

OMAN

SHORTTAKES



INFORMATION
MINISTRY JOINS ISSN
NETWORK

TUNIS: The Ministry of Information on Wednesday joined the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) network during its participation in the ISSN annual meeting held in Tunis.

By joining the ISSN network, the ministry seeks to activate the sector of publishing and enhance Omani cultural identity on the international scene.

The step will also help learn about global experiences in using the ISSN for supporting the marketing and dissemination of periodical publications issued in the Sultanate of Oman.

The ISSN network's meeting dealt with challenges facing publishers in the digital age. It also discussed means of improving business operations, facilitating access to information through the use of ISSN and providing updated data available on new titles. — ONA



ENVIRONMENTAL COMPETITION WINNERS FETED

AL RUSTAQ: The Office of the Governor of Al Batinah South honoured the winners of the home environmental sanitation campaign competition organised by the office with the aim of combating disease vectors and fighting Aedes mosquito. The honouring ceremony was held under the auspices of Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South. — ONA

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Musandam Governorate is ready to kick off the third edition of 'Musandam Winter', which will combine the governorate's stunning landscape and rich heritage with a variety of exciting activities.

The Governor of Musandam recently signed agreements with multiple organisations and companies, officially starting the preparations for this year's festival and positioning Musandam as a top tourist destination.

Officials in Musandam are confident that, with the right partnerships, the festival can become a key driver of economic growth. Additionally, improving public transportation will help elevate Musandam's profile as a tourist destination.

The activities lined up for the third edition include Musandam and Sea Festival, Gulf Boat Race, Musandam Winter Youth Award, Luxury Car Tour and Exhibition, photography exhibition, Musandam Through History and Second Mountain Walk.



UKRAINIAN EMBASSY IN MUSCAT INAUGURATED

MUSCAT: The Ukrainian Embassy in Muscat was inaugurated on Wednesday under the auspices of Andrii Sybiha, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, and in the presence of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister. The embassy's opening comes within the framework of enhancing bilateral relations and expanding joint cooperation in various fields.

In his speech, the Ukrainian minister said that this step comes within the framework of enhancing diplomatic and economic relations between Oman and Ukraine. He also expressed his keenness towards boosting cooperation in different fields, such as commerce, energy and agriculture. The opening ceremony was attended by several officials and ambassadors of Arab and friendly countries. It was also attended by a number of Ukrainians living in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Labour ministry clarifies
on new gratuity rules

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

THE MINISTRY of Labour has clarified how gratuity (end of service) is currently calculated for both Omani workers and expatriates since the issuance of the Social Protection and Labour Laws in 2023.

Since July 31, 2023, a new gratuity system has been in place under Article 61 of the Labour Law. This system will continue until the savings system, as stipulated in the Social Protection Law, comes into effect within a specified timeframe.

For Omani workers who are not covered by the Social Protection Law, upon termination of their employment contract, the employer must pay a post-service gratuity to the worker. This gratuity should not be less than the basic wage for each year of service.

For example, employees who were hired before the new law will have their gratuity calculated at a rate of 15 days' wages for each year of service for the first three years, and one month's wages for each subsequent year.

Starting from July 31, 2023, gratuity is calculated based on one basic salary for each year of service, using the employee's most recent basic salary.

Employers have the option to settle the worker's dues for their period of service before the savings system begins. In this case, the settlement must be calculated using the basic wage on the settlement date.

For expatriates employed at a basic salary of RO 500 before July 31, 2023, the gratuity is calculated at RO 250 for each year of service.

From July 31, 2023, onwards, gratuity is calculated at one full basic salary per year of service (RO 500 for each completed



Starting from July 31, 2023, gratuity is calculated based on one basic salary for each year of service, using the employee's most recent basic salary

year), until the new savings system is implemented.

The savings system will ultimately replace the end-of-service gratuity scheme.

As per the Royal Decree 52/2023 promulgating the Social Protection Law, a decision must be issued by the Board of Directors of the Social Protection Fund to fix the date on which the savings system comes into force. This date will not exceed July 2026. According to Article 136 of the Social Protection Law, the savings system applies

compulsorily to expatriate employees. Article 97 of the executive regulation clarifies the different ways in which expatriate employees will be registered in the savings system, which must not exceed 30 days from their employment.

The executive regulation also allows the fund to register expatriate employees with retroactive effect, but not before the date of entry into force of the savings system, if it finds that they are not registered in the savings system.

Musandam all set to host winter festival in November



Officials in Musandam are confident that, with the right partnerships, the festival can become a key driver of economic growth.

The governorate has been investing in its tourism infrastructure by focusing on community engagement, participation, capacity, expertise, sustainability and impact measurement.

Otaxi is partnering with the festival to provide transportation services. Harith bin Khamis al Maqbali, CEO of Otaxi, explained that they will be logistics and transportation partners, helping to move people around Musandam, from the airport to festival locations, and providing activities like exploring towns in Musandam. He mentioned that they have been considering the tourism sector for a while and see this as a great opportunity to showcase their services.

Otaxi now operates throughout Oman, from Musandam in the north to Dhofar in the south, passing through Al Buraimi, Al Duqm, Nizwa, Suhar, Muscat, and all major cities. They have over 5,000 Omani taxi drivers working across the country.

This partnership is one of many agreements that will contribute to the promotion of Musandam through public-private partnerships.

Oman-born doctor braves bombs, missiles to volunteer in Gaza Strip

BREGJE VAN BAAREN
MUSCAT, OCT 23

A COURAGEOUS

Oman-born obstetrician-gynecologist, Dr Thalia Pachiyannakis, recently joined a team of doctors on a daring mission to aid the humanitarian effort in at the Al Nasser Medical Complex Palestine.

In June 2024, Dr Thalia and her colleague travelled to Khan Yunis, a city in southern Gaza, to help deliver and save newborn babies and support their mothers in horrifying and inhumane conditions.

Dr Thalia was born and raised in Muscat by her Omani mother and Greek-born father. She currently resides with her family in Indiana, US, where she practices medicine at Heart City - Women's Health.

The following is an account of Dr Thalia's personal experience in war-torn Gaza, as narrated to me during and after her stay. It has been edited for length and clarity.

"Well, I have always been interested in humanitarian work while Dr Hina Cheema, a fellow resident, with whom I worked in Michigan, had been to Gaza before. She told me about the atrocities and the needs of the beautiful people she



Gazans display such admirable resilience and faith but also tangible desperation



Dr Thalia Pachiyannakis

met, and I decided to join her on her next trip.

"After what was a long process involving lots of checkpoints and waiting, we entered Palestine through Israel. We were allowed to bring only one suitcase and not anything that was packed or might be perceived as a gift for the local people.

"We drove into Gaza in bulletproof cars. Looking out of the window, I noticed the destruction, poverty and garbage everywhere. Although I have always been aware of what is happening here, it was just a surreal first sight, as if you

are in a movie about a war zone; it is just unbelievable and unacceptable that this is the actual situation that these people are living in.

"Almost every building has been destroyed while we were taken to the UN building. Most humanitarian entities stay in the hospitals where they are assigned, but we were advised to stay in Al Mawasi in a little chalet with civilians while most of them live in tents here.

"There are actually plenty of highly competent and well-educated doctors in Gaza, but the problem is there are not enough

medical supplies, available rooms, or ultrasound machines to perform the work on women properly. None of us have access to basic needs like disposable and sterile gowns, scrubs, or even soap to wash our hands.

"There is no sanitation. If a mom has to undergo an ultrasound in an outpatient unit, the next patient will lie in the same bed. There is no cleaning of machines in between procedures and no napkins or tissues to even wipe the gel off the patients, there are also no clothes, and a severe lack of shoes in Gaza. If an instrument in the OR

falls, then you just have to wash it with a bit of saline and reuse it. The hospital has been short of fuel and they shut off the air conditioning while it is currently forty degrees Celsius. I am sure you can imagine how hard it is to operate in this heat. We are often sweating into open wounds during C-sections.

"Hence, there is pretty much chaos at the maternity ward and the outpatient unit. Many pregnant women do not have access to prenatal care. Imagine: these women usually walk for hours and hours to reach the hospital to come in to check the heartbeat of their babies and to make sure they are still alive inside their wombs, as most, if not all, women are physically ill."

Dr Thalia has gone back to the United States. But she wants to go back to Gaza. "I have changed. I have realised that we live in a cynical world where many people only care about themselves and choose to look away while other people are suffering. I know I am not like that, and I refuse to be like that. I am inspired by other people who want to help humans and dedicate their lives to helping others. I always think of the people I met in Gaza, and one day, I want to go back."

FORUM DISCUSSES ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

MUSCAT: The first edition of Oman Youth Forum, titled "Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Future of the New World", was launched in Muscat on Wednesday.

Organised by Al Roya newspaper, the forum highlighted emerging technological innovations and developments that influence the course of human life by generating new tracks in many fields.

The event was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said. The forum's activities included specialised training workshops



dealing with the following: Developmental uses of artificial intelligence, AI-enhanced news content, virtual production related to AI algorithms and the role of AI in shaping public opinion.



EXPRESSION OF INTEREST Non-Revenue Water (NRW) Performance Based Contract

Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company was established under Royal Decree No. 131/2020 of December 9, 2020 stated that Oman Wastewater Services Company SAOC shall undertake the activities of water and Wastewater in all governorates of the Sultanate, with the exception of the Governorates of Dhofar.

OWWSC (also known by the brand name Nama Water Services (NWS)) wishes to engage the services of a NRW Contractor to undertake the management, reduction and control of Non-Revenue Water (NRW) through a Performance Based Contract. The Successful Bidder will also be required to undertake all activities related to operating and maintaining the water network.

NWS intends to procure the services of a qualified NRW contractor through a three stage process: (i) shortlisting, (ii) data discovery and bid submission and (iii) bid evaluation.

Companies that are interested in being short-listed for the NRW performance based contract and being invited to the discovery stage are requested to contact the NWS tender department for further details of the shortlisting process at tender@owwsc.nama.om

Evidence of successful NRW PBC including references and key personnel will be required to be submitted in the short-listing process. Companies may participate as a consortium/joint venture.

The closing date for submitting an Expression of Interest is 2pm on Sunday 10th November 2024 to tender@owwsc.nama.om



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SPOTLIGHT



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 23

IN RECENT YEARS, there has been an increase in heart attacks among young people, which was previously uncommon for this age group. How can young people prevent these attacks, and what are the reasons that have made them more common in recent times? Dr Alya al Kindi, an emergency medicine specialist, describes sudden death among young people as being preceded by any major symptoms indicating the presence of a major health problem.

Dr Al Kindi said that parents, coaches, and those around young people can recognise the warning signs that may indicate the risk of cardiac arrest by following some important signs. These symptoms include fainting or feeling dizzy suddenly, especially during or after exercise, chest pain or shortness of breath, which may indicate a heart problem. A rapid or irregular heartbeat may also appear, in which the person feels that his/her heart is beating strongly or quickly. Extreme fatigue and exhaustion after doing simple tasks, along with swelling in the legs or ankles, may also be signs that require attention.

Dr Al Kindi explains that sudden heart attacks in young people can result from a variety of causes, including direct heart disorders and other factors. Among the most prominent of these causes are heart rhythm disorders such as ventricular fibrillation that causes the heart to beat irregularly and rapidly, which hinders the efficient pumping of blood. There is also hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a genetic disease that causes the heart muscle to enlarge and leads to irregular heartbeats and sudden cardiac arrest, especially during exercise.

In addition, a heart attack can result from a blockage in the coronary arteries that feed the heart, or inflammation of the heart muscle

To reduce the risks of heart attacks, a silent killer of young people, one must follow a healthy lifestyle, exercise regularly, eat a balanced diet and refrain from smoking



Sudden heart attacks in young people can result from a variety of causes, including direct heart disorders and other factors. Among the most prominent of these causes are heart rhythm disorders such as ventricular fibrillation that causes the heart to beat irregularly and rapidly, which hinders the efficient pumping of blood

DR ALYA AL KINDI
An emergency medicine specialist

caused by a viral or bacterial infection. Causes also include aortic aneurysm, which can lead to aortic rupture and severe internal bleeding, in addition to stroke or pulmonary embolism that obstructs blood flow to the lungs. Some genetic problems such as Brugada syndrome and long QT syndrome can affect the electrical signals in the heart, increasing the likelihood of sudden death.

The doctor explained that other factors can contribute to an increased risk of sudden heart attacks among young people. This includes excessive physical stress resulting from intense exercise, which may lead to sudden cardiac arrest, especially in individuals with undetected heart problems. Poisoning or drug abuse, such as cocaine, are also factors that cause heart rhythm disturbances

and increase the risk of sudden death. In addition, stress and psychological stress play a role in increasing blood pressure and accelerating heart rate, which increases the likelihood of heart problems.

Dr Al Kindi stresses that preventing sudden heart attacks requires following a set of preventive measures that aim to maintain heart health and detect any problems in their early stages. These measures begin with conducting periodic medical examinations, including electrocardiograms (ECG), echocardiograms and heart stress tests especially people who are doing strenuous exercise or having warning heart symptoms like chest pain or recurrent fainting or abnormal heart beating. The doctor should be informed of the presence of a family history of heart disease.

The doctor stresses the importance of following a healthy lifestyle, by exercising regularly, eating a balanced diet and refraining from smoking. It is also recommended to reduce stress and psychological pressure by learning relaxation techniques such as meditation or yoga. It is essential to avoid drugs and stimulants that may cause heart rhythm disturbances and increase the risk of sudden death.

In addition, controlling chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, high sugar and high cholesterol play a major role in prevention.

Dr Al Kindi confirms that there is a lack of awareness among young people about heart health and the importance of preventive examinations. She calls for raising awareness through social media and organising awareness events in schools, universities and work places. She also stresses the importance of training individuals in first aid and the use of electric shock devices in public places, as these measures can contribute to saving lives.

SHORT TAKES



With effect from October 29, 2024, three direct flights will be operated per week. — **ONA**

OMAN AIR
AUGMENTS SERVICES
TO MOSCOW

MUSCAT: Oman Air announced a schedule for enhancing its services to Moscow during the winter season (2024-2025), as part of its strategy to improve air connectivity and provide flexible and diverse travel options for travellers between Muscat and Moscow.

With effect from October 29, 2024, three direct flights will be operated per week.

The number of flights will be raised to 5 with effect from December 1, 2024 and increased to 6 from December 25, 2024 to March 29, 2025, Oman Air affirmed. — **ONA**

Students to be feted at
Namat Sustainability
Awards

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Students from across the country who have excelled in environment protection will be honoured at the Namat Competition Awards Ceremony, in its fifth edition, to be held under the auspices of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education (MoE), on October 31 at the Novotel Main Ballroom.

The annual Namat competition, titled ‘Sustainability; A Way of Life’, organised by Environment Society of Oman (ESO) in association with Ministry of Education and supported by Veolia Oman, an environmental management company, aims to bring out some of the awe-inspiring ideas that can change the way we live and add value to environment preservation for the generations to come.

Representatives from the winning schools will receive overall trophies besides awards and accolades, a spokesperson said. Earlier, the Namat awards saw children presenting ideas based on three broad categories, such as ‘Energy Management’, ‘Waste Management’ and ‘Water Management’ initiatives that saw an overwhelming participation from the students, which consisted mostly of girls supported by their teachers.

The themes focused on the theme that water and energy are essential for life while economic growth partly requires harnessing the potential of ecosystems and therefore water and energy efficiency are essential.

Oman is going through an energy transformation while focusing more on renewables.

ROHM to feature Ahlam,
Branco in November

STAFF REPORTER
Muscat, Oct 23

THE Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) in November will feature a variety of shows including Portuguese soul music, the glorious pageantry of the marching bands, an open-air concert and a sophisticated evening of jazz. Additionally, audiences are invited to discover what is on offer in the Educational and Outreach programme with inspiring initiatives around reading and writing for children.

November opens with Cristina Branco, a legendary Fado singer, who brings authenticity and flare to this soulful Portuguese genre that strikes deep into the heart. Performing just one night, this concert offers an insight into this stunning tradition of music as well as connecting with feelings of love and loss amongst audiences. Don't miss your chance to feel this incredible depth of emotion in ‘Mais que Fado’ with Cristina Branco on November 5 at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts.

Following just two days later is the annual three-night military music festival. Oman's military and police marching bands, featuring drums and pipers, perform alongside visiting bands from Jordan and Austria. This dynamic exhibition combines international flair, light displays, and seamless collaboration, leaving a lasting impression. Military Music: Oman and the World is a highly popular event that sells out quickly. Choose your tickets for November 7, 8 or 9 to enjoy the show.

The middle of the month heralds the return of Ahlam to the opera house. In a new open-air concert format, this Emirati superstar will perform from her most



Cristina Branco



Ahlam

loved repertoire of songs in what will be a sell-out event on November 14.

The final concert of the main programme in November is two nights of jazz, with a very special artist from the world stage. Anthony Strong is an extraordinary musician and performer, with a programme of classics from jazz greats such as Nat King Cole and Frank Sinatra, as well as his original songs. In concert with the Latvian Radio Big Band, this is a combination that will feed or inspire a lifelong love of jazz. Audiences adore this sharp-suited gentleman of jazz, and this show is highly anticipated. Anthony Strong and the Latvian Radio Big Band will take place on November 28 and 29 at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts. Don't miss Coffee and Dates on November 27, with Anthony Strong in conversation with Umberto Fanni in the Music Library.

Two brand-new initiatives are launched this month by the education team. Aimed at inspiring the love of reading, writing and the theatre, November 6 and 7 sees the exclusive presentation to selected schools in Muscat of the much-loved story around the book character Geronimo Stilton by Italian author Elisabetta Dami, with a workshop on the ways to bring characters to life on the written page for children.

Let's Read, a theatrical presentation of stories and characters with YouThinkers, explores the magical tale of Beauty and the Beast (Music Library, November 16, 10 am till 1 pm). The month ends with the second Lunch Music of the season. Opera di Monte Carlo singers perform arias from the La Fille du Regiment at the Opera Galleria on Saturday, November 30, at 12.30 pm. Tickets are available for purchase on the ROHM website, app, or directly at the box office.

Omani Indian classical music fusion begins today

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

An ensemble of Omani and Indian classical music will be showcased at the Indian Art and Music festival called ‘Sangeethotsav’ to be held for 3 Days from October 24 to 26, at the College of Banking and Financial Studies, from 6.30 pm until 10 pm, aiming at enriching the strong inter-cultural ties between both the communities of India and Oman, according to Ekata Muscat, a group of music aficionados that provide a platform for classical music.

The festival that not only celebrates the rich musical heritage of Oman but also encourages collaboration and community among musicians, will host ‘Sangeetharchana’, from 9.30 am – 4.00 pm on the first day while

Ekata Muscat will confer the ‘Sangeetha Sudha Nidhi’ Award on Thichur Surendran, who has been performing and training hundreds in Panchavadyam for the last over 30 years in Oman

on the following days, the venue will see hundreds of Omani talents performing their regional as well as classical music of Oman.

On the first day, the event will kick off with a live vocal concert by Vasudha Ravi, who is an acclaimed Carnatic musician. Edappaly Ajithkumar on Violin, Payyanur Govinda Prasad on Mukharshangh, Vazhapally Krishnakumar on Mridangam, and Vishnu V Kammath on Ghanchira will accompany her.

On the second day of the festival, a grand celebration of music that features a diverse array of performances, highlighting both established and emerging talents from the region. With its focus on fostering creativity and promoting cultural exchange, Sangeetharchana has become

a significant event in the local artistic landscape, drawing audiences and participants alike.

On the third day, a captivating Hindustani concert featuring an exceptional lineup of artistes will offer a treat to the senses of the audience as the concert will showcase the vocal talents of prominent musicians like Yash Devle, accompanied by Zuber Shaikh on sitar, Dwij Gandharva on tabla and on Vineeth Pandit on harmonium. This ensemble promises to deliver an unforgettable evening of soulful music and rich cultural heritage.

On the sidelines of the event, Ekata Muscat will confer the ‘Sangeetha Sudha Nidhi’ Award on Thichur Surendran, who has been performing and training hundreds in Panchavadyam for the last over 30 years in Oman.

Seminar highlights women’s workplace rights

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 23

A recent seminar titled ‘The Reality of Women's Employment in Light of Labour Law Amendments’, organised by the Women Workers' Committee of the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions (GFOTU), concluded with crucial recommendations aimed at enhancing women's rights in the workplace.

The event brought together local and international stakeholders, including the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Ministry

of Labour (MoL) and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

Key recommendations from the seminar include the implementation of comprehensive awareness programmes to educate women about their legal rights, particularly under the new labour and social protection laws.

The seminar emphasised the importance of reaching out to women with disabilities to ensure their inclusion in these initiatives.

Another key recommendation focused on supporting women's advancement into leadership roles



The seminar emphasised the importance of reaching out to women with disabilities to ensure their inclusion in these initiatives

through training and monitoring programmes. Equal pay for equal work was also highlighted, with calls for employers to ensure wage parity between men and women, in accordance with international standards.

The need for safer work environments was underscored, with recommendations urging stricter enforcement of policies against workplace harassment and violence. Additionally, the seminar advocated for greater compliance with maternity rights, such as paid maternity leave and breastfeeding breaks, and called for flexibility in

work arrangements, including the provision of workplace childcare.

Incentives for businesses to hire more women, support for female entrepreneurs through training and funding, and enhanced international exposure for Omani women were also among the recommendations.

The seminar emphasised the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors to ensure the protection and empowerment of women in the workforce, reflecting Oman's commitment to advancing women's rights in line with Oman Vision 2040.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Chinese President Xi Jinping and India PM Narendra Modi meet on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Kazan. — Reuters

MODI AND XI AGREE TO RESOLVE DIFFERENCES

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed on Wednesday to boost communication and cooperation between their countries. The two leaders met on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Russia for their first formal talks in five years. The meeting in the city of Kazan came two days after New Delhi announced that it had reached a deal with Beijing to resolve the four-year military stand-off in the Himalayan region of Ladakh.

The two sides should strengthen communication and cooperation, resolve conflicts and differences, and realise each other's development dreams. In response, Modi told Xi that maintaining peace and stability on their frontier should be a priority, and that mutual trust, respect and sensitivity should be the basis of the relationship. "We welcome the agreement on the issues that had come up over the last four years," Modi said in comments that were aired on broadcaster Doordarshan. — Reuters



Units of the Mozambican anti-riot police deploy during a march, in Maputo. — AFP file photo

MOZAMBIQUE WARNS PROTESTERS AHEAD OF ELECTION

MAPUTO: Mozambique's president warned on Wednesday that calls for violent protests could be considered criminal acts as tensions grew ahead of the imminent release of election results. Leading opposition candidate Venancio Mondlane has called for 25 days of "terror" over the killing of his attorney as results from the October 9 ballot, likely to be published on Thursday, were expected to show the ruling Frelimo party winning.

"Inciting the population to revolt, misinforming the world and creating chaos for political purposes can be considered criminal acts," President Filipe Nyusi told reporters. While he said that Mozambicans have the right to protest, "news that the country will again demonstrate against a process that has not yet seen its outcome is unsettling." Earlier on Wednesday, thousands of people gathered outside Mozambique's capital to bury lawyer Elvino Dias who was killed alongside another opposition ally, Paulo Guambe. — AFP

Seoul says North Korea sent thousands more troops to Russia

KYIV: Ukraine on Wednesday called on any North Korean troops fighting for Russia to surrender, after South Korea said over a thousand more had been deployed by Pyongyang. South Korean lawmaker Park Sun-won said, after a briefing by his country's National Intelligence Service, that 1,500 more troops from the rival North had gone to Russia, taking the total deployment to 3,000.

"The planned deployment of about 10,000 troops from North

Korea to Russia is expected to have occurred by December," added Park, who sits on the national assembly intelligence committee.

Neither Russia nor North Korea's state media have commented since Seoul's spy agency said last week said Pyongyang had decided to send a "large-scale" troop deployment to Russia to fight Ukraine. But international concerns are mounting. Germany said on Wednesday it had summoned North

Korea's envoy over Pyongyang's support to Russia in Ukraine and warned the reclusive state against sending troops.

South Korea will send a delegation to Nato headquarters in Brussels next week to brief the alliance on the situation, officials said.

Ukraine's appeal for North Korea troops to surrender came shortly after Zelensky made a new plea for allies to respond to the North's intervention. — AFP



Displaced families fleeing Israeli army operations in Jabalia take the main Salah al-Din road towards Gaza City. — AFP

BOMBS HALT GAZA POLIO VACCINATIONS

GENEVA: The World Health Organization said on Wednesday that "intense bombardment" and "escalating violence" in northern Gaza had forced it to postpone the final phase of a child polio vaccination drive. The necessary second round of vaccinations has been completed in central and southern Gaza, and was to begin on Wednesday in the north.

But the WHO said it had been "compelled to postpone" the bid to give 119,279 children in northern Gaza a second vaccine dose.

The vaccination campaign was called off "due to the escalating violence, intense bombardment, mass displacement orders and lack of assured humanitarian pauses across most of northern Gaza," the UN health agency said.

"The current conditions, including ongoing attacks on civilian infrastructure, continue to jeopardise people's safety and movement in northern Gaza, making it impossible for families to safely bring their children for vaccination," and for health workers to operate, it added. — AFP

Israel strikes residents in Lebanon's Tyre

REPORTERS observed several strikes on Lebanon's Tyre on Wednesday after the Israeli army warned residents to evacuate swathes of the coastal city which boasts a Unesco world heritage site. Footage showed plumes of thick black smoke rising from several neighbourhoods, with parts of the evacuation area just 500 metres from the city's ancient ruins.

"Four strikes targeted the city of Tyre after the enemy threatened to bomb it," the National News Agency said, after earlier reporting that "an enemy drone targeted" a "street in Tyre". "The situation is very bad, we're evacuating people," said Mortada Mhanna, who heads Tyre's disaster management unit.

Bilal Kashmar, the unit's media officer, said that many were fleeing the city and heading towards the suburbs. "You could say that the entire city of Tyre is being evacuated," he said, adding that the once vibrant southern hub had already been emptied of most of its residents.

Only about 14,500 people were still in Tyre on Tuesday, thousands of them displaced from other parts of the south, he said. A photographer in the city of Sidon, further north, saw dozens of cars on the coastal highway filled with families carrying mattresses, suitcases and clothes.

"Some families, who had not left the city of Tyre before, began leaving their homes to stay clear of areas that the Israeli enemy threatened to target," Lebanon's official National News Agency said. Civil defence teams helped transport elderly people and people with limited mobility "to safe areas", the NNA added. Emergency teams drove around the city, urging people to evacuate over megaphones, a video journalist said.



Smoke billows after an Israeli strike, in Tyre, southern Lebanon. — Reuters

Residents began to flee immediately after the Israeli army called on residents of large parts of Tyre to leave ahead of military operations targeting Lebanese group Hezbollah. The army's Arabic-language spokesman Avichay Adraee posted a map of the affected streets in Tyre on X, saying: "You must immediately move out of the area marked in red and head north of the Awali River."

Anyone who is near Hezbollah elements, facilities and combat equipment is putting his life in danger."

On September 23, Israel launched an intensive air campaign in Lebanon, after almost a year of cross-border exchanges with Hezbollah over the Gaza war. Since then, at least 1,552 people have been killed in Israeli strikes on Lebanon. — AFP

FLOODS CAUSALITIES

Tropical Storm Trami kills 14 in Philippines



At least 14 people were killed in the Philippines as Tropical Storm Trami flooded villages, inundated rivers and forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes as it approached the eastern coast. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Wednesday ordered responders to prepare for the main storm's landfall over the northeastern province of Isabela. "The worst is yet to come, I'm afraid. Let's all prepare," Marcos said in a briefing. — Reuters

DEFENCE EXERCISES

Japan and US kick off joint military drills



Japan and the United States kicked off 10 days of joint military drills involving tens of thousands of personnel. "Keen Sword" will involve 45,000 Japanese and US troops, 40 vessels and 370 aircraft, as well as some forces from Australia and Canada, the Japanese Joint Staff said. The exercises, which take place every two years, will be held across Japan, including at the countries' military bases through November 1. — AFP

COURT RULE

Uganda jails oppn members for 'treachery'



A Ugandan military court sentenced 16 members of an opposition party to five years in prison on illegal possession of explosive devices and "treachery" charges. The prosecution alleged 16 members of the main opposition National Unity Platform (NUP). They had all pleaded guilty to the charges but NUP leader Robert Kyagulanyi claimed they had been forced to plead in this manner and seek a presidential pardon. — AFP

CLAIMSDENIAL



Britain's PM Keir Starmer speaks outside of London ambulance service. — AFP file photo

STARMER REJECTS TRUMP TEAM CLAIMS OF INTERFERENCE

LONDON: The government in London on Wednesday played down claims of meddling in the US election, after Donald Trump's team charged that having members of Britain's ruling Labour Party work for his opponent Kamala Harris's campaign was "blatant foreign interference". Trump's legal team filed an official complaint to the US Federal Election Commission, alleging that the "British Labour Party made, and the (Kamala) Harris campaign accepted, illegal foreign national contributions".

Starmer insisted it was normal for volunteers to campaign and that he had established "a good relationship" with Trump, whom he met for dinner over two hours at his Trump Tower residence in New York last month. Starmer also denied suggestions that it could damage relations with the UK's most important ally should Republican party candidate Trump beat Harris and secure a return to the White House after next month's vote. — AFP



CATHEDRAL CARRIES ON RESTORATION

Construction workers dismantle scaffolding on the Notre-Dame de Paris Cathedral, which was ravaged by a fire in 2019, as restoration works continue before its reopening, in Paris, France. Notre Dame gears up to reopen in December, bringing nature back to the forefront of the City of Light. — Reuters

Prime Minister Orban asks Hungarians to ‘resist’ Brussels like USSR

BUDAPEST: Prime Minister Viktor Orban on Wednesday urged Hungarians to “resist” Brussels like they did Moscow almost 70 years ago, as he marked the central European country’s 1956 anti-Soviet uprising. The nationalist premier--Moscow’s closest EU ally whose country holds the bloc’s rotating presidency--has been stoking fears of a war between the West and Russia, which he blames on the European Union and Nato.

At home, Orban, who has ruled Hungary since 2010, is under rising pressure, facing an unprecedented challenge from former-government-insider-turned opposition leader Peter Magyar. “Do we bow to the will of a foreign power, this time

from Brussels, or do we resist it? ... I propose that our response should be as clear and unequivocal as it was in 1956,” Orban told thousands of people in Budapest. “For us, the lesson of 1956 is that we must fight for only one thing, for Hungary and for Hungarian freedom,” he added.

The 1956 anti-Soviet uprising left about 3,000 people dead and 20,000 wounded between October 23 and November 4 and became a symbol of Hungary’s fight against repression.

Since Russia’s war of Ukraine in 2022, Orban has refused to send weapons to Kyiv and urges a speedy ceasefire without any preconditions. He warned that under a Kyiv-proposed “victory plan,” “we Hungarians



Hungary's PM Viktor Orban delivers a speech, in the Millenaris culture centre of Budapest. — AFP

would wake up one morning to find Slavic soldiers from the East stationed on Hungarian territory again”.

In his speech, Orban also accused Brussels of wanting to impose a “puppet government” under his rival, Magyar, in Hungary.

“We know that they want to force us into war. We know they want to force their migrants on us. We know they want to hand our children over to gender activists,” he added.

In June, the European Court of Justice fined Hungary for failing to uphold international procedures for asylum seekers.

Hungary has so far refused to pay the fine. Orban attended a ceremony marking the 1956 uprising in a Bu-

dapest park rather than outside the capital as he has the previous two years.

Magyar has seized on remarks by one of Orban’s top advisers, Balazs Orban, which caused an outcry last month.

The political director, who is not related to the premier, said Hungary would not have defended itself like Ukraine did against Russia, as it learned to be “cautious” following the 1956 uprising, which Moscow crushed with overwhelming force. The aide later apologised, claiming his words were misinterpreted, but resisted calls to resign. The prime minister called the comments a mistake. — AFP

Putin faces calls for peace at BRICS summit

WORLD leaders called for peace in the Middle East and Ukraine at the BRICS summit in Russia on Wednesday, as President Vladimir Putin told them he welcomed offers to mediate in the Ukraine conflict. The Russian leader is casting the gathering as a sign that Western attempts to isolate Moscow have failed, but faced direct calls to end the Ukraine conflict from some of his closest and most important partners.

The meeting of around 20 world leaders in the central city of Kazan is the largest diplomatic forum in Russia since Putin ordered troops into Ukraine in 2022. Starting in 2009 with four members -- Brazil, Russia, India and China -- BRICS has since expanded to include other emerging nations such as South Africa, Egypt and Iran.

Chinese President Xi Jinping told the summit there must be “no escalation of fighting” in Ukraine. “We must adhere to the three principles of ‘no spillover from the battlefield, no escalation of fighting and no adding oil to the fire by relevant parties’, so as to ease the situation as soon as possible,” Xi said.

Russia and China signed a “no limits” strategic partnership days before Moscow ordered troops into Ukraine and Putin and Xi both hailed close ties in a bilateral meeting on Tuesday.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also issued a call for peace. “We support dialogue and diplomacy, not war,” he said.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva also called for escalation in both the Middle East and Ukraine to be avoided. “As we face two wars that have the potential to become global, it is essential to restore our ability to work together towards common goals,” he said in an address to the summit via video conference.

In private talks, Putin welcomed offers by several of the BRICS leaders to mediate in Ukraine, even as he told them his forces were advancing, his spokesman said on Wednesday.



Russia's President Vladimir Putin gives a speech during the meeting of the BRICS summit in Kazan. — AFP

day. Many countries “expressed a desire to contribute more actively” to resolving the conflict, state media cited Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as telling reporters. Putin had also used the meetings to tout “the very positive dynamics on the front for the Russian armed forces,” Peskov said.

Russia’s troops have been slowly advancing in eastern Ukraine for much of 2024, though neither side has been able to make a decisive breakthrough and the conflict appears locked

in an attritional phase. “Avoiding escalation and initiating peace negotiations is also crucial in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia,” Brazil’s Lula said.

Moscow promotes the BRICS platform as an alternative to Western-led international organisations like the G7. “The process of forming a multipolar world order is underway, a dynamic and irreversible process,” Putin said at the official opening of the summit. — AFP

UK and Germany sign ‘milestone’ defence deal

LONDON: London and Berlin on Wednesday hailed a “milestone” in military cooperation as they signed a new defence pact that would see German submarine-hunting planes operate from British bases to counter threats from Russia after its full-scale attack on Ukraine. Europe’s two biggest defence spenders said the Trinity House Agreement, signed by Defence Ministers John Healey and Boris Pistorius, would strengthen Nato’s “European pillar” at a time of increased threat from the east.

An eye-catching part of the deal is the prospect of German Boeing P-8 aircraft patrolling the skies of the North Atlantic from a base in northern Scotland. Another aspect will see German arms giant Rheinmetall open a UK factory making artillery gun barrels, using British steel.

Healey told a joint news confer-

An eye-catching part of the deal is the prospect of German Boeing P-8 aircraft patrolling the skies of the North Atlantic from a base in northern Scotland.

ence that European allies needed to take on more responsibility for European security “and this is the driving force behind our Nato-first UK defence strategy. We share the same threats: war in Ukraine, conflict in the Middle East, growing Russian aggression. We share the same values: democracy, individual freedom, rule of law,” he said.

Pistorius added that it was “our responsibility in Europe to strengthen the European angle, the European pillar of Nato.” “The US will shift their focus more to the Indo-Pacific... so it is only a question of ‘will they do much less in Europe because of that, or only a little bit less?’ But anyway, we would have to do more, and this is our task”

The agreement is the first between the UK and Germany and aims to put previously ad hoc cooperation

between the two countries on a more regular footing. The artillery factory would support more than 400 jobs, while the two countries will undertake joint work to develop deep strike weapons.

The two armies will train together more often in a bid to strengthen Nato’s eastern flank, amid concerns for security in the Baltic states and Scandinavia because of Russia’s actions against Ukraine. “The Trinity House Agreement is a milestone moment in our relationship with Germany,” Healey said.

The deal “will be the first pillar of a new and wider friendship treaty for us,” he added.

Pistorius said the deal was evidence that “the UK and Germany are moving closer together,” following 14 years of Conservative rule that saw the UK exit the EU. — AFP

OPINION

A call for unity amid Gaza’s blood, Lebanon’s tears



BADR AL ABRI

The writer focuses on issues of reconciliation and understanding. He is the author of the book Jurisprudence of Extremism.

NO ONE can reconcile to the horrors of genocide nor can we allow ourselves to be consumed by sectarian divisions while such atrocities unfold. This is not a time for division but for unity in defending our shared humanity. Religion and sect are much like cultural or traditional garments one wears after birth, and should not define one’s essence. We are all part of a shared existence, undifferentiated by these labels. This fundamental human identity should guide how we treat each other in both peace and war, in good times and bad, without discrimination. The Arab world must move beyond the confines of sectarianism, which is often propagated by media and politics. However, this can only happen if there is a deep-rooted acceptance of sectarianism within the broader social fabric. What is needed today is a universal human discourse that allows us to understand both religious texts and the social concerns of the region. As Muhammad al Rumaihi notes, sectarianism has deepened in society. Some divisions have become entrenched, forming closed circles defined by tribe or sect. In his book Contemporary Arab Society,

Halim Barakat observes that public order and culture often categorise citizens based on their sect rather than as citizens. Hence, there is a growing call for secularism. However, I believe that secularism cannot achieve its true value unless it stems from a unified human tendency. Otherwise, as history shows, imperialism has exploited sectarianism to serve its interests, fuelling conflicts and wars to maintain control and exploit the resources of these peoples. This is evident in the actions of the occupying forces in Palestine, leading to genocide in Gaza and widespread destruction in Lebanon. On social media today, we see a resurgence of sectarianism, with political disputes from as far back as the Saqifah incident being brought back to life. Debates about the Companions and theological differences are being weaponised in this context, which only serves to distract from the real issue—the protection of those facing genocide and barbaric warfare. If the rational among us do not stand against the invocation of sectarianism in such humanitarian crises and instead promote a unified global human discourse, the

We are all part of a shared existence, undifferentiated by these labels. This fundamental human identity should guide how we treat each other in both peace and war, in good times and bad, without discrimination.

harm caused will spread beyond the areas of war and genocide. As Muhammad Mahfouz states in his article The State, Sectarianism, and the Problems of Unity and Social Peace, sectarian affiliations are a symptom of a deep crisis in Arab societies, where modern political ideologies have faded and been replaced by sectarian identities. These identities fuel social tensions, perpetuating historical grievances and the bloody legacies of sectarian relationships in times of civilisational decline. Thus, it is imperative that intellectuals, religious leaders, and socially influential figures dismantle the structures of sectarian discourse and return to a shared human narrative. We must also combat populist rhetoric and the so-called “digital armies” that aim to rekindle hatred and sectarianism, exploiting the tragedies in Palestine and Lebanon to deepen divisions. We must use these same tools to promote the values of human dignity, resistance against injustice, and the importance of a unified human approach. The article is translated by Badr al Dhafari. The original version of this article was published in Arabic in the print edition of Oman newspaper on October 23.

CLIMATE CHANGE
WORSENER DEADLY
AFRICA FLOODS

LAURIE CHURCHMAN

Human-caused climate change worsened floods that have killed hundreds of people and displaced millions in Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Sudan this year, according to a study published on Wednesday. The intense rainy season has unleashed a humanitarian crisis across large areas of the Sahel region bordering the Sahara desert. A new analysis by the World Weather Attribution (WWA) network of scientists found warming driven by the use of fossil fuels had exacerbated the flooding in Sudan. The researchers also said climate change would have made this year’s torrential rains around five to 20 per cent more intense across the Niger and Lake Chad basins, citing a previous WWA study of similar floods in 2022. “This is only going to keep getting worse if we keep burning fossil fuels,” said Clair Barnes from the Centre for Environmental Policy at Imperial College London. Global warming is not just about rising temperatures — the extra heat trapped in the atmosphere and seas has knock-on effects and can result in more intense downpours and storms. The researchers said there was a clear link between the extreme rainfall and a warming planet. In the study, they focused on war-torn Sudan, where millions of displaced people have been uprooted by conflict and driven into flood-prone areas. The scientists used modelling to compare weather patterns in our world and one without human-induced warming, and found that month-long spells of intense rainfall in parts of Sudan had become heavier and more likely due to climate change. At the current 1.3 degrees Celsius of warming, they said similar periods of rainfall are expected to occur on average about once every three years, and have become about 10 per cent heavier due to climate change. Joyce Kimutai, a researcher at Imperial’s Centre for Environmental Policy, said the floods underscored the need for a loss and damage fund for nations devastated by climate change. A key meeting ahead of COP29 earlier this month ended with countries making little progress over how to finance a deal for poorer nations. The role of climate change in the floods was compounded by other human-made problems, the researchers said, and they called for better maintenance of dams and investment in early warning systems. — AFP



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is an environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development, focusing on climate change impacts in the Middle East and women’s empowerment in environmental solutions. Follow her on X: @RumaithaBusaidi.



Women need to be present in decision-making roles, especially in sectors like fisheries, manufacturing, and renewable energy—key areas for the Sultanate of Oman’s sustainability efforts

LAST THURSDAY, as we celebrated Omani Women’s Day, I found myself deeply reflecting on the pivotal role women have played in the development of the Sultanate of Oman and their indispensable importance to our future. The challenges we face as a nation—especially the urgent threat of climate change—demand the full participation of women in every facet of our society. The day is not only a celebration of our progress but also a call to action for the journey ahead. The Sultanate of Oman proudly stands as the first Gulf country to grant women the right to vote and run for office, a legacy of women’s leadership that began in the 1970s. Omani women have shattered barriers in education and entrepreneurship, particularly in STEM fields—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Today, women outnumber men in these

disciplines, and more women are leading their own businesses than men. Despite these remarkable achievements, women’s workforce participation remains alarmingly low. In 2023, only 32 per cent of women in the Sultanate of Oman were part of the labour force, compared to 88 per cent of men. This disparity is not unique to Oman; globally, women’s labour force participation hovers just under 47 per cent, while men stand at 72 per cent. This gap is not merely a statistic; it represents a missed opportunity in our collective efforts not only for GDP growth but also to combat climate change. Oman Vision 2040 outlines ambitious goals for sustainable development and economic diversification, but these goals can only be realised by harnessing the full potential of our human capital. Women are not just essential to climate action—they are leaders.

Across the globe, women are disproportionately affected by climate change, particularly in the Global South. In Oman, coastal communities face rising sea levels and extreme weather events, where women play a pivotal role in building resilience and safeguarding their families and communities. While many women continue to excel, societal factors continue to limit their full participation in Oman’s economy. As we confront the growing threat of climate change, it is imperative that these factors be eased, as women need to be present in decision-making roles, especially in sectors like fisheries, manufacturing, and renewable energy—key areas for the Sultanate of Oman’s sustainability efforts. However, empowerment cannot happen in isolation. Male allyship and sponsorship are critical to advancing women’s roles in climate action and beyond. While we encourage women to build their confidence and networks, it is equally important that men, especially those in leadership positions, advocate for and support women’s inclusion in key discussions. Creating environments where men champion women’s voices helps break down stereotypes and ensures that Oman’s approach to climate change is both inclusive and effective. It’s not just about women rising—it’s about all of us rising together. Climate change is urgent and cannot be addressed by overlooking half of our population. Women are already leading climate adaptation efforts in the country, and their leadership is vital for creating a sustainable, resilient Oman. Oman Vision 2040 will only be realised if everyone is enabled to lead, innovate, and act in the face of these challenges. The question we must all ask ourselves is: How will we ensure that no one is left behind in this mission? The future of the Sultanate of Oman depends on our collective answer. By breaking down barriers, fostering inclusive leadership, and empowering every woman and girl, we can build a resilient and thriving nation capable of meeting the challenges of tomorrow.

Teacher-student relationship...



ISHWAR DESHMUKH

The writer works at Indian School in Salalah, and has served as Head of the Physical Education Department in reputed schools in India and Gulf countries

IT’S been more than three decades for me in teaching in schools in India and Gulf countries. I have observed that the teaching community usually expects respect from students in any educational organisation. But there is a thin line, like an equator dividing the earth into two equal parts, between acquiring your students’ respect and simply expecting it because we are the teaching fraternity.

The students are usually disillusioned as they are not clear about their habits. Many students adopt this habit while growing up. They respect their teachers most of the time for no reason. As a teacher, if you wish to develop your students’ habit of respecting their teachers, mentors, elders, and parents as they get older, there are certain habits you need to unleash.

A teacher with authority needs to maintain discipline in a class and school. No doubt, it’s a must for a teacher to imply timely discipline, but at the same time, it’s essential not to be autocratic as a teacher while raising the students; no doubt, at times, it’s the best and the most accessible mode of controlling the students and maintaining discipline. In the long run, it does not work, leading to lack of respect from students. Often, children experience that their voice is ignored, and they end up feeling that the teacher is not their well-wisher or guide. With experience, I can state that let the students have freedom, but ensure

the boundary line is marked as it’s a learning age. So, let them make decisions by which they will learn from their mistakes. The student will surely understand, develop and groom himself with critical interpersonal skills and will respect the teacher.

Actions speak more than words. I believe observation is one of the modes of learning. A teacher must be a role model and a source of inspiration for the students inside and outside the school. The teacher must abide by the rules framed, which the students will undoubtedly follow. This will help students to understand the importance of honesty. It’s straightforward... as a teacher, we should not expect our students to respect us if we don’t follow and abide by the rules.

Trust and commitment play a vital role between the teacher and the student. It is like a rule or law. A teacher must always keep his/her word; only then they will be looked at with great respect and be loved and honoured. This will help as a stepping stone for a student in building respect.

A teacher must be a problem solver. A student should be able to approach the teacher without hesitation to get the solution. In contrast, the teacher must also remember that the student’s potential of solving or facing the problem should not be hindered.

The student will promote himself and develop the quality of an independent thinker,

A teacher must be a role model and a source of inspiration for the students inside and outside the school

thus looking to you with notable respect.

The teacher must see and ensure that the interest and passion of students towards their field of life should not be hindered.

As teachers, we must show equal respect for feelings and thoughts, which will help students grow and become successful. Going against their interests will create discouragement. So, respect their interests, and you will be respected in return. This will lead to a special bond with your students.

At a particular age, a teacher should appropriately discuss sensitive topics. Healthy communication with your students will help you understand them much better. Make them comfortable by showing trust. By being open and honest, they will be comfortable discussing any topic, and thereby, you will tell your students that they can trust you with anything. This openness will stimulate respect and will strengthen the relationship with your students.

Show respect, give them time, listen, and respect their thoughts and feelings. This is one of the most important aspects as far as give and take of respect is concerned. One must treat the students with the respect which they deserve.

If a teacher expects or wants that he should be respected, he must first show them respect. It’s nothing but a transformation of your mutual relationship with your students.

POLAND LEADS NATO ON DEFENCE SPEND... BUT CAN IT AFFORD IT?

GERGELY SZAKACS AND KAROL BADOHAL

Poland’s Nato-leading surge in defence spending is raising budget concerns because it will bake in higher long-term expenditure on its military — even as Warsaw concedes it faces revenue shortfalls in its budget this year.

Central Europe’s largest economy is on track to lead Nato in terms of defence spending relative to the size of its economy for the second year in 2024 based on Nato estimates.

Outlays are projected to rise even further to 4.7 per cent of GDP next year, part of a wider European drive to bolster defence capabilities following Russia’s 2022 war on Ukraine. Poland’s \$35 billion defence bill this year could surpass that of its ex-Communist central European and Baltic neighbours combined — not to mention that of much larger economies such as Italy, which has long undershot a Nato target of defence spending of at least 2 per cent of gross domestic product.

Prime Minister Donald Tusk’s government says defence contracts signed before it took power in late 2023 may have contributed to a fiscal hole worth some 12.5 per cent of Poland’s projected 2025 GDP due to underestimated long-term obligations.

Deputy Defence Minister Pawel Bejda told parliament earlier this month that the current government “will either find these (underestimated) funds or will have to abandon some tasks,” adding it did not currently intend to shelve spending plans. Polish officials have cited a \$4.6 billion deal to buy 32 Lockheed Martin F-35 fighter jets as an example where lifetime costs could exceed that reflected in the headline contract value. Former defence minister Mariusz Blaszczak called the accusations a “political attack” and “diverting attention from slowing the modernisation of Poland’s armed forces.”

Poland’s two main parties are at loggerheads ahead of a key presidential election next year. Asked whether Poland has incorporated longer-term defence-related expenses into its fiscal targets, the Finance Ministry said the structure of the national budget in any given year depended on current financing needs.

“Poland’s acquisition of new military platforms at scale will lead to significantly higher costs to maintain this equipment over the long term,” Seamus P Daniels, a fellow at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies said.

— Reuters

The promise and peril of water markets

IN a landmark report, the Global Commission on the Economics of Water recently identified water markets as a fundamental solution to the world’s escalating climate-driven water crisis. The logic is simple: When something is scarce, it becomes more valuable. By pricing water appropriately and creating markets to allocate water based on demand, we could promote more efficient use and incentivise conservation. Yet while the concept of water markets appears promising, Chile, Australia, the United States, and other countries’ experiences show that implementation can prove challenging.

Water markets have been heralded for their ability to allocate water more efficiently. When individuals or organisations are allowed to trade water rights, water is allocated to those who value it most. In Chile, one of the first countries to implement a national water market, agricultural producers can purchase water from other regions or industries that have a surplus. Owing to this flexibility, the system allows for high-value crops to flourish even during droughts.

By helping to reduce inefficient water use, Chile’s water market boosted agricultural productivity over time. Between 1985 and 2018, water-intensive agriculture in the Atacama and Coquimboregions grew significantly as water markets allowed for more flexible allocation to high-demand areas. The same principle has been applied in Australia’s Murray-Darling Basin, where farmers trade water rights to adapt to fluctuating water availability. As Bloomberg reports, the water trade in Australia is about AU\$4 billion per year (\$2.7 billion) and has made Australia the ninth-largest food exporter in the world. The same markets can also incentivise water conservation. California’s Central Valley allows agricultural water trading, enabling farmers to cope with periodic droughts by purchasing water from more resource-rich regions.

But Chile’s experience also highlights the pitfalls of water markets. Far from being a panacea, Chile’s



Water markets have been heralded for their ability to allocate water more efficiently.



EDUARDO ARARAL

The writer is an associate professor, former vice dean for research, and former co-director of the Institute of Water Policy at the National University of Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy

water market has led to significant inequalities. Large agribusinesses have acquired substantial water rights, leaving smaller farmers and communities with little access. With wealthier players dominating the market, marginalised communities are priced out.

Such outcomes raise serious equity concerns. Water is not just an economic commodity; it is a basic human right. A system that allows the wealthiest to buy up the most water risks undermining access for those who need it most. After water rights in northern Chile’s Limari Valley were consolidated among a few large agricultural companies, smallholders lacked sufficient water during dry years. Similar trends have been observed in California, where a small proportion of water-rights holders control a significant amount of available water, disproportionately benefiting large-scale agriculture.

Moreover, water markets can lead to environmental degradation. In Chile, diverting water to agricultural use has at times compromised the ecological health of rivers and wetlands. In Australia, over-extraction of water has led to severe environmental consequences, including the collapse of river ecosystems and the depletion of surface water and groundwater resources, threatening biodiversity.

California has encountered similar challenges. Although water trading has helped balance supply and demand in some regions, it has also exposed deep inequities. The Central Valley’s small-scale farmers struggle to compete with larger agribusinesses for water, while poorer urban communities face higher water prices. In times of drought, the market-driven system tends to favour those who can afford to pay, leaving behind the most vulnerable populations.

@Project Syndicate, 2024

SPORTS

ASIAN U17 QUALIFIERS



AHMED, OSAMA NET BRACE AS OMAN THRASH SINGAPORE 5-0 IN GROUP J

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 23

Oman boys thrashed hosts Singapore 5-0 in the opener of AFC U17 Asian Cup Qualifiers for Group J on Wednesday night. In the same group, Tajikistan registered a historic 33-0 win over Guam to lead the group with goals difference than Oman.

At Bishan Stadium in Singapore city, the national under-17 football team delivered a top show in the opening match to clinch the first three winning points in the qualifiers campaign. It was a match from one side as Oman team dominated the field and managed to reach to the opponent's goal in five occasions.

Ahmed al Omrani was the star of the match as he netted two goals in the 21st minute from penalty spot and in the 71st minute. Al Omrani received a perfect pass from Fahad inside the box as he put the ball in the net. An impressive show was delivered by Osama al Mamari who also scored two goals. In the 54th minute, Osama managed to penetrate the opponents' defence to send a strong shot towards the goal while his second goal in the 87th minute came through a header. Sulieman al Kharousi scored in the 68th minute with a strong shot from inside the box.

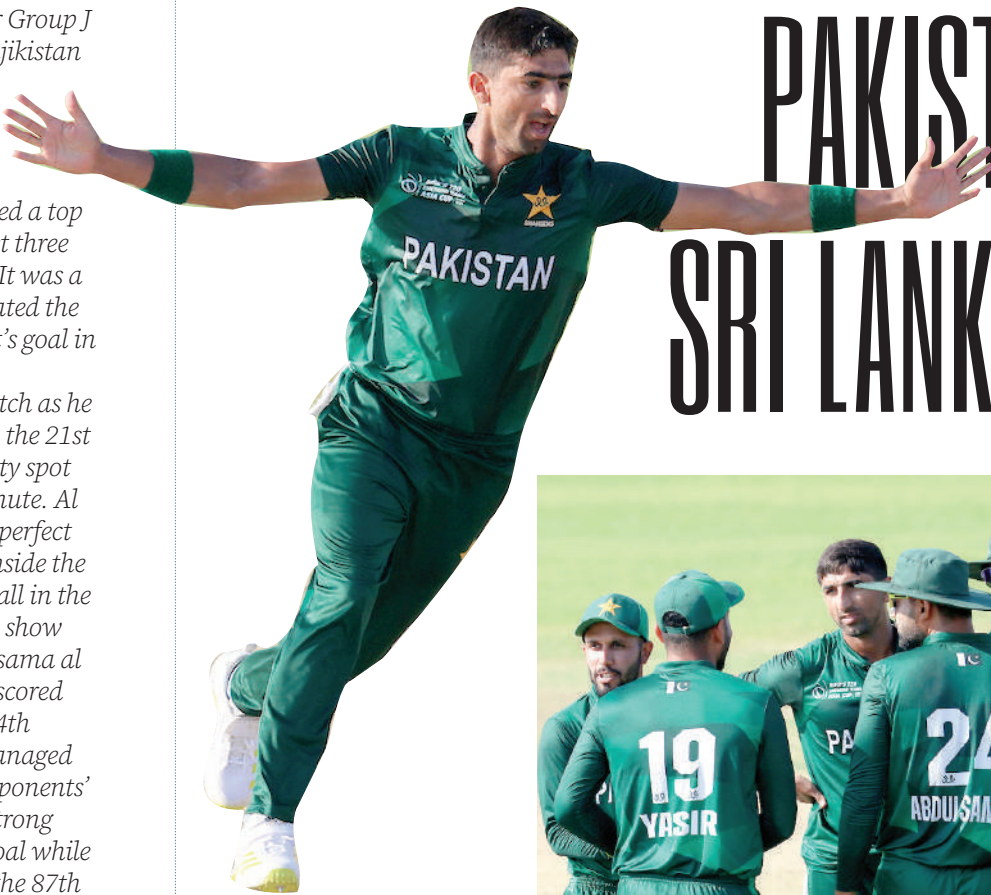
Oman will face Guam on Friday before meeting Tajikistan in the concluding clash on Sunday. A victory in the coming game will raise Oman's hopes of securing slot for the Asian finals. Oman will face Guam on Friday before meeting Tajikistan in the concluding clash on Sunday. A victory in the coming game will raise Oman's hopes of securing slot for the Asian finals. The junior stars are looking to rekindle the history as the national team had managed to earn two titles of the Asian Cup twice in 1996 and 2000 beside attending the Fifa U-17 World Cup three times in 1995 in Ecuador (ended in fourth place), 1997 in Egypt and 2001 in Trinidad and Tobago. The junior Red Warriors had attended the Asian Cup for 11 times and they are looking for the 12th time presence in the continental showpiece event.



Mohammad Nadeem of Oman plays a shot during the ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup T20 match against India at OCA Stadium in Al Amerat.

— ACC

INDIA A TAKE ON AFGHANS, PAKISTAN A MEET SRI LANKA IN SEMIS



Shahnawaz Ali Dahani of Pakistan A celebrates the wicket of Raja Akif Ullah Khan of UAE.



Pakistan A players during the ACC Men's T20 Emerging Teams Asia Cup 2024 Group B match between Pakistan A and United Arab Emirates.

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroopchh01

INDIA A will meet Afghanistan A (5.30 pm) and Pakistan A take on Sri Lanka A (1 pm) in the semifinals of the ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup T20 in Muscat on Friday. India topped Group B with six points from three matches, winning all. Pakistan Shaheens, who lost to India A in their first match, won next two to come second in the group with four points.

In Group B, Sri Lanka A topped with four points on a better run-rate than Afghanistan with same points.

India beat hosts Oman by six wickets in the last group match of the tournament at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat on Wednesday night.

Batting first, Oman posted a decent total of 140-5 with the help of a valiant 41 runs from Mohammed Nadeem. Hammad Mirza remained not out on 28.

Wasim Ali batted well to score 24 before getting lbw to Sai Kishore. Captain Jatinder Singh (17) and Aamir Kaleem (13) also contributed in the opening wicket.

India A gave ball to eight bowlers with five of them taking a wicket each.

In reply, India rode on Ayush Badoni's 27-ball 51, Abhishek Sharma's 15-ball 34 and captain Tilak Verma's 36 not out to comfortably reach the target with 28 balls to spare. Ramandeep Singh hit 13 runs from 4 balls to complete the proceedings as India reached 146-4 in 15.2 overs.

Badoni hit 24 runs in an over from Oman spinner Samay Shrivastav with three fours and two sixes to put scoring in top gear and diminish any hopes for a fightback from the hosts after claiming early wickets.

DAHANI DRUBS UAE

Earlier, medium pacer Shahnawaz Dahani's lethal spell of 5-12 drubbed UAE as Pakistan Shaheens recorded a dominant 114-run victory to march into the semifinals.

This was Pakistan A's highest margin of victory in terms of runs in T20s, beating 74-run win against Oman on Monday.

Batting first, Pakistan A posted a commanding total of 179-4 in their 20 overs.

Openers Omair Yousuf (21 off 11 balls) and Yasir Khan (25 off 13) gave them a nice start.

Captain Mohammad Haris, who dropped himself from the opening position to one down, led the charge with an unbeaten 71 off 49 balls.

Haris hit six fours and three sixes in his whirlwind knock. Haider Ali smashed a 17-ball 32 with a four and three sixes to boost the run-rate in the final overs of their innings.

For, UAE Muhammad Farooq was the standout bowler, claiming 3-27.

In response, UAE struggled to get going, collapsing to 65 all out in 16.3 overs. Dahani rattled the UAE batting line-up with his five wickets in 4 overs. Sufiyan Muqeem and Abbas Afridi also took crucial wickets.

UAE captain Rahul Chopra (20 off 18) was the lone warrior as they folded up for 65.



Ayush Badoni of India A receives the player of the match award.



Muhammad Haris of Pakistan A raises his bat after scoring a fifty.

JUNIORTALENTS



OTA TO ORGANISE MONTHLY TOURNAMENT ON SATURDAY

MUSCAT: The Oman Tennis Association (OTA) is gearing up to organise its second monthly tournament for the current season which will take place at the tennis courts of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher starting from Saturday. The tournament will feature competitions for various junior categories, including under-8, under-10, under-12, under-14 and under-18 for both boys and girls. Additionally, there will be singles, doubles and mixed doubles events. The first tournament, which concluded recently, saw fierce competition across different categories and attracted nearly 100 players of various ages. The association aims to enhance the technical level of young players and provide consistent tournaments to help develop their skills.

The coaching staff of the national teams is also keen on using this tournament to assess the technical performance of players by allowing them to compete in numerous matches. Moreover, the tournament has attracted significant interest from the expatriate communities in Oman with many eager to participate.



Al Amerat claim hockey first division league title



Al Amerat players celebrate with the league shield. Al Amerat blanked Al Salam 5-0 in the final. — Abdulwahid al Hamadani

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 23

AL AMERAT CLUB claimed the title of the 2024 First Division Hockey League with a decisive 5-0 victory over Salam Club. Al Ittihad secured third place after defeating Nizwa in the third-place play-off through a penalty shoot-out, winning 3-1. The matches were held at the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat. The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Mohsin bin Hani al Bah-rani, CEO of Mohsin Haider Darwish. The league featured six teams divided into two groups: Group A included Nizwa, Al Itti-had and Qurayat, while Group B consisted of Al Nahda, Al Salam and Al Amerat. The league matches took place from October 17 to 22. The final match witnessed intense com-petition between Al Amerat and Al Salam as both teams aimed to secure the title early. However, the first quarter ended in a 0-0 draw. In the second quarter, Al Amerat’s Younis al Noufli broke the deadlock with a penalty corner in the 22nd minute. Al Amerat continued to dominate, applying pressure while Al Salam failed to mount



Al Amerat and Al Salam players fight for the ball.

Al Ittihad secured third place after defeating Nizwa in the third-place play-off through a penalty shoot-out, winning 3-1.

Al Amerat’s Ahmed al Noufli won the league’s top scorer award with 8 goals, while Al Ittihad’s Hajis Khairallah won the best goalkeeper award. The best player award went to Nizwa’s Majed al Saridi.

any significant threat. The second quarter ended 1-0 in favour of Al Amerat. Al Amerat maintained their momen-tum in the third quarter, with Khadher al Noufli scoring the second goal in the 47th minute after a swift attack. The team displayed excellent ball movement and

created multiple opportunities, extending their lead to 2-0 by the end of the quarter. In the fourth quarter, Al Amerat domi-nated as Ahmed al Noufli scored the third goal in the 51st minute, followed by Elias al Noufli’s goal a minute later to make it 4-0. Ahmed al Noufli sealed the victory with his second goal from a penalty cor-ner in the 57th minute ending the match 5-0. Al Ittihad and Nizwa battled for third place in a closely contested match. The first quarter ended goalless as both teams focused on solid defence. In the second quarter, Nizwa took the lead with Zakariya al Nabhani scoring from a penalty corner. However, Al Ittihad equalised in the 29th minute through Ishaq al Harmi, leaving the score at 1-1 at half-time. The tie persisted through the third quarter, despite efforts from both sides to find the winning goal. Both teams played cautiously as fatigue set in, and the match ended in a draw, forcing a penalty shoot-out. Al Ittihad emerged victorious with a 3-1 shoot-out win, securing third place in the league. Al Amerat’s Ahmed al Noufli won the league’s top scorer award with 8 goals, while Al Ittihad’s Hajis Khairallah won the best goalkeeper award. The best player award went to Nizwa’s Majed al Saridi.

Mehidy, Jaker keep Bangladesh alive against South Africa

MIRPUR, Bangladesh: Half-centu-ries by Mehidy Hasan Miraz and Jaker Ali helped Bangladesh into an 81-run lead over South Africa before bad light brought an early finish to day three of the first Test on Wednesday. The hosts were 283-7 in Mirpur when the umpires called stumps about an hour before the sched-uled finish, with Mehidy on 87 and Nayeem Hasan on 16. Bangladesh spin bowling coach Mushtaq Ahmed said he believed his side could still snatch its first ever Test win against the visitors. “We have to bat as long as we can, score consistently and get whatever lead we can,” he said. “When we can start believing, we can come back and we fight,” he added. “When you don’t give up, the opposition also respects you.” South Africa only bowled five overs in the last session and fewer than 58 overs were played through the day after a rain interruption cut the second session short.

In the morning, South African pace bowler Kagiso Rabada took advantage of overcast conditions to take two wickets in three balls during the fifth over.



Bangladesh’s Mehidy Hasan Miraz (L) plays a shot during the third day of the first Test against South Africa at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka. — AFP

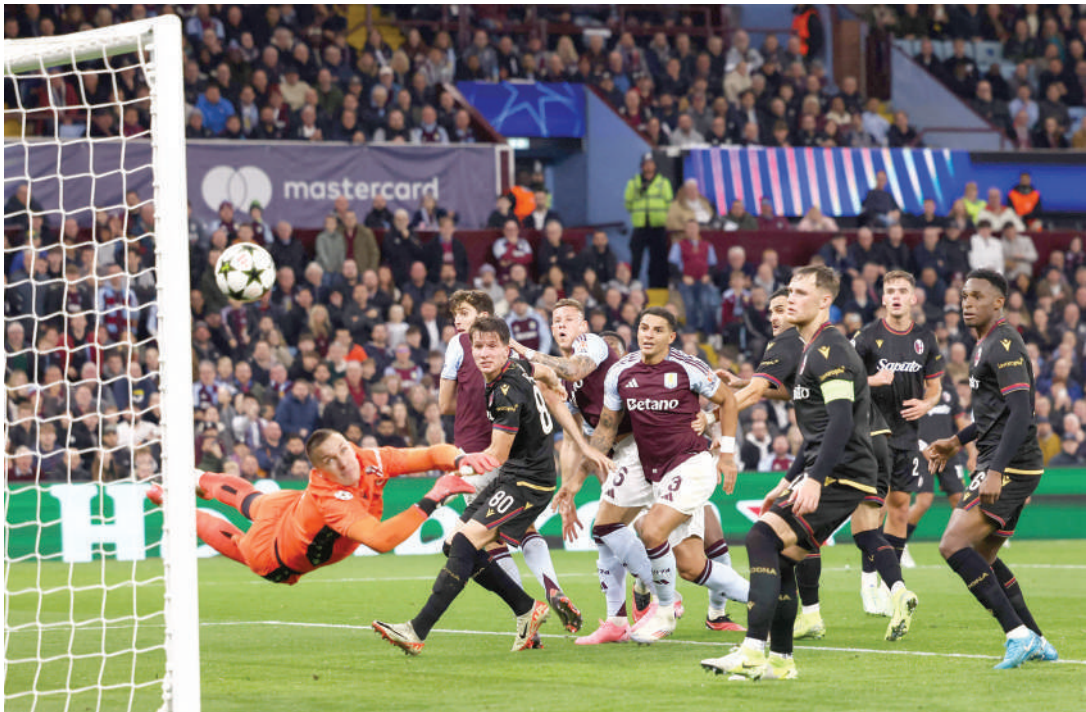
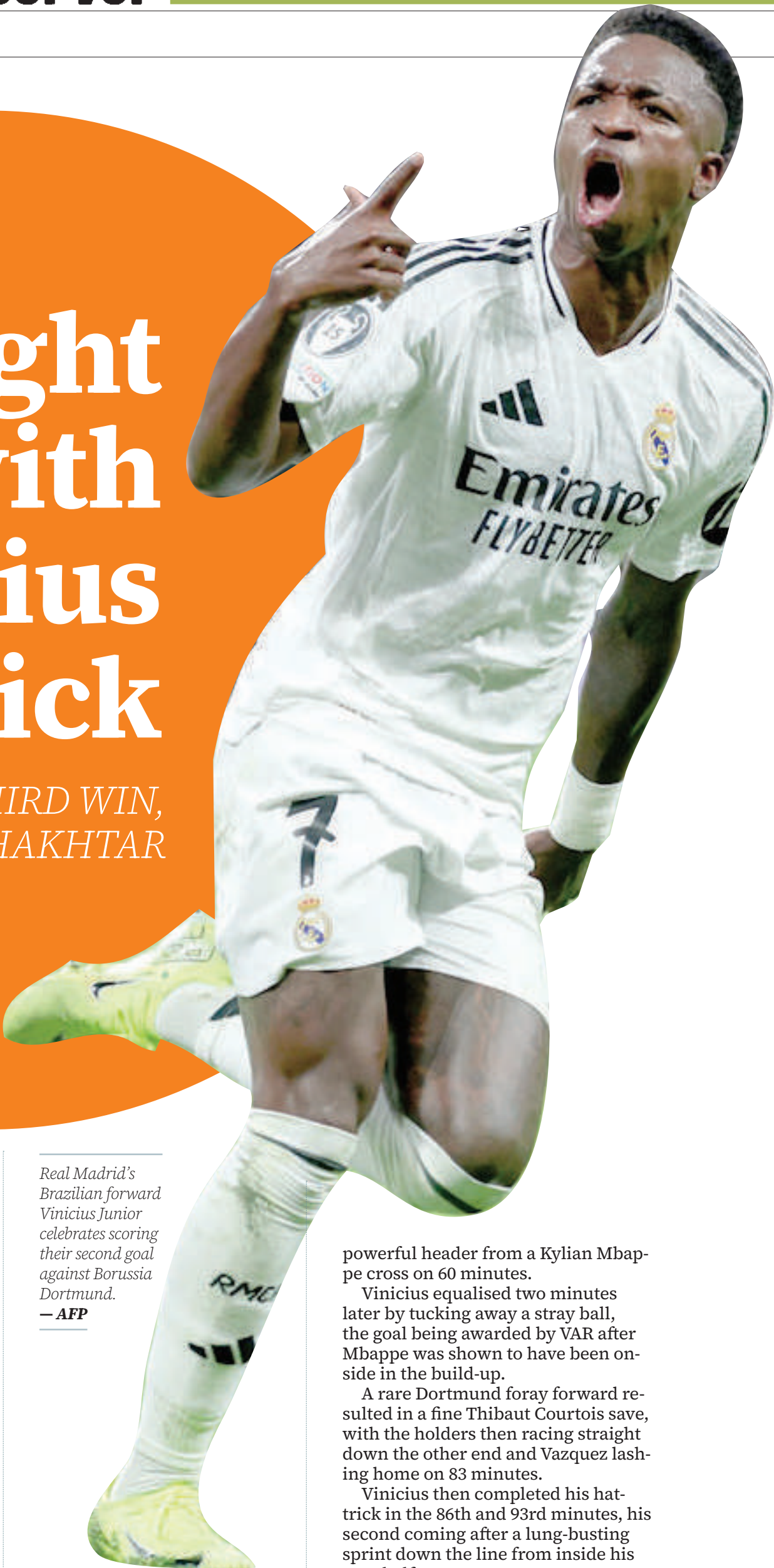
Mehidy and debutant Jaker added 138 runs for the seventh wicket to save Bangladesh from an innings defeat after they resumed at 101-3, chasing down South Africa’s 202-run first-innings lead. Jaker was eventually trapped lbw

by left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj for 58. “Obviously Bangladesh has done really well today. Conditions got a little bit better, if I’m honest, with a slightly used ball,” Maharaj said. “But I think we’re still ahead,” he

added. “Bangladesh have a lead and we’ve got three wickets more to go. We can restrict them as much as possible, but I still feel we’ll be in the bouncing seat. In the morning, South African pace bowler Kagiso Rabada took advantage of overcast conditions to take two wickets in three balls during the fifth over. Mahmudul Hasan Joy departed after making 40 when his attempted drive found a thick edge to first slip, where David Bedingham took the catch. Rabada’s fourth wicket of the innings came two balls later as he sent Mushfiqur Rahim’s mid-dle stump cartwheeling out of the ground with a full delivery that nipped back. The right-hander made 33. Wicketkeeper Litton Das followed for just seven as he edged a sharply turning delivery from Maharaj to wicketkeeper Kyle Verreynne and the dismissal was confirmed as caught on review, after an initial shout for lbw. — AFP

Real fight back with Vinicius hat-trick

VILLA GO TOP WITH THIRD WIN, ARSENAL EDGE SHAKHTAR



Aston Villa's Scottish midfielder John McGinn (unseen) scores his team first goal past Bologna's Polish goalkeeper Lukasz Skorupski (L) during the Uefa Champions League match between Aston Villa and Bologna at Villa Park in Birmingham, central England. — AFP

REAL MADRID came from behind to beat Borussia Dortmund 5-2 in the Champions League on October 22, 2024, with Vinicius Junior scoring a hat-trick, as Aston Villa maintained their 100 per cent record to go top of the table.

Vinicius struck three times in the second half as Madrid bounced back from two goals down to inflict further anguish on Dortmund — in the repeat of last season's final which Real won 2-0.

First-half goals in quick succession by Donyell Malen and Jamie Gittens had given Dortmund a two-goal lead at half-time.

"Things were very quiet when we got to the dressing room 2-0 down at half-time," Vinicius, 24, told Movistar.

"But we listened to the boss (coach Carlo Ancelotti) and agreed one simple thing: if we can score first then we'll fight back and win once again."

The 15-time champions duly struck back early in the second period via Antonio Rudiger and Vinicius, before Lucas Vazquez sent Real ahead, and the Brazilian netted two more inside



AC Milan's Christian Pulisic scores their first goal against Club Brugge. — Reuters

the final 10 minutes.

After the surprise defeat at Lille last time out, Madrid's hunt for a record-extending 16th Champions League crown is back on track as they move to ninth in the standings, on six points.

Malen swept the Germans into the lead on the half-hour following a deft pass from Serhou Guirassy that split open the defence.

Madrid defender Eder Militao was then left beating the turf in frustration four minutes later when Gittens flew in at the back post to double Dortmund's lead.

Rudiger halved the deficit with a

Real Madrid's Brazilian forward Vinicius Junior celebrates scoring their second goal against Borussia Dortmund. — AFP

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RESULTS ON TUESDAY:	
AC Milan (ITA) 3 (Pulisic 34, Reijnders 61, 71) Club Brugge (BEL) 1 (Sabbe 51)	
Monaco (FRA) 5 (Minamino 20, 70, Embolo 45+4, Singo 54, Akliouche 90+7) Red Star Belgrade (SRB) 1 (Ndiaye 27-pen)	
Arsenal (ENG) 1 (Riznyk 29-og) Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR) 0	
Aston Villa (ENG) 2 (McGinn 55, Duran 64) Bologna (ITA) 0	
Girona (ESP) 2 (Gutierrez 42, Juanpe 73) Slovan Bratislava (SVK) 0	
Juventus (ITA) 0 Stuttgart (GER) 1 (Toure 90+2)	
Paris Saint-Germain (FRA) 1 (Hakimi 55) PSV Eindhoven (NED) 1 (Lang 34)	
Real Madrid (ESP) 5 (Rudiger 60, Vinicius Junior 62, 86, 90+3, Vazquez 83) Borussia Dortmund (GER) 2 (Malen 30, Gittens 34)	
Sturm Graz (AUT) 0 Sporting Lisbon (POR) 2 (Santos 23, Gyokeres 53)	

powerful header from a Kylian Mbappe cross on 60 minutes.

Vinicius equalised two minutes later by tucking away a stray ball, the goal being awarded by VAR after Mbappe was shown to have been on-side in the build-up.

A rare Dortmund foray forward resulted in a fine Thibaut Courtois save, with the holders then racing straight down the other end and Vazquez lashing home on 83 minutes.

Vinicius then completed his hat-trick in the 86th and 93rd minutes, his second coming after a lung-busting sprint down the line from inside his own half.

Arsenal emerged 1-0 winners at home to Ukraine's Shakhtar Donetsk thanks to an own goal from the visitors' goalkeeper.

Dmytro Riznyk could only grasp at thin air after Gabriel Martinelli had cut in from the left and smacked the ball against the near post before it rebounded back off the goalie and over the line.

Leandro Trossard missed a penalty near the end, but Arsenal had already done enough to secure their second win of the tournament.

TABLE-TOPPING VILLA

Fellow Premier League side Aston Villa are enjoying an excellent return to European football's top table after 41 years, as they won their third match in three Champions League outings this term with a 2-0 victory against Bologna.

"We are playing seriously, we are playing focused, responsible and the team is progressing and maturing in everything," manager Unai Emery told TNT Sports.

John McGinn opened the scoring at Villa Park 10 minutes after the interval and Jhon Duran wrapped up the points in the 64th minute, sending Emery's side to the top of the league phase table on nine points with zero goals conceded.

Stuttgart sank Juventus 1-0 in Turin, thanks to a stoppage-time winner by El Bilal Toure. — AFP



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MAJOR THRUST ON GENERATIVE AI IN OMAN



Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology at MoTCIT, addressing the conference on Wednesday.

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, OCT 23

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) held here yesterday, October 23, 2024, a conference highlighting generative AI under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

In his keynote address, the Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology at MoTCIT, Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, highlighted the significance of generative AI. “Generative artificial intelligence is considered the new revolution in AI, with its economic contribution estimated to be between \$2 to \$4 trillion by 2030.

“Therefore, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has given utmost importance to generative AI.” The initiatives are part of Oman’s wider plan to grow the AI sector, he said.

“Last month, under the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Council of Ministers approved the National Programme for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Digital Technologies. This programme aims to localise and enhance artificial intelligence in economic sectors, as well as localise AI technologies in developmental sectors.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Stone laid for RO 78m OQ fuel storage project

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 23

OQ, the global integrated energy group, has laid the foundation stone for its Strategic Fuel Storage Project in Musandam.

The ground-breaking ceremony for the project, with an investment value of over RO 78 million (approximately \$204 million), was held under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, in the presence of local dignitaries and officials. This initiative forms part of OQ’s commitment to sustainable economic development and addresses the rising demand for petroleum products driven by population growth and increased commercial activities.

The storage facility will serve as a strategic reserve for various fuels, including gasoline (M91 & M95), oil, gas and jet fuel, ensuring uninterrupted supply during emergencies. The facility will have a storage capacity exceeding 14,536 cubic metres.

Sayyid Ibrahim highlighted the significance of the project: “The Strategic Fuel Storage Project ensures that Musandam’s fuel needs are met, even in emergencies covering the needs of nationals and residents for different fuel products. This is a vital contribution from OQ to the governorate, bolstering its ongoing investments and its support for local communities.”

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufl, Minister of Energy and Minerals, stated that the groundbreaking of the Strategic Fuel Storage Project in Musandam is part of the ministry’s ongoing efforts, in collaboration



The initiative forms part of OQ’s commitment to sustainable economic development.

Highlights

This project marks another addition to OQ Group’s investments in Musandam of over

RO 800 MILLION.

It also underscores OQ Group’s commitment to fulfilling its national responsibility in advancing energy sustainability and responding effectively to the growing energy demands in the governorate.

with OQ Group, to ensure the availability of petroleum products for residents and citizens, especially in emergencies.

Al Aufl also highlighted the increasing local demand for petroleum products driven by population growth and expanding commercial activities.

Ashraf bin Hamed al Mamari, Group CEO of OQ, said: “This project marks another addition to OQ Group’s investments in Musandam of over RO 800 million. It also underscores OQ Group’s commitment to fulfilling its national responsibility in advancing energy sustainability and responding effectively to the growing energy demands in the governorate.”

Steps outlined to bolster Oman’s global competitiveness

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, OCT 23

AS part of a series of media engagements aimed at enhancing communication with the public, experts and stakeholders in the economy, the Ministry of Economy held a media gathering titled “Towards a Competitive Oman”.

The event provided a comprehensive overview of Oman’s competitive performance and the initiatives aimed at improving the country’s position on the global competitiveness map since the launch of Oman Vision 2040.

The media gathering focused on Oman’s significant progress in several international competitiveness indicators over the past years and the government’s commitment to further improving its standing in global rankings.

The gathering also discussed the implementation of annual plans by national teams dedicated to enhancing competitiveness, stressing the importance of collaboration across government entities involved in this crucial task.



These achievements were not coincidental but the result of dedicated efforts by specialised teams working to improve the quality of data, refine its accuracy and update frameworks to align with international competitiveness standards.

DR SAID BIN MOHAMMED AL SAQRI
Minister of Economy

Addressing the gathering, Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, highlighted Oman’s notable progress in several key international indicators, in alignment with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

He emphasised that Oman advanced an impressive 95 positions in the 2024 Environmental Performance Index, moving from 149th place to 54th globally within just two years.

The minister further noted that Oman jumped 39 places in the 2024 Heritage Foundation’s Index of Economic Freedom, securing 56th place globally.

Additionally, Oman improved by 9 positions in the United Nations’ E-Government Development Index, advancing from 50th to 41st place. Furthermore, the country made significant strides across the six global governance indicators published by the World Bank.

“These achievements were not coincidental but the result of dedicated efforts by specialised teams working to improve the quality of data, refine its accuracy and update frameworks to align with international com-

petitiveness standards,” Dr Al Saqri stated.

He emphasised that this progress reflects much more than numbers — it signifies Oman’s steady march towards achieving the ambitious objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The minister pointed out that collaborative efforts across government sectors have been instrumental in enhancing overall performance and competitiveness, while also supporting the country’s developmental goals on a global scale.

The media gathering also outlined future steps to bolster Oman’s global competitiveness. These include exploring the possibility of Oman joining the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) and preparing for its inclusion in the World Bank’s Business Readiness Index by 2025.

This index is a vital global indicator, offering insights into the progress governments are making to support and expand private sector activities, thereby increasing their contribution to sustainable growth.

The National Competitiveness Office continues its efforts to improve

14 key indicators through the work of four dedicated national teams. The upcoming steps include further studies on joining the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) and preparing for Oman’s inclusion in the Business Readiness Index by 2025.

Speaking exclusively to the Observer, Abdulwahab al Maimani, Global Innovation Index Expert at the National Competitiveness Office, discussed the evolving role of artificial intelligence (AI) in Oman.

He explained that AI in this context is more about designing systems rather than relying heavily on AI.

For instance, the development of a digital speaker capable of answering a wide range of structured questions related to international expertise, and providing responses in the same language is currently underway.

The project is expected to launch soon, with Al Maimani focusing on the AI aspect of this development.

He also addressed whether Oman’s current number of science and technology graduates is sufficient or if the country holds a high ranking nationally in these fields.

ADVERTORIALS

CSR INITIATIVE



Himmah volunteers play pivotal role in Dar Al Atta’a’s food donation drive

MUSCAT: Exemplifying the significance of responsible corporate citizenship in advancing community welfare, National Finance, the leading finance company in the Sultanate of Oman, partnered with Dar Al Atta’a to organise food donations for distribution to families in need, in honour of World Food Day.

The company’s Himmah volunteer group was instrumental in coordinating contributions from benefactors and packaging essential items into boxes, working alongside volunteers from Dar Al Atta’a and other like-minded organisations.

World Food Day, observed globally on October 16, highlights the critical issue of food insecurity while advocating for the availability of nutritious, affordable, and safe food for all. National Finance’s commitment to this vital cause reflects the company’s deep awareness of the challenges facing communities across the nation.

By actively engaging in community empowerment initiatives, National Finance not only fulfils its corporate responsibility but also fosters a collective effort to ensure the welfare of all segments of society.

Tariq bin Suleiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, stated, “A core aspect of National Finance’s operational ethos is our commitment to positively impacting the community and striving to improve lives while promoting equity across the nation.

We take pride in our involvement with Dar Al Atta’a’s food donation drive, which aims to make nutritious food accessible to underprivileged families in our communities. Through this initiative, we not only raise awareness about the critical importance of food security in fostering a thriving society but also encourage our peers and customers to join us in supporting and uplifting those in need.”

Through its Imtidad social responsibility arm, National Finance has established a distinguished legacy of leading and participating in social welfare and empowerment endeavours that have significantly enriched the social fabric of the country.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds enhances festive offers

MALABAR Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 360 showrooms across 13 countries, has ramped up their festive season offers ahead of Dhanteras and Diwali by providing free gold coins on gold jewellery purchase.

The limited period offers, which are valid across all Malabar Gold & Diamonds showrooms across Oman from October 25 to October 29, will provide customers with the opportunity to get Free Gold coins on the purchase of gold jewellery worth RO 300.

As part of the ongoing offer that has been running across Malabar Gold & Diamonds showrooms, customers are eligible for free gold coins on the purchase of diamond and precious gem jewellery worth RO 300 and above.

As the auspicious occasion of Dhanteras draws near, the assured gold coin offer that has been extended to cover gold jewellery purchase as well, is sure to be great news for jewellery buyers.

“The rise in gold price that the market has witnessed over the past week is further testament to the incredible position that Gold has as a safe haven asset.

As Dhanteras approaches, a time when many of our customers choose to invest in gold as a symbol of prosperity and good



Customers are eligible for free gold coins on the purchase of diamond and precious gem jewellery worth RO 300 and above.

fortune, we are excited to provide free gold coins with every gold jewellery purchase. This is our way of enhancing the value of their purchase and adding extra joy to their festive moments”, commented Shamlal Ahamed, MD-International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

On Dhanteras Day (Tuesday, October 29), all showrooms of Malabar Gold & Diamonds in Oman will be open from 8:00 am, to be able to serve the high cus-

tomers footfall that is expected at the showrooms.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds’ Pay 10 per cent advance offer, introduced ahead of the festive season, has been a significant benefit for customers, with thousands taking advantage of the opportunity to secure the best rates on their jewellery purchases.

The brand has also announced that this advance payment option will remain available until Dhanteras, on October 29.

‘911 TURBO REMASTERED’ AUCTION SHINES AT PORSCHE FESTIVAL

MUSCAT: RM Sotheby’s will auction online the one-off ‘911 Turbo Remastered’ during this year’s Icons of Porsche festival in Dubai. The car was first unveiled at last year’s festival to kick off global celebrations for the ‘50 Years of Turbo’ anniversary.

The auction will commence online on Wednesday 20 November 2024, and will conclude during the evening on Sunday 24 November while the car is live on the main stage at Icons of Porsche.

“Icons of Porsche has cemented itself as the annual highlight for the car community in this region, and RM Sotheby’s is truly excited to be a part of this year’s festival,” said Duccio Lopresto, Business Development Director, RM Sotheby’s.

“Concluding the auction at Icons of Porsche will bring new attention and excitement to the festival.”



The one-of-a-kind ‘911 Turbo Remastered’ is a modern-day interpretation of the original 911 Turbo prototype gifted to Louise Piëch in 1974. It is also a showcase of the extensive capabilities of the Sonderwunsch special request programme.

Sonderwunsch is the special request arm of both Porsche Exclusive Manufaktur and the Porsche Classic department,

which takes personalisation to the highest level where almost anything is possible, hence the slogan: ‘you dream it, we build it’.

Tickets for this year’s Icons of Porsche festival are now online available via IconsOfPorsche.com.

The 911 Turbo Remastered project was a collaboration between Style Porsche, Porsche Exclusive Manufaktur and the Porsche Middle East and Africa regional office.

“This very special car is not only a showcase of what is possible with our Porsche personalisation programmes,” said Manfred Bräunl, Chief Executive Officer, Porsche Middle East and Africa FZE. “It also highlights the brave and pioneering Porsche spirit as we look back to the inspiration for this project, the very first 911 Turbo.”

Saud Bahwan Automobile honours winners of national skills contest

MUSCAT: Saud Bahwan Automotive recently announced the successful completion of the Toyota Service, National Skills Contest, a prestigious event designed to recognise and reward Toyota Oman’s outstanding service personnel who demonstrate exceptional skills and dedication.

This annual contest showcases the talent and technical expertise of Toyota’s service staff, highlighting their passion for maintaining the highest standards of customer care.

During the event, participants from Toyota service centres across the country competed in various categories, from technical diagnostics to customer service excellence.

The month-long contest had been designed in two segments, including written tests and on-vehicle tests. The candidates were also required to do actual demonstrations of denting, painting and fault-rectification in order to evaluate their skills.

This annual contest showcases the talent and technical expertise of Toyota’s service staff, highlighting their passion for maintaining the highest standards of customer care.



A panel of judges over the period, observed each contestant and evaluated their performance with a scoring sheet, which covered important parameters. Each contestant brought forth a wealth of knowledge and hands-on expertise, representing the pinnacle of Toyota’s renowned commitment to customer

satisfaction and vehicle care.

At the conclusion of the National Skills Contest, an award ceremony was held to honour and felicitate outstanding Toyota service performers.

Abdullah bin Mohamed Bahwan, Managing Director – Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group, handed over

the awards to the outstanding performers across the different categories and applauded their passionate efforts.

Speaking on the significance of such a distinctive event, Abdullah bin Mohamed Bahwan said, “The Toyota Service National Skills Contest is a key function that reflects the core values of Saud Bahwan Automotive. It is a celebration of the dedication and talent of our Toyota service personnel, whose passion for excellence aligns perfectly with our objectives for customer satisfaction. Through their skills and commitment, they ensure that every Toyota customer experiences unmatched service quality, thereby building trust in our brand.”

The contest not only acknowledges the hard work and talent of the participants but also serves as a medium of inspiration for the entire service team to continuously outdo expectations and strive for excellence.

OMAN INFRA FUND
RAKIZA CLOSES
\$300 MILLON
SUBSCRIPTION DEAL



CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 23

MUNEER
AL MUNEERI
OIM Founder and
Rakiza co-CEO

OMAN-BASED infrastructure fund Rakiza has successfully closed a transaction of \$300 million in a subscription facility of Rakiza Fund I, a \$1 billion fund focused on investing in infrastructure assets in the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Investors in the subscription facility include a number of prominent regional and global institutional investors and asset allocators.

An announcement to this effect was made by MUFG EMEA (Europe, Middle East, and Africa), the wholesale banking arm of Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (MUFG).

Tokyo-headquartered MUFG (Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group) is one of the world's leading financial groups, with a global network spanning over 2,100 locations in more than 40 markets including the Americas, Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Asia and Oceania.

In a post on Wednesday, MUFG EMEA announced that it acted as Structuring Co-Arranger, Facility Agent, Security Agent, Issuing Bank and Lender for the subscription line facility.

"This transaction empowers Rakiza to more efficiently deploy capital in attractive greenfield infrastructure projects within the region and simplify its day-to-day fund operations," MUFG EMEA stated.

Congratulating Rakiza on the successful transaction, Darryl D'Souza, Head of FIG Sponsor Coverage, MUFG EMEA, added: "We are very pleased to have enabled this successful transaction for Rakiza, a Fund with whom there is good overlap in MUFG's geographic coverage in the MENA region and product capabilities in Project and Corporate Finance."

For Muscat-based Rakiza, a leading global investor, developer, and long-term fund manager of core infrastructure assets, the subscription deal adds to a long list of successes achieved in recent years. The private equity infrastructure fund is independently co-managed by regulated independent fund manager Oman Infrastructure Investment Management (OIM) and UK-based investor, developer, and fund manager Equitix.

Earlier this year, Rakiza announced the financial close of its first transaction in Saudi Arabia, by acquiring a 40 per cent stake in Tihama Power Generation Company, which owns and operates four plants producing 1,600 MW of electrical power and 6.3 million pounds per hour of process steam.

Muneer al Muneeri, OIM Founder and Rakiza co-CEO, described the latest transaction as a "first-of-a-kind subscription line facility for an infrastructure fund in the MENA region".

He added: "This facility provides us with a strong competitive advantage, enabling us to rapidly deploy into compelling infrastructure investment opportunities within the region, creating value for our investors and stakeholders."

Shore power investment
opportunity in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, OCT 23

AN investment opportunity in shore power infrastructure has been unveiled by SOHAR Port and Freezone in a move to reduce emissions and enhance sustainability in maritime operations. Companies wishing to participate in the strategic project must follow a structured process to express their interest, with the deadline for submissions set for January 16, 2025.

Shore power, also known as "cold ironing" or "alternative maritime power," refers to the provision of electrical power to docked ships from the shore.

This enables vessels to shut off their diesel engines while in port, significantly reducing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

As environmental regulations tighten globally, shore power infrastructure is becoming a critical investment for ports, helping reduce the carbon footprint of maritime operations.

In remarks to *Oman Observer*, Dr Abdullah al Abri (VP Sustainability), said, "At SOHAR Port and Freezone, we are setting new benchmarks in maritime sustainability. The shore power project is not just about reducing emissions — it's about positioning SOHAR as the premier hub for innovation and growth in the region.

This investment marks a pivotal moment in our journey to become the leading port in the Middle East and a global example of sustainable leadership."

The shift toward shore power aligns with SOHAR's long-term commitment to sustainability, enhancing the port's appeal to eco-conscious shipping companies and contributing to Oman Vision 2040 goals of reducing carbon emissions across key sectors.



The shore power project is not just about reducing emissions — it's about positioning SOHAR as the premier hub for innovation and growth in the region.

Installing shore power systems not only benefits the environment by minimising emissions from idling ships but also offers economic benefits for port operators, shipping companies, and local communities.

Eng Mohammed al Ambusaidi (Project Manager) added, "We are excited to invite forward-thinking and visionary investors to be part of this transformative journey.

The shore power initiative offers a unique opportunity to contribute to a greener future while leveraging SOHAR's strategic location and world-class infrastructure. Together, we can create lasting environmental and economic value. Such a project is creating a legacy of innovation and sustainability for the future."

By adopting shore power, SOHAR Port and Freezone can position itself as a leader in green port technologies in the

region, attracting more sustainable trade and investment. The investment opportunity represents a strategic move toward future-proofing the port's operations while offering a promising return for investors.

Interested companies are required to send an official letter confirming their interest to SOHAR's procurement and contract department via email.

Upon receipt, the department will send a non-disclosure agreement (NDA), which must be signed and returned within two working days.

Once the NDA is signed, SOHAR will provide the investment opportunity documents, including a brief on the project and technical requirements. Companies will then submit non-binding technical proposals in response to the Request for Proposals (RFP) guidelines.

MAJOR THRUST ON GENERATIVE AI IN OMAN

FROM PAGE 13

It also emphasises the governance of artificial intelligence with a human-centred vision for the benefit of humanity," he stated.

The conference also included the final ceremony of the "Engineer it with AI" competition, which was launched by the Ministry earlier in August.

"The idea of the competition is to encourage youth to come up with real-world ideas and applications

to solve generative AI challenges. Today, we are pleased to honour the best outputs of this competition and the winning teams," said Dr Al Shaithani.

The first winner - Embedded Stars - is an educational platform which utilises generative AI to offer various learning features including customised study plans, summary of notes and a smart assistant.

The second winner - AI Hire - is a recruitment platform that uses AI to analyse and generate resumes

quickly and efficiently. In third place is OmniWare, which utilises AI to improve the accuracy and speed of fracture identification within X-Rays aimed at combating medical errors which can reach 20 per cent due to time constraints.

According to officials, several private and public bodies are currently in the process of adopting several models created by participants.

The conference also featured several panel discussions with local

and global experts highlighting several key topics including the impacts of quantum computing on AI technologies, generative AI as a driver for future development, and changing business models.

The National Programme for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Digital Technologies falls under the government's strategy of boosting the contribution of the digital economy to the local GDP from 2 per cent currently, to 5 per cent by 2030 and 10 per cent by 2040.

HSBC CEO tells staff senior redundancies inevitable after revamp

LONDON: Some senior HSBC staff should brace for job cuts after the bank's latest restructuring, Chief Executive Georges Elhedery told staff in a memo seen by Reuters on Wednesday.

"Inevitably some of our colleagues will face redundancies as we streamline duplicative senior roles," Elhedery said in the memo after announcing one of the bank's biggest overhauls in recent years.

The bank on Tuesday said it would merge some operations and split its geographic footprint into East and West, as Elhedery stamps his mark on the Asia-focused lender by trying to strip out overlapping management roles to trim costs.

A spokesperson for the bank confirmed the memo's contents but declined to comment further. The memo was reported earlier by Bloomberg News.

"The leadership team will spend more time with you in the coming days to explain these changes in more detail and to give you the

The bank on Tuesday said it would merge some operations and split its geographic footprint into East and West,



A HSBC bank branch in Hong Kong. — Reuters file photo

opportunity to ask questions," Elhedery told staff.

HSBC has split up its operations into four business lines, namely UK, Hong Kong, corporate and institutional banking, and wealth banking.

Those changes should "boost accountability for each of the businesses, identifying underperforming areas more clearly," Morningstar

analyst Michael Makdad said.

The reorganisation follows a similar one by Barclays earlier this year, which split its business into five units in a move that CEO C.S. Venkatakrishnan said would help to make clearer how each was performing. HSBC added that chief risk officer Pam Kaur would become its chief financial officer from January 1.

She replaces Elhedery, who took over from Noel Quinn as CEO in September.

Quinn had pivoted the bank heavily towards Asia during his stewardship of the bank, whose origins can be traced back to Hong Kong.

"The creation of a new international wealth and premier banking division signals HSBC's intent to be the bank of choice for the rich," noted Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell trading group.

"The Middle East is expected to be a major opportunity for the group given its significant wealth and HSBC will want to have people on the ground ready to serve."

Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown, said cost-cutting was "a big driver" of the changes.

She added that "fresh efficiencies (are) likely through the simplification of its geographical structures and the merger of its commercial and institutional banking operations". — **Agencies**

OPINION

Why combating mismanagement in state institutions is key



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI.

THE State Financial and Administrative Audit Authority publishes its annual report to track developments within various government units and agencies, as well as the performance of government investments in companies under its supervision. This process promotes transparency and strengthens integrity by addressing mismanagement within state institutions. The 2023 report detailed numerous violations recorded by the Authority during the previous year. It emphasised the need for continuous follow-up with government and private institutions to identify shortcomings and uncover the facts before making any accusations against institutions or individuals. This approach ensures a thorough examination before determining whether malpractice has occurred. The latest report noted the recovery of financial amounts for the state treasury,

totalling approximately RO 178 million over the past two years (2022-2023). It also handled 115 cases related to public funds and processed 951 complaints. The Authority approached these cases with a high level of transparency, integrity, and accountability, as required by regulatory systems. In the past year, the Authority addressed issues in various economic and social sectors, evaluating institutions' readiness to handle their responsibilities in areas such as education, health, tourism, oil, minerals, electricity and water, municipal work and civil society organisations. These investigations included scrutinising the legitimacy of expenses for maintenance, travel, events, and other administrative and operational activities. The report highlighted several convictions related to bribery, forgery of official and unofficial documents, embezzle-

Highlights

The latest report noted the recovery of financial amounts for the state treasury, totalling approximately

RO 178 MILLION over the past two years (2022-2023). It also handled 115 cases related to public funds and processed 951 complaints.

ment, abuse of power, data falsification in government records, exploitation of positions for personal gain, conflicts of interest, misappropriation of public funds, and failure to fulfil job responsibilities. Additionally, the Authority continues to review draft laws, regulations, and systems within these institutions to improve governance. The agency is now enhancing its community partnerships to uncover facts about state institutions. This requires a careful approach to handling complaints and reports from the public. When reliable evidence of mismanagement or manipulation by those in charge is provided, it becomes easier to pursue accountability. This, in turn, supports efforts to create job opportunities, attract investments, reform judicial institutions, and strengthen the media's role in addressing these issues.

CHINA PINS STIMULUS ON MONEY MERRY-GO-ROUND

CHINA'S economy has long been supported by a great wall of debt, much of it hidden off local governments' balance sheets. To reboot economic growth, Beijing plans to swap these borrowings into bonds with full, rather than implicit, state backing. The rejig will juice spending by the provinces for a while. There is no official number but the International Monetary Fund estimates the total borrowing of local government financing vehicles (LGFVs) at about \$9 trillion, or about half of GDP. These dues include a ragbag of shadowy instruments such as enterprise bonds and financing from trusts. These borrowings accumulated partly because Beijing limited how much provinces could raise through official bonds. Now, the Ministry of Finance is planning a one-time, large-scale expansion in the debt ceiling to formally acknowledge these outstanding liabilities. The money merry-go-round will improve transparency and give local governments some breathing room. Take Liaoning. The province in China's northeastern rustbelt was allowed in 2023 to refinance 87 billion yuan (\$12.2 billion), with bonds maturing in 7 to 30 years on an average interest rate around 3.5%. Its uptake of the debt swap programme, per Moody's, was equal to 50% of its total debt from LGFVs - one of the biggest buckets of hidden debt - and 111% of the short-term debt from its public LGFV issuers. Scaling up this swap programme will help other provinces to avoid a short-term liquidity crunch. Banks might be in brighter mood to lend more too, as replacing dubious borrowings with government bonds will most likely allow lenders to slash risk weightings assigned to these assets. By moving the money from one pocket into another, Beijing will wring out efficiencies for borrowers. That will allow local authorities to increase short-term spending on public housing and incentives to boost consumption. The principal amount of debt governments owe will not be reduced. It may even rise. But China will ease a short-term source of financial instability. — Reuters



ALAN RAPPEPORT
The writer is an economic policy reporter at The New York Times, based in Washington.



A housing development under construction in Shanghai, China. — The New York Times

THE global economy has managed to avoid falling into a recession even though the world's central banks have raised interest rates to their highest levels in years to try to tame rapid inflation, the International Monetary Fund said on Tuesday. But the IMF, in a new report, also cautioned that escalating violence in the Middle East and the prospect of a new round of trade wars stemming from political developments in the United States remain significant threats. New economic forecasts released by the fund Tuesday showed that the global fight against soaring prices has largely been won: Global output is expected to hold steady at 3.2% this year and next. Fears of a widespread postpandemic contraction have been averted, but the fund warned that many countries still face a challenging mix of high debt and sluggish growth. The report was released as finance ministers and central bank governors from around the world convened in Washington for the annual meetings of the IMF and the World Bank. The gathering is taking place two weeks before a presidential election in the United States that could result in a major shift toward protectionism and tariffs if former President Donald Trump is elected. Trump has threatened to impose across-the-board tariffs of as much as 50%, most likely setting off retaliation and trade wars. Economists think that could fuel price increases and slow growth, possibly leading to a recession. "Fear of a Trump presidency will loudly reverberate behind the scenes," said Mark Sobel, a former Treasury official who is now the US chair of the Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum. Sobel said global policymakers would probably be wondering what another Trump presidency would "mean for the

The year-over-year global inflation rate is poised to decline to 3.5% by the end of next year from 5.3% this year. That is down from its peak of 9.4% in 2022 and would be below the average level of inflation from 2000 to 2019.

future of multilateralism, international cooperation, US-China stresses and their worldwide ripples, and global trade and finance, among others." That uncertainty is hanging over a global economy that has proved to be remarkably resilient during several years of turmoil. The year-over-year global inflation rate is poised to decline to 3.5% by the end of next year from 5.3% this year. That is down from its peak of 9.4% in 2022 and would be below the average level of inflation from 2000 to 2019. "While the global decline in inflation is a major milestone, downside risks are rising and now dominate the outlook," Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, the IMF's chief economist, wrote in the report. The strength of the global economy continues to be driven by the United States, whose growth is outpacing that of the other advanced economies of the Group of 7 nations. Inflation has already fallen close to the Federal Reserve's 2% goal in the United States and, as a result, the Fed has begun cutting interest rates. The IMF upgraded its projection for output in the United States this year to 2.8% from an earlier estimate of 2.6%, as a result of stronger consumer spending and higher wages. Economic growth is projected to slow to 2.2% in 2025. At a news conference Tuesday, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen noted that economic growth in the United States has also been almost twice as fast as most other advanced economies over the past two years and said the Biden administration is

working to sustain that momentum. "America's strong economic performance is leading the way as a key engine of global growth," Yellen said. Output in the euro area remains sluggish this year at 0.8%, but the IMF estimates that growth will pick up in 2025. Other large countries are struggling, posing risks to the global economy. Growth in China and India is poised to decline this year and next. The IMF estimates China's output at 4.8% this year and it is expected to fall to 4.5% in 2025. Output in India is forecast to fall to 6.5% in 2025 from 7% in 2024. The Chinese economy grew 0.9% in July through September over the previous three months, China's National Bureau of Statistics reported last month. China has been hampered by a meltdown in its housing market, which has slowed construction spending. Local governments are facing budget crunches, and millions of college graduates have been struggling to find work. The IMF said there could be negative implications for the global economy if the contraction in China's property sector becomes deeper or runs longer. That could dampen consumer sentiment in China and slow global trade. Economists at the fund remain concerned about the toll that twin wars between Russia and Ukraine and Israel and Hamas could take on the world economy. If those wars escalate or expand into regional conflicts, they could reignite inflation by causing food and energy prices to spike, much as they did when Russia attacked Ukraine in 2022. The repercussions of protectionist industrial policies and rising trade tensions are also a risk, which the IMF said could hurt growth and disrupt supply chains. "Shifts toward undesirable trade and industrial policies can significantly lower output relative to our base line forecast," Gourinchas said. "While industrial and trade policy measures can sometimes boost investment and activity in the short run — especially when relying on debt-financed subsidies — they often lead to retaliation and fail to deliver sustained improvements in standards of living." The Biden administration has maintained most of the Chinese tariffs that were enacted during the Trump administration and recently decided to increase tariffs on imports of many Chinese green energy products. Trump has proposed blanket tariffs on all imports and even higher duties on Chinese goods. Yellen said that broad-based tariffs would have "a very negative impact" in the United States, raising prices on businesses and consumers. "It's a misguided approach," Yellen said. — The New York Times

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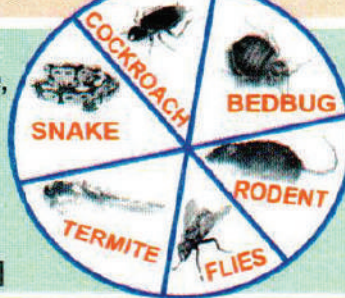
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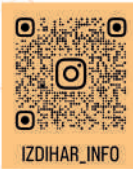
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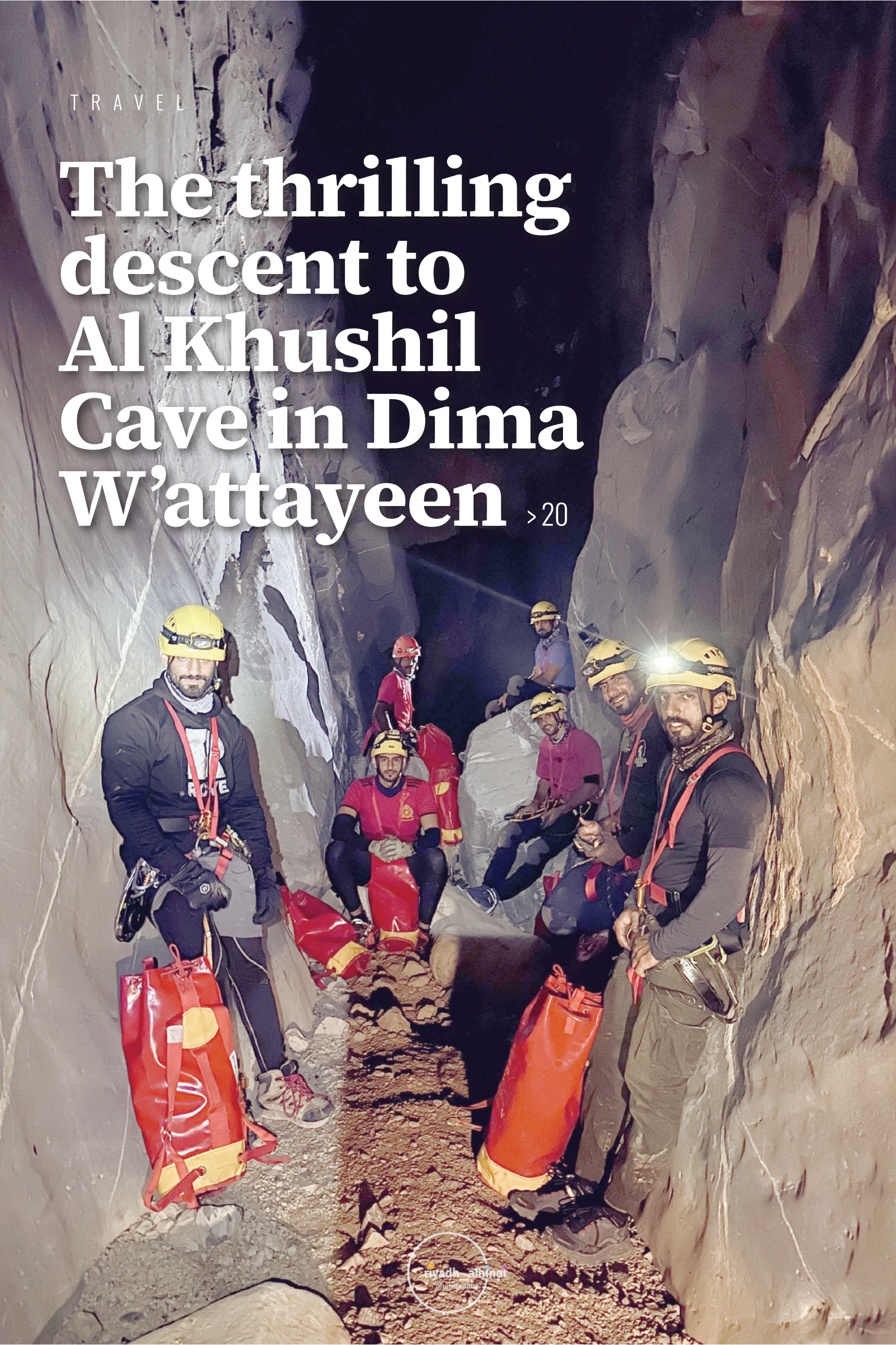
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ART/LIFE



CHANGINGWORLD

Winters in Oman are the perfect time for family gatherings



BY SHADDAD AL MUSALMI
shadadm75@gmail.com

Shaddad is a seasoned Omani journalist and currently one of Oman Observer's senior editors.

Family gatherings hold profound cultural significance among Omanis, particularly during the winter months. This period is characterised by milder weather, making it an ideal time for outdoor activities and social interactions.

The winter season often sees increased community engagement through these gatherings, where families may also invite neighbours or friends to join in celebrations. This inclusivity strengthens community ties and fosters a spirit of cooperation among individuals.

One of the primary benefits of family gatherings is the strengthening of familial relationships. During winter, families come together to celebrate various occasions. These gatherings allow family members to reconnect, share experiences, and support one another emotionally and socially.

The act of gathering fosters a sense of belonging and unity among family members, which is crucial for emotional well-being.

Winter gatherings also play a vital role in preserving Omani traditions and customs. Many families engage in traditional practices during these events, such as preparing traditional dishes like shuwa (slow-cooked lamb) or harees (a wheat and meat dish) among others.

Sharing these culinary traditions not only enhances the experience but also educates younger generations about their heritage. Additionally, storytelling sessions during these gatherings allow elders to pass down folklore and historical narratives that are integral to Omani identity.

Family gatherings also serve as essential social support networks within communities. In times of need — be it financial difficulties or health issues — families can rally around each other for assistance.

In addition, the mental health benefits associated with family gatherings cannot be overlooked. Engaging with loved ones during winter can alleviate feelings of loneliness or isolation that some individuals may experience during this season.

Familial love and support significantly enhance mental well-being by providing comfort and reducing stress. Engaging in activities such as games and group outings promotes happiness and uplifts mood.

Economically, family gatherings stimulate local economies by increasing spending on food, decorations, gifts, entertainment, and venue rentals. Local markets often see a surge in sales during this period, benefiting local businesses and creating job opportunities in the community.

As these cherished events continue to be celebrated in Oman each winter, they remain integral to Omani life, enriching both individual experiences and the broader community. Don't miss the chance to participate in family gatherings this coming winter.

QUICK FEATURES



LIFESTYLE

Artists of the French company Exit-Cirque Inextremiste, perform during the opening of Santa Lucia International Festival in Monterrey, Mexico. —AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

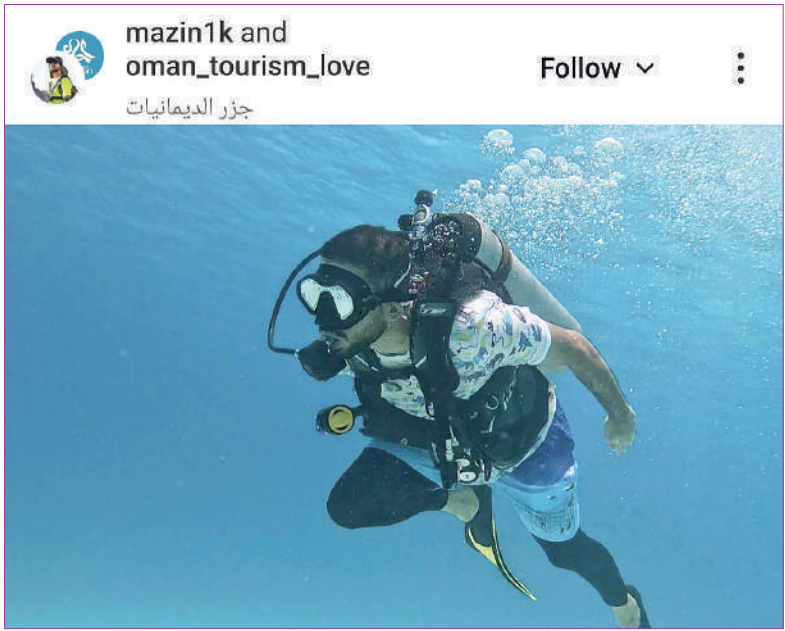
US singer Pharrell Williams poses on the red carpet upon arrival to attend the closing night headline gala screening of "Piece by Piece" at the Southbank Centre Royal Festival Hall, during the 2024 BFI London Film Festival. —AFP



FESTIVAL

A child dressed as Hindu deity Lakshman, brother of Lord Ram is pictured during a religious procession on the occasion of Nakkataiya festival in Varanasi. —AFP

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Taylor Swift bauble most popular Christmas decoration at Selfridges



Selfridges has revealed that an exclusive Taylor Swift Christmas decoration is the department store's top-selling festive decoration so far this year.

The Swiftie slogan bauble, a homage to the US singer, has beaten other popular culture items, including a Miranda Priestly Devil Wears Prada bauble, as this season's most popular decoration.

A "Press for Champagne" button, a yellow Selfridges bag, and a red wine glass are also among the top 10 most popular Christmas baubles.

Despite the fact there are still two months to go until Christmas and Halloween is yet to come, it seems shoppers are getting in the mood for the festive season.

The department store said sales in its recently opened Christmas Shop are up 20% on this time last year, with customers keen to snap up decorations, gifts and festive treats earlier than ever.

Selfridges buying manager Eleanor Gregory said: "Shoppers

want to make sure they have the Christmas popular decorations ahead of everyone else, ready to post across their social media come December.

"Last year we saw oat milk and anchovy baubles as well as Jelly bags fly off the shelves and appear all over Instagram and TikTok.

"This year it's all about the 'spicy marg' baubles, Taylor Swift-inspired festive cowboy hats, and our must-have 'Swiftie' bauble."

Selfridges has sold 14% more baubles at its Oxford Street store than this time last year, and 192% more lights and trees online.

The retailer has made its Christmas Shop 22% bigger than 2023 and offers shoppers a choice of more than 900 decorations.

The space on the lower ground floor of the West End store also features spinning trees, toy trains running on tracks, cuckoo clocks and a Lemax model village fairground snowscape. —PA Media/dpa



Back from the brink of extinction, Chilean frogs begin journey home

SANDWICHED between wet towels in temperature-monitored containers, a dozen critically endangered Loa water frogs were flown from Santiago to Calama earlier this month, the first step conservationists have taken to return the amphibians to their natural habitat in a river that runs through the world's driest desert.

The frogs were on the verge of extinction in 2019 after water extraction from mining, agriculture and development, exacerbated by climate change, decimated their habitat.

Scientists were able to rescue the remaining malnourished and sickly frogs, relocating 60 and transporting 14 to the Parquemet Zoo in Santiago for reproduction.

Once there, Osvaldo Cabeza, a herpetologist, led a successful reproduction campaign, reaching a peak of 500 individuals. Now, he wants to help bring them back to their environment.

"If we do not recover this habitat, it is very likely that the frogs will become extinct in the wild and will only exist in laboratories," Cabeza said, adding that different sectors need to come together to restore the habitat.

"It's important to make joint efforts to recover (the frog's) environment."

To do that, state-run copper giant Codelco and the local government created and recently inaugurated El Loa Biodiversity and Conservation Center (CENByC) in northern Calama. "The frog is a survivor. It has proven to be quite resilient to all the adverse conditions it has been exposed to," said Francisca Oliva, the centre's coordinator. "So my way of looking at this project in the future is quite hopeful."



At the new centre, scientists hope to support the frogs and encourage reproduction. In the future, they want to bring them back to their natural habitat. For now, the govern-

ment established a new protected zone in Calama and aims to work with companies and citizens to clean and protect the damaged habitat.

— Reuters

Al Khushil Cave, located 7 kilometres from Hail Al Hareem, presents an array of challenges for adventurers. The steep vertical descent of 140 metres, alongside hazardous conditions with slippery floors, showcases the cave's treacherous allure.



The thrilling descent to Al Khushil Cave in Dima W'attayeen



BY ARWA AL HASHIMI
PHOTOS BY RIYADH AL HINAI

THE FIRST encounter with Al Khushil Cave is nothing short of mesmerising. Nestled near the village of Hail Al Hareem in the Wilayat of Dima W'attayeen, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, the cave welcomes adventurers with an awe-inspiring entrance that hints at the wonders within.

As explorers approach, they are captivated by its striking natural features, from the glimmering crystal-clear pools to the intricately sculpted cave formations. Stepping inside is akin to entering a different world—one filled with wonders yet to be uncovered. There's an intoxicating sense of excitement, paired with the anticipation of potential life forms that may dwell in the hidden recesses of these subterranean spaces, particularly considering Oman's unique biodiversity.

Al Khushil Cave, located 7 kilometres from Hail Al Hareem, presents an array of challenges for adventurers. The steep vertical descent of 140 metres, alongside hazardous conditions with slippery floors, showcases the cave's treacherous allure.

Photographer and adventurer Riyadh Al Hinai, one of the first to descend into Al Khushil Cave, described the journey as both thrilling and treacherous.

"The cave is incredibly deep, with a watercourse known as the 'Impossible Mission' because of how difficult it becomes to cross when water levels rise after rain," Al Hinai explained.

"But despite the obstacles, it was an unforgettable experience. We were mesmerised by the cave's beauty and the refreshing coolness of its water pools."

DISCOVERING NEW WONDERS

Oman's geographical location bestows upon it a landscape rich in various land formations that set it apart in the Middle East. The rugged mountains, steep cliffs and deep valleys create an ideal environment for cave formations.

The team of volunteers and explorers collaborated with the Omani Caves Exploration Team with a mission to map the previously untouched caves around Hail Al Hareem. Their work unearthed three new caves, each named after local dialect terms used by villagers to describe these hidden mountain openings. Despite being known for generations, these caves had never been fully explored.

Al Khushil Cave, the crown jewel of these discoveries, reaches an impressive depth of 400 metres, while Al Naqah and Al Faqa' offer unique exploration experiences, each with their own distinct challenges and stunning features.

Al Naqah Cave, while known to local villagers, is another marvel that beckons the curious. Its dramatic 25-metre vertical entrance leads to a network of fissures and tranquil pools, exploring which offers a sense of tranquillity while surrounded by nature.

Likewise, Al Faqa' Cave, located a mere half-kilometre northeast of Hail Al Hareem, presents a technical challenge for seasoned explorers. Its stunning natural deposits represent both a risk and a reward.

The exploration of these remarkable caves not only unveils the natural splendour of



Oman but also positions the country uniquely within the adventure tourism sector. As global interest in adventure tourism expands, Oman's offerings stand out. The combination of diverse landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and unique natural wonders like its caves creates an exceptional opportunity to attract tourists seeking excitement and natural beauty.

AN ADDED LAUREL FOR ADVENTURE TOURISM

Caving, while an exhilarating adventure, poses inherent risks, especially for those without proper training and expertise. Non-experts may face numerous hazards, such as unstable rock formations, slippery surfaces, and challenging vertical descents, as exemplified in caves like Al Khushil. The steep 140-metre drop and treacherous paths can lead to serious injuries if precautions are not taken. Furthermore, navigating dark, confined spaces can provoke disorientation and panic, underscoring the importance of familiarity with the terrain.

There is also the risk posed by environmental factors, such as rising water levels in passageways—situations like the "Impossible Mission" watercourse exemplify the unpredictable nature of cave environments. Additionally, the presence of natural and fragile ecosystems presents ethical concerns; disturbances can irreparably damage habitats that host unique species.

Despite the risks, caving offers unparalleled beauty and a unique opportunity to connect with nature in its most untouched form. Exploring caves like Al Khushil introduces adventurers to mesmerising stalactites and stalagmites, intricate rock formations, and the soothing sound of dripping water echoing through vast chambers. The experience is not merely about the thrill of descent; it's about witnessing nature's artistry and capturing moments of serene quietude in an otherworldly setting. For those seeking adventure coupled with safety, joining guided caving tours presents an excellent opportunity to explore Oman's hidden wonders responsibly. Witnessing the awe-inspiring beauty of regions like Al Khushil not only enriches personal experience but also promotes sustainable tourism, ensuring that these natural treasures remain untouched for generations to come.