support homeownership, a private-pensions system to develop or deepen financial markets, and green assets to address climate change. Create an asset with a price tag, and investors will flock to it, especially when they can rely on implicit government guarantees against possible losses (as is often the case).

But consider the results. We got a mortgage market that fostered a boom in construction and house prices, but failed to solve the housing crisis; a pension system that constantly needs safe assets to meet future

obligations, even if that means continuing to invest in oil and gas; and decades of delays in changing how energy is sourced, produced, and disseminated, because green assets simply cannot do those things.

Having placed our faith in the "magic of the market," we got a bloated, fragile financial system that is in constant need of stewardship by central banks, lest it implodes and take the economy with it.

None of this makes much sense. After all, prices are poor guides to the future, which is inherently unknown and unknowable, all the more so when there is strong evidence that it will deviate substantially from the past.

In the 1930s, John Maynard Keynes quibbled that it was impossible to know if and when another world war would break out, or what the inflation rate would be in the 1960s.

In 2023, we do not know just how rapidly climate change will accelerate, where the next wildfires will break out, or which parts of the world will experience devastating droughts, flooding, and so forth.

Because these scenarios

are uncertain, there is no way that markets can price them accurately. Still, unless we ignore the scientific evidence, we do know one thing for sure:

More climate-related devastation is coming, and we cannot fathom the additional social and political effects it might bring.

Worse, because finance is in the driver's seat, we have come to accept that the most obvious solution — reducing emissions immediately — is too "costly." That is why more and more businesses and governments are now reneging on commitments to reduce emissions, diluting previously stated goals, or delaying policies for implementing them.

Financialisation has become so deeply rooted that we seem to have unlearned politics. By blindly relying on price tags, we have deprived ourselves of the skills for building consensus and developing effective strategies that avoid imposing the greatest costs on people whose lives are not "priced in." No one benefits more from this calamity than finance. But those returns cannot last indefinitely.

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MUSIC

Musicians and dancers perform during the 15th Fandango Fronterizo, alongside the US-Mexico border fence in Playas de Tijuana, Baja California state, Mexico. — AFP



CULTURE

Performers take part in the closing ceremony of Asian Games at the Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre Stadium in Hangzhou in China's eastern Zhejiang province. — AFP



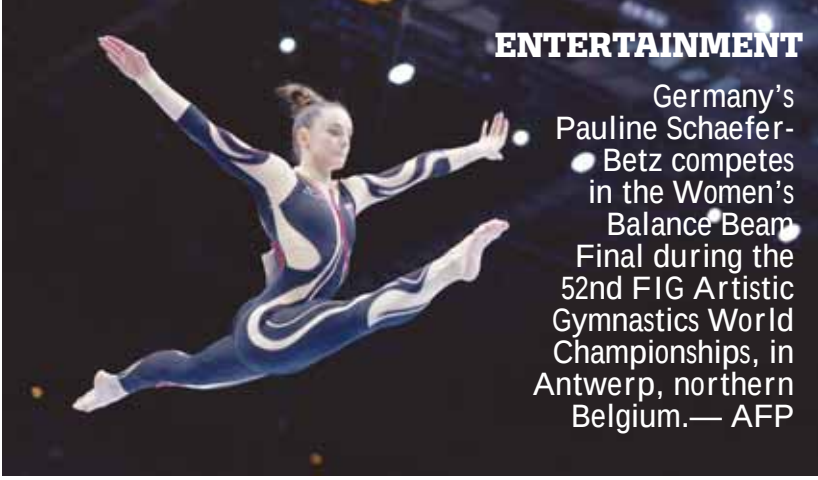
FASHION

Hong Kong actor Chow Yun Fat and his wife Jasmine Tan arrive on the red carpet for the 28th Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) at the Busan Cinema Center in Busan. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

This aerial photo shows a woman taking a selfie as she visits a lantern show during national holidays in Guangzhou, in China's southern Guangdong province. — AFP



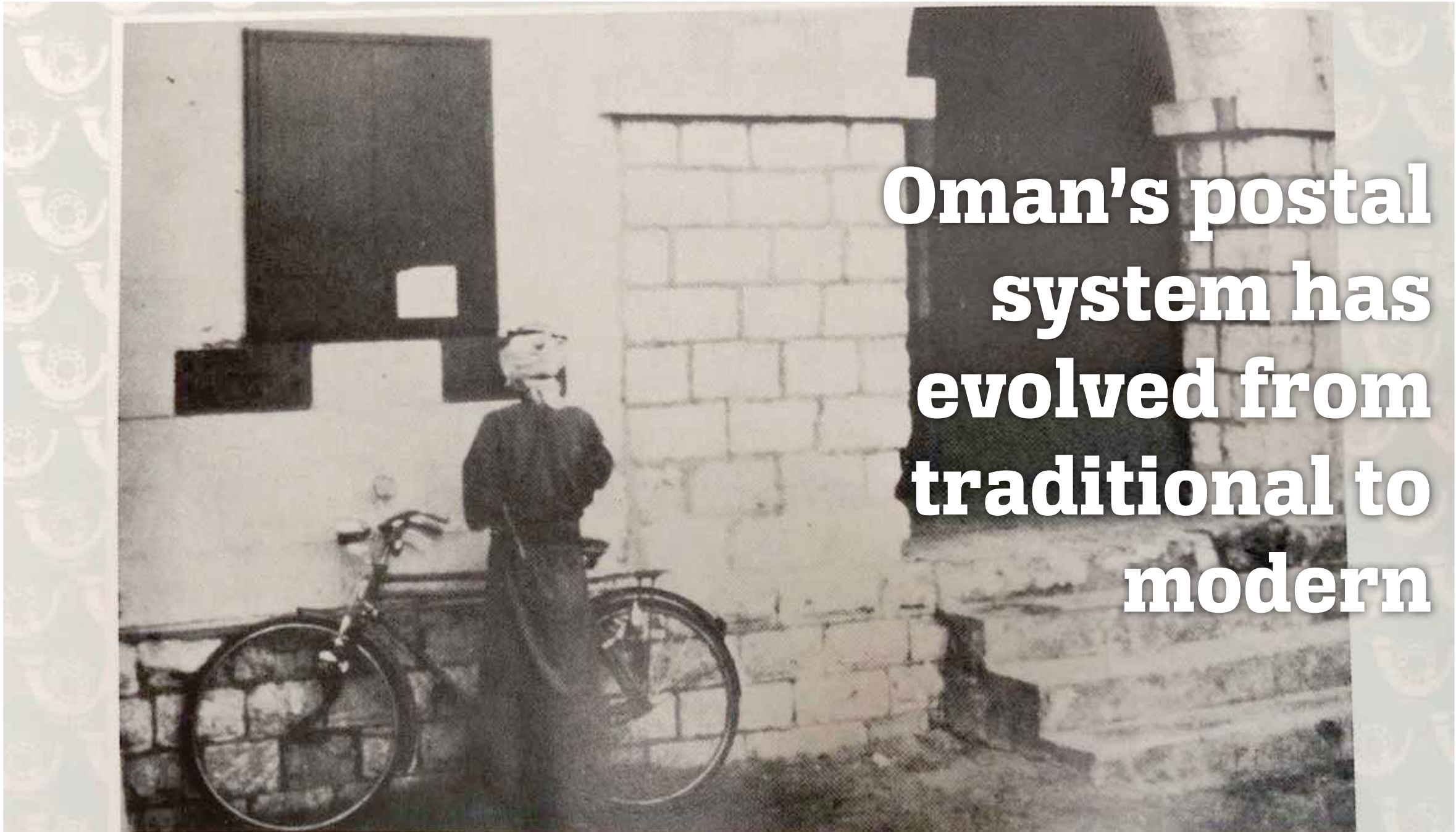
ENTERTAINMENT

Germany's Pauline Schaefer-Betz competes in the Women's Balance Beam Final during the 52nd FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Championships, in Antwerp, northern Belgium.— AFP

art & life

MONDAY | OCTOBER 9, 2023 | RABEE ALAWWAL 23, 1445 AH

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Oman's postal system has evolved from traditional to modern

MUSCAT POST OFFICE 1965

BALQEES AORAIMI

In the historical context of Oman's mail system, transporting mail before the establishment of post offices was quite primitive. 'The History of Mail in Oman 1856-1985' is a book that depicts Oman's postal system. During the Portuguese presence, the letters were handwritten on paper, folded four times, sealed with wax, and imprinted with the royal seal. These sealed messages were then entrusted to specialised messengers who undertook the arduous task of delivering them on foot. Their journey involved crossing the Mediterranean Sea, often relying on small boats and favourable winds. This perilous expedition would take a full year for the messenger to reach the intended recipient, whether in Hormuz or Muscat, and an additional year to return with a response. With the discovery of the sea route to India, the journey

from Portugal to India, Hormuz, and Muscat became somewhat more manageable. Letter carriers could now use anchorages on their voyages, reducing the travel time to six months. Additionally, some correspondents chose to transmit private messages orally to prevent theft during transit. The evolution of Oman's postal system can be divided into four key stages. The first was the Indian supervision stage (pre-1864): The first postal service in Oman operated under the supervision of the Indian government, with services managed from the Bombay area. During this period, Indian stamps featuring British kings were used. The second state was 'Pakistani supervision' following India's independence from Britain and the subsequent creation of Pakistan. Then Pakistan took over the supervision of Oman's mail services.

The third stage was 'British supervision' (April 1, 1948 - April 29, 1966). The British administration assumed responsibility for supervising postal services in Oman and across all Arab Gulf countries during this period. The fourth stage was 'Postal independence from foreign supervision' (April 30, 1966). During this stage, Oman gained control of its postal services on April 30, 1966. From this date, Omani citizens managed the postal service, and the first regular Omani stamps were issued, featuring depictions of the port of Muscat, prominent castles, and the state emblem. This marked the era of "Muscat and Oman" stamps. On August 9, 1970, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos announced the change of the country's name from "Muscat and Oman" to the "Sultanate of Oman." On January 16, 1971, the first collection of stamps bearing this new name was



introduced. Today, Oman Post boasts 86 branches with over 550 employees and offers approximately 20 different services, including international transactions with more than 100 countries. The country has embraced digitisation and advanced technologies, such as the innovative logistics services platform, to enhance the efficiency and quality of its postal services, aligning with the changing demands of the modern world.





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S. Korea's film-making diaspora: telling their 'own stories'



The rise of South Korean diasporic cinema has allowed the artists involved to feel less alone, one film-maker told Busan International Film Festival attendees on Friday.

Six films from the diaspora are unspooling as part of a special sidebar this year in the South Korean port city, including Isaac Chung's Oscar-winning "Minari" and Celine Song's Sundance favourite "Past Lives". Since "Parasite" became the first non-English-language film to win a Best Picture Oscar, films made by the Korean diaspora have experienced a remarkable surge, with film-makers delving into culture-spanning narratives that encompass their varied experiences.

"(The) main thing it's



done, at least for myself, is to know that as I tell my own stories, people are finding common ground to relate with one another," Justin Chon, who directed 2021 adoption drama "Blue Bayou", told reporters.

He has since directed four episodes of the successful Apple TV+ series "Pachinko", the story of an ethnic Korean family living in Japan, based on the novel by Min Jin Lee. When "other immigrants and minorities in the United States are telling their stories, the only thing it does is signal to me that I really wasn't alone this entire time", he said.

"Minari" director Chung said as a second-generation Korean-American, he had always felt "a loss of a place that I don't fully understand that is far away from me".

Korean-American actors Steven Yeun and John Cho were unable to comment on their American projects due to the ongoing Screen Actors Guild strike, but both freely discussed why they believed the work stoppage was important.

"I think the strike is a very righteous act of making sure that we ensure and protect artists and those who are living an actor's life and a writer's life," Yeun said. "And there are many people who don't have safeguards... I sit here with so much privilege to be here and to be able to talk about it."

Cho, who starred in the 2018 thriller "Searching" which is screening at this year's BIFF, said artificial intelligence — a key concern for striking actors — has "put people out of work" in the entertainment industry.

"When I go to see a movie (it's) to see people enacting a human

drama and to have an experience with an audience watching human expression," he said.

"And so behind the scenes, if we start taking out people, the art form is going to suffer."

- COLLABORATION -

The festival's diaspora section features several intriguing collaborations between diasporic and South Korean artists as well as those from other nationalities.

"Burning" (2018), for example, is based on Japanese writer Haruki Murakami's novel, directed by acclaimed South Korean film-maker Lee Chang-dong, and stars Yeun.

Korean-American director Song's "Past Lives" (2023), meanwhile, co-stars South Korean actor Teo Yoo and Korean-American actress Greta Lee.

Yoo, who is fluent in English, on Thursday candidly expressed the challenges he faced in trying to present himself as an appealing love interest to the American audience.

In "Past Lives", he plays a South Korean character who speaks English with a heavy accent and less-than-perfect fluency.

Director Chon's latest film "Jamojaya", which features a collaboration with Indonesian rapper Rich Brian and actor Yuyu Unru, had its Asian premiere at BIFF.

"So this is my fifth film, and the first three were centred around Korean Americans," Chon said after a BIFF screening on Friday, when asked about his collaboration with Indonesian artists.

"To really create empathy and understanding for ourselves as a whole, we should start telling each other stories, especially in the whole Asian diaspora."

— AFP

MUSIC

Rapper Drake says taking break from music over health issue

CANADIAN RAPPER

DRAKE said on Friday he is taking a break from music, just hours after dropping his latest album, in order to focus on recurring stomach issues.

"I probably won't make music for a little bit, I'm gonna be honest," he said on his SiriusXM radio show Table For One, adding: "I need to focus on my health first and foremost..."



a new single off the album called "8AM in Charlotte." He also raps on the track "Daylight."

Drake's hiatus has forced the cancellation or postponement of several upcoming concerts in the United States, according to his website and Ticketmaster.

But Friday and Saturday shows scheduled in Toronto, where fans were



I need to get right."

"I've been having the craziest problems for years with my stomach," he explained.

The 36-year-old Grammy Award winner had just released his latest studio album "For All The Dogs." Long-awaited, it features Bad Bunny, J. Cole, SZA, Lil Yachty and a Frank Ocean sample.

His five-year-old son Adonis drew the artwork for the cover and was featured in a music video for

already seen lining up, appeared to still be a go.

Drake mentioned that he would also meet unspecified commitments.

"I got some other things I need to do for some other people that I made promises," he said.

Otherwise, he said, "I'm gonna lock the door in the studio for a little bit," Drake said. "I don't even know what a little bit is. Maybe a year or so, maybe a little longer." — AFP

ART

Pioneering Austrian artist Oppenheimer gets retrospective

DENOUNCED BY A famous rival before being almost forgotten, Max Oppenheimer, a pioneer of expressionism and the avant garde, gets a major retrospective at Vienna's Leopold museum from Friday.

The largest retrospective to date of the Austrian painter features over 170 works and seeks to revive his name and reputation after it almost fell into obliv-



ion.

The museum, said curator Hans-Peter Wipplinger, "is inviting visitors to rediscover a significant yet almost forgotten oeuvre".

The Leopold museum is better known as home to a key collection of Austrian expressionist painter Egon Schiele's work.

Oppenheimer's expressionist and cubist paintings are among those the museum includes in the show, which reflects "about five decades of art history", Wipplinger told AFP.

"He was always on the lookout for new stylistic challenges," he said.

Born in 1885 into a Jewish family in Vienna, Oppenheimer once shared a studio with his friend Egon Schiele

after finishing his studies in Vienna and Prague.

Known for his lively portraits of the contemporary intellectual elite — including Sigmund Freud and writer Stefan Zweig — Oppenheimer was also passionate about music and interested in religious and mythological themes.

While some contemporaries admired the spirited brushwork of Oppenheimer, or "MOPP," he also made enemies.

Austrian artist Oskar Kokoschka waged a virulent campaign against his colleague, accusing him of plagiarism over a poster he had painted to promote one of his exhibitions.

- LOOTED ART -

Oppenheimer was frequently on the move, relocating nine times throughout his tumultuous life, including stays in avant-garde Berlin and Paris.

He emigrated via Switzerland to New York, where he died penniless and alone in 1954.

Many of Oppenheimer's works were either looted or destroyed once the Nazis came into power, but some are still thought to be hidden in private collections. Setting up the large-scale retrospective required meticulous research by the Leopold museum.

One of many items on display at the exhibition is a striking self-portrait, which is being shown in its homeland for the first time in 110 years. The painting once belonged to art collector Oskar Reichel.

After resurfacing in April in an auction catalogue, the self-portrait was returned to Reichel's descendants before the Leopold museum purchased it from them. The exhibition runs until February 25. — AFP

SCIENCE

Scientists untangle mystery about the universe's earliest galaxies

SINCE BEGINNING OPERATIONS last year, the James Webb Space Telescope has provided an astonishing glimpse of the early history of our universe, spotting a collection of galaxies dating to the enigmatic epoch called cosmic dawn.

But the existence of what appear to be massive and mature galaxies during the universe's infancy defied expectations - too big and too soon. That left scientists scrambling for an explanation while questioning the basic tenets of cosmology, the science of the origin and development of the universe. A new study may resolve the mystery without ripping up the textbooks.

The researchers used sophisticated computer simulations to model how the earliest galaxies evolved. These indicated that star formation unfolded differently in these galaxies in the first few hundred million years after the Big Bang event 13.8 billion years ago that initiated the universe than it does in large galaxies like our Milky Way populating the cosmos today.

Star formation in the early galaxies occurred in occasional big bursts, they found, rather than at a steady pace. That is important because scientists typically use a galaxy's brightness to gauge how big it is - the collective mass of its millions or billions of stars.

So, according to the study, these galaxies may have been relatively small, as expected, but might glow just as brightly as genuinely massive galaxies do - giving a deceptive impression of great mass - because of brilliant bursts of star formation.

"Astronomers can securely measure how bright those early galaxies are because photons (particles of light) are directly detectable and countable, whereas it is much more difficult to tell whether those galaxies are really big or massive. They appear



The James Webb Space Telescope and a Quest Every Human Shares - **NYT**

to be big because they are observed to be bright," said Guochao Sun, a postdoctoral fellow in astronomy at Northwestern University in Illinois and lead author of the study published this week in the *Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

Webb, which was launched in 2021 and became operational in 2022, detected about 10 times more very bright galaxies from cosmic dawn than anticipated based on most theoretical models.

"According to the standard model of cosmology, there should not be many very massive galaxies during cosmic dawn because it takes time for galaxies to grow after the Big Bang. Immediately after the Big Bang, the universe was filled with a very hot, nearly uniform plasma - a fireball - and there were no stars or galaxies," Northwestern University astrophysicist and study senior author Claude-

André Faucher-Giguère said.

"In our new paper, we show quantitatively using our simulations that the bursts of star formation produce flashes of light that can explain the very bright galaxies observed by Webb. And the reason this is so significant is that we explain these very bright galaxies without having to break the standard cosmological model," Faucher-Giguère added.

The simulations in the study were conducted as part of the Feedback of Relativistic Environments (FIRE) research project.

The findings centered upon a phenomenon called "bursty star formation."

"In contrast to forming stars at a nearly constant rate, the star formation activity in those early galaxies went on-and-off, on-and-off, with some large fluctuations over time. This, in turn, drives large variations in their brightness

because the light seen by telescopes like JWST was emitted by the young stars formed in those galaxies," Sun said.

The researchers have an idea of why this phenomenon occurs in smaller galaxies. In these, a batch of very large stars may form in a sudden burst, then explode as supernovas after just a few million years due to their great size. They blast gas into space that becomes ingredients for another burst of star formation. But the stronger gravitational effects in larger galaxies prevent these bursts, favoring steady star formation.

Sun expects Webb to continue to challenge our understanding of the universe and provide fresh insight, regardless of whether it meets scientific expectations.

"This is exactly how science is done and progressed," Sun said.

—REUTERS



Uzbekistan's Talgat Sherov competes at men's breaking event during the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou. — AFP

Breakdancing wows Asian Games ahead of Olympic bow

HANGZHOU: WHEN SOUTH KOREAN Kim Hong-yul was a teenager in the late 1990s, hip-hop ruled the airwaves and breakdancing was "the coolest thing in the world", he says.

Now the acrobatic dance style, which originated on the streets of 1970s New York, was at the Asian Games for the first time and will also debut next year at the Olympics.

It is all part of moves to attract a younger audience.

But for some of the older "B-boys" and "B-girls", these may be their last — as well as their first — chances of a medal and broader recognition, with middle age approaching.

In Hangzhou on Friday dancers in baggy T-shirts, tracksuits and baseball caps flipped, jiggled and spun on their heads to a throbbing beat as "breaking", as it is officially called, took centre stage.

A DJ spun tracks and an MC hyped the contestants up. Spectators, who were overwhelmingly young, waved glow sticks and whooped.



Vietnam's Nguyen Thi Hong Tram participates in the women's breaking competition during the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou. — AFP

The 38-year-old Kim, a full-time B-boy and two-time Red Bull BC World Champion, made it through to Saturday's knockout rounds after multiple dance "battles" against opponents.

He picked up breakdancing as a 13-year-old after seeing his friends show off their moves and said he was thrilled to see what he calls their "culture" get recognition from top sporting events.

"It feels really great. I've been literally staying with my culture and this culture keeps growing up, and I've been keeping watching it, so I'm happy for it," Kim said.

He is among a handful of older dancers at a competition dominated by contestants in their teens and 20s. He can feel the clock ticking.

"When I was young it was almost whole day of practice (every day), but now I'm getting old, two or three hours a day is enough," he said.

Breaking's Asian Games debut is even more special for Kim and his rivals because spots for next year's Paris Olympics are up for grabs along with medals.

Japan's 40-year-old Ayumi Fukushima topped the women's qualification round, outperforming opponents half her age and impressing an international panel of judges with her agility and musical sense.

Kim said there was a "lost generation" of breakdancers between those born in the 80s and the youngest contestants on Friday, as the genre ebbed from prominence in popular culture.

"When I started dancing it was the coolest thing in the world, but maybe it's not any more," Kim said.

But a recent boom in commercialised breakdancing competitions and breakdance-themed reality TV shows has inspired a resurgence, especially across Asia.

Kim, who dances under the stage name "Hong 10", said he hoped the discipline's inclusion in the Asian Games would result in "many kids trying this and understanding this and evolving this".

"Maybe five years later, ten years later, I wanna see something I never expected." When asked if breakdancing's recognition by big multi-sports events would compromise its original counterculture spirit, Kim was confident the pros outweighed the cons.

"Just because it becomes a sport, we're not gonna get rid of our previous culture, we're gonna keep this culture... it's gonna be great," he said.

— AFP