

Asteroid sample brought to earth in Nasa first

A seven-year space voyage came to its climactic end on Sunday when a Nasa capsule landed in the desert in the US state of Utah, carrying to Earth the largest asteroid samples ever collected. Scientists have high hopes for the sample, saying it will provide a better understanding of the formation of our solar system and how Earth became habitable. **DETAILS ON P20**



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OMAN'S ECONOMIC REVIVAL TO BE SUSTAINED DURING 2023: CBO



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BEZZECCHI WINS INDIAN GRAND PRIX AS BAGNAIA CRASH OPENS UP CHAMPIONSHIP



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THE MAGICAL BURQA THAT WEAVES ARTISTRY AND OMANI CULTURE



ROYAL DECREE RATIFIES AGREEMENT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued Royal Decree No (67/2023) on ratifying the air services agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of Belarus, signed in Muscat on July 25, 2023. Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this Decree. Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its data of issue. — ONA

PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY HOLIDAY ON SEPT 28

On the approach of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) birthday anniversary, it has been decided that Thursday 12 Rabee Al Awwal 1445 AH, corresponding to September 28, will be an official holiday for employees of units of the State's Administrative Apparatus and other legal entities and establishments of the private sector. The Ministry of Labour explained that the employers may agree on terms to engage employees on the said holiday - if deemed necessary due to the nature of their work-provided they compensate the workers for the holiday. — ONA

Oman seeks peaceful resolution of conflicts

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman affirmed that dialogue is a consistent principle and a strong approach in its foreign policy due to their effective impact on achieving reconciliation, harmony and peace between conflicting parties.

This was stated by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, during a speech of the Sultanate of Oman at the 78th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York.

Sayyid Badr said: "The Sultanate of Oman asserts its firm commitment to join hands with the international community in its quest to achieve a peaceful world order, based on justice, fairness, respect for the Charter of the United Nations, international law, the sovereignty of states, and non-interference in their internal affairs."

The minister added that the Sultanate of Oman calls on the international community to adhere to the United Nations system in addressing disputes and resolving conflicts, and to advocate dialogue



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy addresses the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York City, on Saturday.

as a way to reach peaceful solutions to these conflicts, and to negotiate to build a world in which a decent life prevails and filled with prosperity, stability, security and peace. He explained that "we are linked to nations by the unity of principles and goals, through which our goals are achieved and our virtues are elevated, and we will remain - with God's help - supportive of

truth and just causes."

Sayyid Badr said: "The Palestinian cause is at the forefront of long-standing issues, and has been subjected to injustice for more than 70 years while the Palestinian people stand steadfast in the face of the brutal Israeli occupation, siege, torture, in violation of international law and the Security Council's resolutions." **TURN TO P5**

16.2% RISE IN JOB OPPORTUNITIES

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

As the government accords high priority to provide gainful employment opportunities to citizens in line with Oman Vision 2040, overall employment opportunities in 2022 increased by 16.2 per cent, reflecting the impact of the sustained recovery of economic activities in the post-pandemic period. The employment opportunities for Omani citizens and expatriate workers increased by 3.6 per cent. An increase in expatriate workers during 2022 primarily reflected the recovery from a dip during the pandemic period, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) said in its annual report for 2022.

The number of Omani employees in the public sector increased by 3.5 per cent. Omani nationals constituted 89.2 per cent of the total employees in the public sector in 2022 as compared with 89.4 per cent in 2021.

ORGANIC FIG FARM SET UP



The Organic Fig Farm Project in the Wilayat of Suhar in Al Batinah North Governorate is one of the investment projects that utilise modern technologies. The project is an output of the Food Security Laboratory overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources with the aim of enhancing local fig production and supplying the local market with various agricultural products. The project has an investment value of RO 150,000 and occupies an area of 16 acres. **DETAILS ON P5**

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■ SAUDI EMBASSY MARKS NATIONAL DAY IN MUSCAT



MUSCAT: The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia held a reception on the occasion of the 93rd National Day at Sheraton Oman Hotel on Sunday. – ONA

Omani Women Associations serve 9,979 members, 40,639 beneficiaries

MUSCAT: Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that the total number of Omani Women Association branches reached (65) in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, serving (9,979) members and (40,639) beneficiaries till the end of 2022.

The Governorate of Muscat has (6) associations, serving (1,648) members, and (1,804) beneficiaries, while the number of the Omani Women Association's

branches in the Governorate of Dhofar reached (10), serving (1,162) members, and (2,801) beneficiaries.

The number of the Omani Women Association's branches in the Governorate of Musandam reached (4), serving (568) members and (2,436) beneficiaries, while the number in the Governorate of Al Buraimi reached (2), serving (168) members and (3,005) beneficiaries.

In the Governorate of Al

Dakhiliyah, the number of Omani Women Association's branches reached (10), serving (1,115) members and (11,376) beneficiaries, in the Governorate of Al Batinah North reached (7), serving (1,694) members and (7,057) beneficiaries, while in the Governorate of Al Batinah South, there are (6) branches with (1,050) members and (4,104) beneficiaries.

In the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South, there are (6) branches of Omani Women As-

sociation, serving (1,256) members and (3,525) beneficiaries, while in the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah North, there are (6) branches, serving (552) members and (3,178) beneficiaries. In the Governorate of Al Dhahirah, there are (4) branches serving (519) members and (1,263) beneficiaries.

The number of Omani women's associations branches in the Governorate of Al Wusta reached (4), serving (247) members, and (90) beneficiaries. — ONA

India-Oman seminar looks at cooperation in defence production, procurement



The first ever India-Oman Defence Industrial Seminar provided an opportunity for government owned, and private defence companies from India to come together.

MUSCAT: The first ever India-Oman Defence Industrial Seminar was held in Muscat on Sunday and provided an opportunity for government owned, and private defence companies from India to come together with officials from the Ministries of Defence, Fisheries and Agriculture, Transport, Communication and IT, from the Sultanate of Oman to hold productive discussions on cooperation in defence production and procurement.

The Indian MoD was represented by Sanjay Mehrishi, Deputy Director General (Exports), Ministry of Defence (Department of Defence Production), who also provided an overview of the advances made by India in the field of defence production. Director General (International Cooperation), Ministry of Defence Sultanate of Oman was the special guest at the seminar.

Amit Narang, Ambassador

of India to the Sultanate of Oman addressed the gathering highlighting the traditionally close relations between the two countries and encouraged the participants to engage in constructive collaborations to achieve tangible results beneficial for both the nations.

This is first such physical seminar on Defence Industrial Collaboration between India and the Sultanate of Oman where it received an unprecedented response from Indian companies with 23 Indian public and private companies represented, reflecting the enthusiasm amongst them to partner and collaborate with Oman and to support Sultan's Armed Forces and Civil Defence Agencies in addressing their requirements.

A wide range of topics related to defence hardware, security systems, cyber security, communication, and niche technologies were covered during the Seminar.

Are there many options for the coming long weekend's outing?

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The holiday for Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) birthday will be on Thursday thereby ensuring a long weekend for citizens and residents of the Sultanate of Oman, especially those from the capital.

Domestic tourists can have a few options to explore not minding the prevailing high humidity and temperatures for outdoor activities at the moment.

It may be noted that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has upgraded facilities at many tourism destinations, including forts and castles, by handing over the management to the private sector or local SMSes.

According to the travel operators, one of the popular destinations certainly is the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar mountainous range, around 30 km from Nizwa, where only a four-wheel drive vehicle is allowed after a checkpoint.

The current maximum temperature in the region is 26 degrees Celsius and a minimum of around 19 degrees Celsius.

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar stands out as a unique tourist destination that boasts a year-round turnout of visitors, who set out, from their accommodations in modern hotel facilities, to explore the adjoining mountains and practice many types of related sports.

It is also unique in Oman in the sense that it is home to many agricultural crops like pomegranates, grapes, peaches, apricots, roses, and other farming products. The villages of the wilayat house a number of



Domestic tourists can have a few options to explore not minding the prevailing high humidity and temperatures for outdoor activities.

ancient buildings that attract large numbers of tourists from various Arab, Asian, European, and American countries.

More than 79,000 people visited Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in the first six months of 2023, reaching 79,034 visitors according to statistics issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Jabal Shams is another destination. It is the highest peak that lies in the heart of the Western Hajar Mountains chain in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. It takes

around 2 hours from Nizwa and the highest range is about 3,000 metres above sea level.

On the way is Al Hamra, an old town that is 400 years old. It contains several villages showing the traditional life of Omani, known as Wadi Ghul, Wadi Nakhr, and Misfat al Abryeen; Al Hamra is famous for its bright colour rugs and oriental design.

Al Hoota Cave is a cave located in Al Hamra and is 5 km long. The cave was first discovered by locals several hundred years ago and

was officially opened as a tourist destination in December 2006. The Omani blind cavefish lives in this cave system.

Al Hoota cave was formed as a result of the chemical and hydrographic erosion of limestone by acidic water and extends more than 5 kilometres underground.

Weather permitting, Marina Bandar al Rowdah is another option. It is known for its dolphin boat tours in the sea around the capital, but do take preventive measures to avoid the scorching



sun.

As the majority of domestic tourists have not yet visited the Oman Across Ages Museum, it is just the time to do so.

The museum, built under the Royal orders of the Late HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said is the largest of its kind in the region, offering visitors an interactive experience of the cultural and geographic diversity of the Sultanate of Oman, the building includes galleries, a library, an auditorium, cafés, and social and research spaces.

The museum is located in the Wilayat of Manah, which is situated around 160km from the capital and is known for some of its old ruined villages.

The design of the building and the materials used in the project have been deeply connected with the local Omani landscape. It is around 15 km from Nizwa City centre.

While beaches are certainly among the favourites, a lot depends on the temperature forecast during the weekend.



ASMED plans to license 70 new Sanad Centres

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Sanad Centres, which were started to boost entrepreneurship among Omanis and spread e-governance, is witnessing growth at a steady clip with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) planning to license 70 new outlets and finance 250 establishments in different governorates.

For more than two decades, thousands of Sanad Centres not only helped to process private sector recruitment and avail government services online but also provided jobs for many Omani youths.

Today to apply for a Sanad license and attain the permit it takes one week.

Moosa al Kindi, manager at Al Kindi Sanad Services in Ruwi, has been working in the field for decades and is a pioneer. He has staff who have been with him for

“I started as a typist and today we help in different areas. We have to deal with many issues. For some it is to do with court, ROP, manpower and for others it is visa applications

MONA AL BALUSHI

many years as well. One of them is Mona al Balushi who arrives at the office by 7 am. She has been working for 20 years at this Sanad Office. She speaks Arabic, English and Hindi and deals with different organisations, individuals both nationals and expatriates.

“I started as a typist and today we help in different areas. We



For more than two decades, Sanad Centres not only helped avail government services online but also provided jobs for many Omani youths.

have to deal with many issues. For some it is to do with court, ROP, manpower and for others it is visa applications,” said Mona.

And every client seems to be in a hurry.

She added, “One thing people have to keep in mind when they come to renew their visa is to have their visa number because these

days the visa is not stamped on the passport.” Meanwhile one client asked, “Should my sponsor come with me to get the visa done?” Another person asked, “Should I go to Seeb?” She replied in Urdu, “No, you can go to Qurum.” Her job like others in the office is not just filing data but also even providing counselling to the clients.

Sometimes it gets too hectic in the Sanad office. Yasser Abdullatif is from Sudan and is at the Sanad Service to get a trading license. “I have been told that the Sanad Office can complete the procedure in a week’s time or so,” Yasser said.

While there were employers who had come for their staff’s paperwork, there were others who had come for visa renewal.

The Sanad Centres have been providing employment opportunities for Omanis.

Nabil al Zedjali who works at the Sanad said, “At the centre it is not the qualifications that matter, it is the skills. And attitude as well because it is also about how quickly can one learn the procedures.” He noted the various services a Sanad Centre offers today, “We work with people who have dealings with courts, Royal Oman Police from visa to transfer of cars, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, municipality,

VAT and Bayan for instance. Writing skills are also important. We have new comers who have got training and are showing promise. We also do translations in different languages and recently we did so in European languages.” For instance, Muscat Municipality stated in its website that a Sanad Centre would be able to assist in the completion of all its online services like building permits. In addition, Sanad also provides services related to the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior, the Environment Authority, and Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

Sanad Centres focus on the self-employment of Omanis by providing all necessary services under one roof under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour.

In 2019, Invest Easy announced that requests for license for sales and special offers have to be made through Sanad.

Bookings open for rent at Khazaen vegetable market

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

The Central Market for Vegetables and Fruits in Khazaen has announced the second phase of the plans to rent out new market facilities in Khazaen Economic City by inviting companies engaged in wholesale vegetable and fruit business.

The bookings will start from October 1 as the market is ready for opening next year. The completion rate of the new market in Khazaen Economic City is 75 per cent and it is expected to serve a larger segment of clientele.

The market includes many important facilities and basic services, the most important of which are central refrigerated warehouses and an air-conditioned sales hall, refrigerated warehouses, a sales area for trucks,



The Central Market for Vegetables and Fruits in Khazaen has announced the second phase of the plans to rent out new market facilities.

sheds for sorting and selling onions and potatoes, dry warehouses, and sorting and repacking workshops.

The market also contains a station designated for receiving trucks, a maintenance and charging station for

electric forklifts, a platform for customs inspection, quarantine and food safety, and a laboratory for examining agricultural samples of vegetables and fruits.

The market will offer a number of

services, such as banking services, truck parking, light vehicle parking, places for prayer, restaurants and cafes, transaction clearance offices, and other necessary facilities and services. The market will also contain retail outlets.

Oman-US workshop explores geologic hydrogen’s energy potential

MUSCAT: In a groundbreaking collaboration with the US Department of Energy, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals of the Sultanate of Oman recently organised a pivotal technical workshop on geologic hydrogen. This event was attended by Mohsin bin Hamad bin Saif al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, and Senior Advisor to the US Department of Energy, Dan Milstein. Notably, Leslie Ordman, the Chargé d’Affaires of the Embassy of the United States of America in Oman, graced the workshop with her presence, alongside representatives spanning the public, private, and academic sectors, as well as key figures from investment and research institutions.

The workshop is part of a broader initiative born from the strategic dialogue established between the Sultanate of Oman and the United States of America, a development stemming from the visit of the Secretary of State of the United States in 2022. This multifaceted dialogue, inaugurated in February 2023 in Muscat, covers areas such as trade and investment, alternative energy, education, culture, and science. Of particular note, this Geologic Hydrogen workshop stands as a pioneering governmental-level event in the domain of geologic hydrogen.

At its core, the workshop aimed to foster an exchange of knowledge and ideas regarding geologic hydrogen, facilitate policy discussions related to its exploration, and nurture commercial and academic



The Ministry of Energy and Minerals organised a pivotal technical workshop on geologic hydrogen.

partnerships between Oman and the United States in the realm of cutting-edge energy research.

The focal point of the workshop was hydrogen, a natural substance formed deep within the Earth. Particular attention was given to the opportunities, methodologies, and strategies associated with its exploration and extraction. The event also delved into the natural hydrogen emissions occurring worldwide, including within Oman, notably in Al Hajar Mountains. These emissions often arise from the interaction of groundwater with iron-rich minerals, such as olivine rocks abundant in Oman. These rocks, characterised by unique fractures, have the potential to facilitate the release of hydrogen to the Earth’s surface.

Importantly, geologic hydrogen emerged as a cost-effective and eco-friendly energy source, extracted through drilling procedures similar to other gases,

once substantial reserves are discovered. Nevertheless, the field requires further research and development to unlock its technical and commercial potential fully. Many participants raised the prospect of geological hydrogen being a renewable resource due to the natural underground processes involved. They also discussed various methods to stimulate its production and ongoing research in this burgeoning field.

During the workshop, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals announced its acceptance of research and experimental proposals for geological hydrogen exploration within Oman, inviting interested parties to contribute to this innovative endeavour. Participants also commended Oman’s commitment to environmental sustainability, particularly its strides in advancing the renewable energy sector and clean hydrogen initiatives.

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SHOPPERS
FRUSTRATED WITH
RETAIL

DELIVERY
DELAYS



SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shadadm

IT is very easy to buy items from retailers but getting them delivered on time is a big problem. This despite that many retailers who claim to offer free and swift delivery but never keep up their promises. Many consumers feel that the retailers leave them to fend for themselves once the purchase deal is concluded. “I bought some construction items from one of the stores in Muscat and the sales people promised to deliver them within a week. I thought the week was a

long time but I just agreed. That week turned out to be three weeks following repeated phone calls. I just don’t understand why these sales people always can’t tell the truth,” says an exasperated Fatma al Numani, a consumer from Al Amerat who underwent a bad experience. The stress of consumers getting their items delivered is not only limited to big items but also the ones, which are readily available in the shops like washing machines, water coolers, refrigerators among others. “I bought an outdoor water cooler a few days ago and the salesman at the hypermarket

promised to deliver the item the next day. When I called, during the day of delivery, they said it would be delivered after two days. When I enquired about his promise, he had nothing to explain,” says Jamal from Al Seeb. Retailers say they should not be blamed because some items come from far away stores and sometimes from neighbouring counties. “Some of our items come from Dubai and other faraway stores and there is no way they can be delivered in a few days. Sometimes customers insist on quick delivery but our suppliers also need time to supply,” said a customer care staff at one of the shopping centres.

IT IS VERY
EASY TO BUY
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But not all dealers are bad as there are some who are professional. “I bought some furniture items from one of the furnishing outlets and two days before the delivery, I got a call to confirm that I will get my items at the same day and time. Indeed they came at the same time they had promised,” Abdullah al Numani, a resident from Al Ansab, said. According to the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA), affected buyers can approach them with their grievances. “CPA is accessible and consumers can reach us through our hotline and we will sort the matter out with the concerned retailers,” assured a CPA official.



Oman and ESCWA advance disability employment policies

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development on Sunday held a consultative meeting on 'Discussing the Country Profile Report on Employment Policies for Persons with Disabilities in the Sultanate of Oman.' The meeting was held in cooperation with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). Oman was represented at the



Speakers at the consultative meeting held in Muscat on Sunday.



meeting by the Directorate General for Persons with Disabilities.

The meeting was aimed at highlighting the efforts made to

empower persons with disabilities and to introduce the legislative and legal frameworks and systems applied by the authorities concerned in providing employment for this segment of society. The meeting also sought to finalise the country profile report, as well as the project of the ESCWA and the International Labour Organization. — ONA

Peaceful resolution of conflicts

FROM PI
He stated that the repercussions surrounding the Russian-Ukrainian crisis and its security and military escalation, as well as the painful humanitarian effects, constitute a serious threat to global peace and the flow of energy and food supply chains. This crisis, the minister added, also constitutes a serious challenge to international cooperation and the global order which is based on respect for the law and the Charter of the United Nations. In this regard, the minister reaffirmed that Oman calls for resorting to dialogue and peaceful negotiations on the basis of “do no harm,” respecting the sovereignty of states, the policy of good neighbourliness, and removing the sources and causes of this crisis. He pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman is implementing many plans and programmes aimed at adapting to climate change and reducing its effects. Oman seeks to stimulate investment in renewable energy projects, in accordance with the zero carbon neutrality strategy 2050.

United Arab Emirates. He said that “Oman Vision 2040” is the Sultanate of Oman’s gateway to sustainable development, overcoming challenges, and keeping pace with regional and global changes. The minister also pointed out that the constant development of the educational system at all levels and improving its outputs is necessary to build the man and enable him/her to push the wheel of economic development forward. He added that the Covid-19 pandemic was a lesson for all countries to review their preparedness and response mechanisms for health emergencies and enhance their capabilities. Perhaps the most important lessons learned are the significance of early preparedness in dealing with public health risks and threats, as well as investing in scientific research and technological development, Sayyid Badr said. The minister pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman organised a global ministerial conference aimed at developing solutions to antimicrobial resistance and accelerating the pace of cooperation at the national, regional and international levels to limit the growth of this threat to public health and to the economic components of countries. He stressed that Oman calls on everyone to encourage partnership in research, innovation and manufacturing to

find preventive and therapeutic alternatives to reduce the effects of pandemics and prevent their spread. The foreign minister said: “The Sultanate of Oman seriously seeks to consolidate human rights and adhere to relevant international charters and conventions in order to develop a just international society that embraces absolute respect for human dignity and rights, as well as the religious and cultural values of countries.” The minister asserted that Oman rejects and denounces all incitement acts calling for violence, hatred and discrimination on the basis of faith or race, calling on the international community to find clear and explicit legislation that criminalises these acts that threaten social peace and stability, and even threaten the national security of countries and societies. At the conclusion of the speech, Sayyid Badr said: “We are facing complex global challenges, most notably the escalating effects of the climate crisis, the spread of pandemics, drug trade, and human trafficking, in addition to political and sectarian conflicts, calling on the international community to firmly adhere to the principles of right and justice and apply the rules of international law without double standards, so that security and reassurance prevail among people, trust spreads among countries, and partnerships among peoples grow and flourish”. — ONA

Organic fig trees set up in Al Batinah



SUHAR: The Organic Fig Farm project in the Wilayat of Suhar in Al Batinah North Governorate is one of the investment projects that utilise modern technologies. The project is an output of the Food Security Laboratory overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources with the aim of enhancing local figs production and supplying the local market with various agricultural products. Yusef bin Mohammed al Miqbali, project Executive Chairman said the Organic Fig Farm project has an investment value of RO 150,000 and occupies an area of 16 acres. It is an integrated farm for growing fig trees and providing quantities of high-quality fig varieties including Brown Turkey fig, parchment figs and Jassim figs. The project execution has already begun according to the executive plan which includes fencing the farm, digging wells, installing a modern irrigation network, and planting 4,000 fig seedlings in a first phase. — ONA

Three-day Oman Childhood Conference, Exhibition begins today

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

The Oman Childhood Conference and Exhibition, the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman, organised by the Children First Association, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, begins today.

Dr Ohood bint Saeed al Balushiyah, Vice-Chairman of the Main Committee of the conference said the conference seeks to discuss children’s issues in Omani society, provide support and advice to improve their quality of life, respect their rights, and focus on contemporary trends in raising gifted children. The conference will focus on “contemporary trends in raising talented children,” with the participation of an elite group of specialists, academics, and those interested in this matter locally, regionally, and internationally. The conference aims to highlight the diversity of experiences and make the most of specialists in spreading national and international awareness of caring for the gifted, and the possibilities in the field of investing in developing their abilities. It will also address the exchange of expertise and experiences in discovering gifted children, and strengthening the role of the family, educational institutions and society in caring for them. Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Chairwoman of the Board of Directors of the Children First Association, also mentioned that the association’s vision was built to raise children’s awareness, development, and empowerment in the educational, health, and cultural fields, to meet their needs, develop their



capabilities, and enhance their rights to be active individuals in society. She also noted that the association’s mission was a reference and a supportive platform for childhood in Oman.” The conference works to give children the opportunity to reach their fullest potential. The association also works hard to overcome challenges serving children in Oman, out of its belief in the role of civil society in complementing national efforts. The accompanying exhibition is the first of its kind as it will include all parties interested in children in one place, represented by government institutions that serve children, companies specialising in children’s products, and training and entertainment centres, in order to enable children and parents to learn about the efforts made under one roof. The Children’s Association encourages conferences and exhibitions in which specialists participate to serve goals that open new doors to discuss issues and to spread knowledge and embody the outcomes of the conference and exhibition. It will also include platforms for government institutions to display their services and spread awareness to all segments of society, including school students, families, and those interested in the field of child care. The three-day conference concludes on September 27.

ISS felicitates alumna for UK scholarship

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

Indian School, Sur felicitated Riya Raheem, an alumna of 2019 batch for winning the scholarship to study in the United Kingdom. The British Council Scholarship for Women in STEM covers full tuition fee, to and from flight ticket, health insurance, visa and thesis writing charges along with a monthly living allowance of £1,350. With the scholarship, Riya will study MSc in Data Science at the University of Bath in the UK. ShabeebMohammed, member of the school management committee, presented the memento to Riya Raheem. Dr S SrInivasan, the Principal of the school, appreciated Riya for her achievement. Speaking on the occasion, Dr SrInivasan said that Riya’s achievement is a motivation to all students. “She is the best example for all of us that anyone



Shabeeb Mohammed presents memento to Riya Raheem

can achieve success if you have a strong determination and passion together with the right attitude.” “If you have a passion on a particular subject, chase your dream to fulfil it,” Riya said in her speech. “There are many options available apart from engineering and medicine. It’s you who decides what to choose. If you have a strong passion and are ready to work relentlessly, no one

can prevent you from success. I say this from my experience,” she said. Students of the school interacted with Riya and asked about her experience of winning the award. After schooling, she completed her bachelor’s degree in mathematics from MES Mampad college under the University of Calicut with high distinction with rank. She got the scholarship when she was studying Data Science at the Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT), Vellore. She is also a recipient of the prestigious PM Foundation Fellowship, given to the brightest students in their school board exams. She has won the gold medal at the International Mathematics Olympiad. Riya dedicated this achievement to her teachers and parents, Raheem Karinkappara and Shahida Thoppil, for the motivation and guidance they had given throughout.



Recall Date: 25-09-2023

Recall

KIA
Sportage (SL)
Sorento (XM)

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
KIA Sportage (SL) and Sorento (XM)	2011-2013	1412

Recall consequence

On some Sportage (SL) and Sorento (XM) of 2011-2013MY produced within specific production date range provided in TSB, An engine compartment fire can occur while driving for many reasons and the identification of the cause can be untraceable. While a low percentage of the subject vehicles have experienced an engine compartment fire. However, Kia is conducting this recall as a preventive measure to mitigate any unreasonable fire risk due to potential fuel leaking, oil leaking and/or engine damage.

Recall Action

Verify affected vehicles as per the VIN list, inspect the engine for vibration and knocking condition, then update the software or replace engine based on the inspection results. All affected vehicles will be inspected and repaired at no expense to the vehicle owner

Saudi Arabia celebrates 93rd National Day



Saudi's youth hold Saudi National flag while participating in a carnival celebrating Saudi Arabia's National Day in Riyadh. – Reuters



A child poses for a picture in front of an armoured vehicle during an exhibit by the Interior Ministry to celebrate Saudi Arabia's 93rd National Day in Riyadh on Sunday. – AFP



People watch as Royal Saudi Land Forces AH-64 Apache attack helicopters fly over during an air show. – AFP



Hawk T1A trainer aircraft of the Saudi Falcons aerobatic team perform during an air show in Riyadh. – AFP

Devastating flood strengthens Libya's national fabric

TRIPOLI: About a dozen women hunch over sewing machines in Libya's capital, urgently making clothes for the living, and shrouds for the dead, two weeks after a huge flood devastated the eastern city of Derna.

In the north African country that has long been divided between two rival governments, the tragedy that killed thousands has sparked a nationwide sense of solidarity.

"Our centre was already helping needy families, so you can imagine our mobilisation when it involves a disaster of this magnitude," said Mohamed Kamour, the director of the centre that trains women to become dressmakers.

Since the flood struck on September 10, the apprentices have worked at full speed, cutting and sewing fabric for the needy in Derna, a city more than 1,300 kilometres to the east.

All normal courses have been suspended for the aid effort, said Kamour, whose workshop usually helps widows and divorced women gain financial independence.

"That is the priority," he said. "We interrupted all types of training."

The workshop has already sent 1,300 school uniforms, 850 abayas and 650 shrouds to cover corpses to Derna, and a second shipment is being prepared.

Derna had a population of



Participants work at a women's training and development centre in Tripoli. – AFP

about 100,000 before the flash flood broke through two ageing dams after a hurricane-strength storm lashed the area.

The official death toll passed 3,800 on Saturday.

The flood, which witnesses likened to a tsunami, may have left 10,000 or more people missing, international aid groups said.

Many were swept out to sea, from where bodies are still washing ashore. Others are thought to be buried beneath the mud and debris that carpets entire neighbourhoods of Derna.

Yann Fridez, head of the Libya delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross, spent three days in the disaster zone where he reported seeing

people from all regions of Libya, even the southern city of Sebha hundreds of kilometres away.

People went to Derna "on their own initiative, tribes did too," Fridez said about the country where tribal structures and loyalties remain important.

Restaurateurs have organised meals to feed the displaced.

Business people and others with the means have also mobilised in the country's west and the south to help those suffering.

The International Organization for Migration said on Thursday that more than 43,000 people have been uprooted from the disaster zone.

Appeals to shelter them have spread on social media. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BEIJING

At least 16 killed in coal mine fire in SW China

At least 16 people were killed when a fire broke out at the Shanjiaoshu Coal Mine in China's southwest on Sunday, local officials said.

The fire was extinguished but "after preliminary verification, 16 people have no vital signs", the Panzhou City government said.

"It was preliminarily determined that the conveyor belt caught fire," the notice said.

The Panzhou City mine is about 3,600 kilometres southwest of the capital, Beijing.



In February, a coal mine collapse in the northern Inner Mongolia region left dozens of people and vehicles buried under a mountain of debris.

Authorities did not disclose the final death toll for months, only revealing in June that 53 people had been killed. — AFP

TEHRAN

Iran says 28 IS members held over plot

Iranian authorities have arrested 28 people linked to the IS group for plotting to target Tehran during the anniversary of last year's protests, the intelligence ministry said.

"In recent days, during a series of simultaneous operations in Tehran, Alborz and West Azerbaijan provinces, several terrorist bases and team houses were attacked, and 28 members of the said terrorist network were arrested," the ministry said.

"These elements are affiliated to the professional crime group of Daesh," it added.

The intelligence ministry said two security personnel were wounded during the arrest operations, and a number of bombs, firearms, suicide vests and communications devices were seized. — AFP



ISTANBUL

Erdogan to meet Azerbaijan president on Monday

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will meet his counterpart Ilham Aliyev in the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan on Monday, the Turkish presidency said on Sunday.

The "latest developments" in Nagorno-Karabakh will be at the heart of the meeting, the presidency said in a statement.

The meeting follows a lightning Azerbaijani offensive which recaptured the separatist Nagorno-Karabakh enclave,



mainly populated by ethnic Armenians. Allies Türkiye and Azerbaijan had said in June they wanted to step up efforts to open a land corridor linking Türkiye to Azerbaijan's main territory via Nakhchivan and Armenia.

— AFP



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In brief

■ SEOUL



KIM TELLS XI TO PROMOTE COOPERATION

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has vowed to promote cooperative relations with China in a letter to President Xi Jinping, the North's state media KCNA reported on Sunday.

The letter was in response to congratulations Xi sent for the North's founding anniversary this month where the Chinese president had expressed his willingness to strengthen strategic communication and working-level cooperation.

"I believe ... the DPRK-China friendly and cooperative relations would steadily develop in conformity with the requirements of the new era and the desire of the two peoples in the future," Kim said in the letter sent on Thursday. — Reuters

■ LONDON



LONDON POLICE REFUSE FIREARMS DUTIES

A number of London police have stepped back from firearms duties after a fellow officer was charged with murder over the fatal shooting of a young black man, a force spokesman said on Sunday.

The highly unusual protest by officers prompted Home Secretary Suella Braverman to warn that firearms officers had to make "split-second decisions" and "mustn't fear ending up in the dock for carrying out their duties".

The specialist firearms officers had handed in their tickets, accreditation that allows them to carry guns while on duty. — AFP

■ PARIS



FRANCE PLEDGES \$150 MN TO UN'S IFAD

French President Emmanuel Macron pledged to invest \$150 million in the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to fight poverty and climate change in rural areas.

France decided to host and organise the 13th replenishment of IFAD, and was now launching a call for contributions by making the commitment, Macron said in a video message broadcast during a charity concert organised in New York by non-profit group Global Citizen. IFAD is a Rome-based United Nations agency working to address poverty and hunger in developing countries' rural areas. — Reuters

Karabakh refugees cross to Armenia as Azerbaijan takes control

KORNIDZOR: Ethnic Armenian refugees began to leave Nagorno-Karabakh on Sunday for the first time since Azerbaijan launched an offensive designed to seize control of the breakaway territory and perhaps end a three-decade-old conflict.

This week's lightning operation could mark a historic geopolitical shift, with Azerbaijan victorious over the separatists and Armenia now publicly distancing itself from its traditional ally Russia.

"Yesterday, we had to put down our rifles. So we left," a man in his thirties from the village of Mets Shen said as a first group of a few dozen people crossed the border and registered with Armenian officials in Kornidzor.

Most of the other refugees who crossed were women and children, including some from nearby Eghtsahogh, who had taken shelter around a Russian peacekeeping base after their village allegedly came under Azerbaijani shelling.

Separatist leaders have said they are negotiating the fate of some 120,000 ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh in talks with Azerbaijani officials mediated by Russian peacekeepers. Many have seen shortages of food, water and power during a nine-month blockade.

The Armenian health ministry said 23 ambulances were carrying seriously wounded citizens of Nagorno-Karabakh to the border, accompanied by medics and Red



Refugees gather as they wait to be registered in front of a centre of the Armenian foreign affairs ministry, near the border town of Kornidzor. — AFP

Cross workers. Crowds of relatives gathered on the Armenian side awaiting news.

Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan sought to deflect the blame onto long-standing ally Russia, signalling a breakdown in the countries' security pact.

In nationally televised comments, the Armenian leader said the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation

(CSTO) and Moscow-Yerevan military-political cooperation were "insufficient" to protect the country, suggesting that he would seek new alliances.

The CSTO members pledge to defend one another from outside attack. But, bogged down in its own war in Ukraine, Russia refused to come to Armenia's assistance in the latest Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, arguing that Yerevan

itself had recognised the disputed region as part of Azerbaijan.

Now, Russian peacekeepers are helping Azerbaijan disarm the Karabakh rebels.

Armenia also announced that Pashinyan would meet his Azerbaijani counterpart President Ilham Aliyev at the summit of the European Political Community in the Spanish city of Granada on October 5, along with EU

leaders like President Emmanuel Macron of France and Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Meanwhile, tension was running high at the Kornidzor crossing, five kilometres from the Hakari bridge on the convoy's route, where angry relatives had gathered to await news and one man was so frustrated he pulled out a knife in front of police. — AFP

Fighting ongoing after police officer killed in north Kosovo



Kosovo's police officers stand guard at the entrance of the village of Banjska. — AFP

BANJSKA: Gunmen holed up in a northern Kosovo monastery clashed with authorities on Sunday, according to Prime Minister Albin Kurti, hours after a police officer was killed when a patrol was hit by an ambush involving firearms and explosives.

Kurti said that the group of at least 30 heavily armed gunmen were now surrounded by authorities near the village of Banjska, where the patrol had been ambushed earlier on Sunday, and called for their surrender. The attack and ongoing firefight marks one of the gravest escalations in Kosovo in years, following months of mounting tensions and stalling talks between the government in Pristina and Serbia.

"There are at least 30 professional, military or police armed people who are surrounded by our police forces and whom I invite to surrender to our security agencies," said Kurti during a press conference.

Pictures released by Kosovo authorities showed several

heavily armed gunmen wearing uniforms, barricading themselves at the monastery.

"We can see armed people in uniforms... they are firing on us and we are firing back," Kosovo police official Veton Elshani said.

Police later said in a statement that at least three attackers had been killed and one arrested. Another four civilian suspects carrying radio equipment and weapons were also arrested.

Kosovo police also confirmed that the Jarinje and Brnjak border crossings between Serbia and Kosovo had been closed following the incident.

The attack comes more than a week after talks between the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo centred on improving ties failed to make a breakthrough during EU-mediated negotiations in Brussels.

The EU has been trying for years to resolve the long-running dispute between the Balkan neighbours that has soured relations since their war more than two decades ago. — AFP

40,000 march in Spain against amnesty for Catalan separatists

MADRID: Tens of thousands of Spaniards protested in Madrid on Sunday against possible plans by acting Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez to grant an amnesty to Catalan separatists to keep himself in office after an election he failed to win.

Waving Spanish flags, supporters of the opposition conservative People's Party (PP) travelled from across Spain to attend the rally in Madrid. Authorities estimated the size of the crowd at 40,000.

Sanchez, who came second in an election in July, could stay in office if he wins the support of exiled former Catalonia leader Carles Puigdemont, whose Junts per Catalunya party controls seven seats in parliament.

Puigdemont, wanted in Spain for attempting the region's secession, has demanded that legal action be dropped against fellow separatists as a condition for his support.

Alberto Nunez Feijoo, leader of the PP which won the most votes on July 23, said he would never concede to demands for an amnesty for organisers of a 2017 independence referendum in Catalonia, which was held despite courts ruling it was illegal.

Withdrawing criminal cases against the separatists would amount to granting an amnesty to "coup plotters", he told supporters at the Madrid rally.

Gregorio Casteneda, 72, a pensioner, had travelled from



Spain's opposition People's Party leader Alberto Nunez Feijoo speaks during a rally against a possible amnesty for Catalan separatist leaders in Madrid, Spain. — Reuters

Santander on Spain's north coast to show his opposition to any amnesty.

"I am not in favour of the government that we have. To me this is a disaster because it is going to divide Spain totally," he said.

Sanchez held his own political rally in Gava, near Catalonia's regional capital Barcelona, on Sunday. He did not mention an amnesty but said the Socialists wanted to heal social divisions over the Catalan crisis.

In 2021, Sanchez granted pardons to nine separatists jailed over their roles in the independence push.

Feijoo will take the first stab at

a vote to become prime minister on September 27, but his chances of winning are seen as slim since the PP opposes any concessions to separatists. If Feijoo fails, Sanchez will get a chance to see if he can muster support.

To pass the vote, Sanchez is banking on support from two Catalan separatist parties which both supported his candidate for parliamentary speaker in a vote last month.

For that, they had demanded that lawmakers be permitted to speak in Catalan, Basque and Galician when addressing Spain's parliament. — Agencies

Work smart not hard...

Pl

leasing all people is an impossible mission to achieve, so don't even try to think about it. However, having a healthy work environment and a good leader is very important indeed. This will highly have a positive impact on employees and accordingly will be reflected on their performance. Sometimes, it is just a matter of maintaining a stress-free environment and friendly relations and good chemistry of trust between employees and with the management too.

Among the frustrating issues for employees is the ill-management of tasks that are assigned to each employee. Unfortunately, this creates unnecessary work load for employees most of the time; in fact, it provokes their temper and disappointment. The improper and unfair distribution of daily assignments and tasks is behind the lack of having teamwork spirit as well as friendly relation between workmates and employees in any organisation.

Having no efficient prioritising of tasks is another matter, which many employees and managers are not taking into consideration very often. Thus, employees might suffer a miserable daily routine full of unnecessary tension and work load. Consequently, the quality of deliverables and performance are poor and below standards and expectations. If it happens in an organisation where services are to be delivered, this will certainly dissatisfy customers and might negatively affect the organisation's reputation and performance.

Neither the employee nor the customer would like this to happen, but sometimes it is out of one's control. Both will be the victims of a bad management or a careless boss who cares for nothing, but himself and to make the missions accomplished, regardless of quality. Unfortunately, such kind of a boss is not an accountable manager or a leader at all. Always, a good leader is the one whose actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more. This is a real leader whom all



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An author, columnist,
creative writer,
translator and a
communications
professional

A GOOD LEADER
IS THE ONE
WHOSE ACTIONS
INSPIRE OTHERS
TO DREAM
MORE, LEARN
MORE, AND DO
MORE

employees would constantly need at a work place!

Bosses should implement the policy of smart work, and not hard work, so that they can be good leaders for their employees. Hammering employees with lot of tasks every single day just to keep them busy all the time is not the right way of making them competent employees who can deliver. If tasks and responsibilities are not smartly managed and assigned, this will of course be reflected on employee's dedication, loyalty and performance. Accordingly, this will impact the returns of investment on employees, reflecting their spirit and interest.

Due to the wrong management style and attitude of a boss, employees become very pitifully irritated. Instead they lose interest in their workplace, boss, colleagues and organisation alike. Therefore, usually, these impressions of employees are brought to friendly discussion at workplaces and public gatherings. Such frequently discussed talks are regarded as an opportunity of having a constructive evaluation and sharing personal experiences at work.

To tell the truth, it is not abnormal that people tend to highlight an issue or a certain situation with others out of disappointment or looking for an advice or an opinion at least. Else, it could be a matter of sharing a good experience out of being positive about a place of work or a person. As a talk of different angles, definitely it touches on positive and negative concerns that employees have. However, such kind of talk would always brings the attention on how one could manage his attitude and reaction at a workplace.

Dear bosses, if quality is required, you just need to have a good chemistry with your employees and work smart not work hard. Further, you should prioritise tasks and be fair enough! Have some trust, confidence and accountability on employees, so they can deliver quality work on time. Just ensure having a good team spirit among employees and rest assured they will spare no effort to bring about their best in the organisation and be dedicated and professional.

HOLDING TOGETHER



This aerial picture shows a family holding on as they try to navigate swift currents in the Rio Grand river as they cross the US-Mexico border to Eagle Pass, Texas. – AFP

America must join Europe’s climate club

I

n 2005, the European Union established the Emissions Trading System, the world's first, and largest, market for carbon allowances. Following a cap-and-trade approach, the ETS functions as an open market for trading emissions permits; the current price hovers around €86 (\$92) per metric ton of carbon dioxide emissions.

With an eye towards reducing global emissions, the EU designed a “carbon border adjustment mechanism” to complement the ETS. Effectively a tax on imports from countries that do not have an equivalent carbon price, the CBAM aims to prevent EU-based companies from moving emissions-intensive production to third countries with less stringent climate policies.

Implementation will start in October, at which point importers of select goods – iron and steel, cement, aluminium, fertilisers, electricity, and hydrogen – must begin to report data on embedded emissions. From 2026 onwards, these importers will have to purchase permits that cover their products’ carbon content at the EU market price. The transitional period, during which the CBAM’s functionality and product scope are set to be reviewed, will continue until 2034.

Given that the United States does not currently have its own carbon-pricing mechanism, the CBAM will apply to the country’s exports to the



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sustainable-practices
consulting firm

EU, which totalled more than €350 billion in 2022. A significant share of these exports are carbon-intensive products like aeroplanes and spare parts (roughly 13 per cent of the total), mineral fuels (11 per cent), optical and medical instruments (10 per cent), pharmaceuticals (10 per cent), and agricultural products owing to extensive fertiliser use (4 per cent).

Even a small exporting state like Connecticut will likely feel the pinch: sales of aeroplanes and spare parts (\$2.7 billion) and nuclear technology (\$2.3 billion) accounted for nearly 30 per cent of its roughly \$17 billion in exports in 2021 (the latest year for which data are available).

In early June, Citizens’ Climate Lobby representatives met with more than 450 members of the US Senate and House of Representatives and their staffs to discuss the CBAM. Some politicians were completely unaware of the tax. Others, believing for some misguided reason that it would create an “energy-supply crunch,” proposed expanding production of natural gas and nuclear energy, even though lags between investment and production in those supply alternatives would extend well beyond 2026.

But the response of a third group was more worrisome.

Unperturbed by the EU action, these politicians suggested strong-arming the Europeans into granting the US an exemption from the CBAM by slapping tariffs on EU imports, regardless of carbon content.

It would be unwise to start a trade war with the EU, mainly because the bloc would retain the upper hand. The CBAM tariff on US exports would increase member states’ comparative advantage in selling low-emissions versions of American goods and stimulate the EU-wide development of carbon-saving production technologies – complicated processes in which the US already lags behind current and future competitors like China.



The EU has designed a ‘carbon border adjustment mechanism’ to complement the ETS.

Moreover, American exporters, not European importers, would pay the tax, raising business costs and consumer prices in the US. And this is to say nothing of the missed opportunity to provide economic incentives to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions by changing the relative prices of carbon-intensive goods.

There is a better way to respond. Why not admit that the EU is setting global climate policy and effectively forming a global “climate club”? The US has abdicated its leadership role in this regard, so why not follow the bloc’s lead? Over the next three years, US policymakers could create a carbon-pricing mechanism in line with the EU’s programme and thus be granted

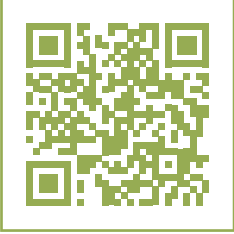
an exception for the right reason – because it joined the club. Both the US economy and the planet would benefit.

The CBAM is an early and promising approximation of the proposal that William D Nordhaus, a Nobel laureate in economics, advocated in “Climate Club: Overcoming Free-riding in International Climate Policy,” his 2015 paper in the American Economic Review. Acknowledging countries’ tendency – manifest in the defunct Kyoto Protocol – to free-ride when international climate agreements lack consequences for non-compliance, Nordhaus argues that a climate club, with small trade penalties on non-participants, “can induce a large stable coalition with high levels of abatement.”

Nordhaus had imagined that China and the US would be the first members of such a club, but that is not a necessary condition. The EU has the economic and political clout to produce “high levels of abatement” while keeping penalties as low as possible. For US policymakers, joining, rather than repudiating, the EU’s approach to carbon pricing is the most sensible way forward for both the domestic economy and the international climate agenda

Sport

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Al Nahdha fight back to draw with Al Nasr in Omantel League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

Al Nasr and Al Nahdha teams played out a 2-2 draw at Al Saada Sports Complex Stadium in the fifth round of the Omantel League on Saturday.

The match began with a competitive display of skills. Both teams displayed resilient defence, thwarting attacks and maintaining a deadlock at the goal.

Al Nasr showcased two dangerous attacks early on, skillfully executed but unfortunately missed by Walid al Musalmi.

In the 17th minute, Al Nasr broke the deadlock with an impressive goal by Abdul Majeed Shammas, seizing an opportunity during a counter-attack. The goal shook Al Nahdha, motivating them to launch a series of attacks. Hamoud al Saadi's attempt was close but missed the target. From a counter-attack, Ahmed al Kaabi almost equalised the score with a shot that Al Nasr's goalkeeper aptly took into a corner kick, ending the course of the first half with Al Nasr leading by one goal.

The second half witnessed heightened intensity, with Al Nahdha pressing hard to take control and adjust the scoreline. In a pivotal moment during a counterattack in the 57th minute, Al Nasr's professional player, Philip, secured a crucial goal, bolstering Al Nasr's lead.

However, Al Nahdha showed resilience and determination, scoring the first in the 60th minute with Abdullah Fawaz's powerful shot that went past Al Nasr goalkeeper Hassan al Buraiki. The match remained intense until the 86th minute when substitute Esam al Subhi made a crucial header, levelling the score at 2-2. The match's exciting conclusion left both teams



with a hard-fought draw.

With this result, Al Nahdha's total points now stand at 8 from 4 matches, maintaining their position in fourth place, including a postponed match. Al Nasr's balance increased to 5 points, securing the seventh position.

AL RUSTAQ FALL AGAIN

In a separate matchup, Al Rustaq, last season's fifth-place finisher in the Omantel League, suffered their second consecutive defeat this season, falling to Al Shabab with a score of 3-2 in a fiercely contested fifth-round match at Al Rustaq Stadium.

Emerson, the standout player of the match, initiated the scoring for Al Shabab in the 9th minute, with Kebegbe subsequently equalising for Al Rustaq from a penalty kick in the 37th minute.

Kebegbe provided a second goal for Al Rustaq in the 56th minute,

but Emerson once again levelled the score for Al Shabab in the 68th minute. He went on to secure the three points for his team by completing a hat-trick with a goal in the 85th minute, making him the first hat-trick scorer in the new season of the Omani League.

As a result, Al Rustaq remain with 3 points from 5 matches, facing a challenging start to the season after their strong performance last year. Meanwhile, Al Shabab, buoyed by Emerson's heroics, advanced from the bottom of the league standings to the seventh in the table with total points to five.

DHOFAR HOLD AL SEEB

The thrilling action in the Omantel League continued as Al Seeb and Dhofar battled to a positive 2-2 draw on Saturday evening at Seeb Stadium in the fifth round.

The first half concluded with

both teams locked in a 1-1 tie. Al Seeb took the lead through Mohsin al Ghassani's header in the 13th minute, while Abdullah al Mishrafi equalised for Dhofar Club in the 26th minute.

The excitement continued into the second half as Tamim al Balushi secured the lead again for Al Seeb in the 56th minute. Dhofar Club responded with determination, equalising through Qasim Saeed.

Al Seeb's point total now stands at 10, trailing behind Sohar, who lead with 11 points but retains another opportunity for advancement. Al Seeb also have a postponed match against Ibri, a first-round fixture rescheduled due to their participation in the AFC Champions League.

Dhofar now have 7 points, placing them on equal footing with Al Nahdha in fourth place, who have a better goal difference.



Oman beach volleyball player

Oman beach volley teams end campaign

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

Oman beach volleyball teams 'A' and 'B' ended their campaign in the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, after suffering defeats in the last 16 round on Sunday.

At Ningbo Banbianshan Beach Volleyball Centre Court 2, Oman team comprising Nouh al Jalubi and Mazin al Hashmi received a 2-0 loss against Kazakhstan pair of Dmitriy Yakovlev and Sergey Bogatu.

The first set finished at 21-16 after Oman's duo delivered their best performance but the experience of the opponents ended the set with five points' gap. In the following set, Oman's duo worked hard to revert back to the match but the rivals managed to strengthen their domination and clinched the match by 21-17.

In another match, the Omani pair of Haitham al Sheraiqi and Ahmed al Hosni suffered a 2-0 defeat against the Qatari duo of Cherif Samba and Ahmed Janko. The Qatari spikers presented a solid performance during the both sets as they won the opening set 21-13 and claimed the second set 21-11.

In the swimming competitions, Oman's Issa al Adawi, ended his participation in the men's 100m freestyle in eighth place with a timing of 53.53s in the preliminary qualification at heat four on Sunday at the Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre Aquatic Sports Arena.

Abdulrahman al Kulaibi took part in the men's 200m freestyle to finish seventh (2:16.65) in the preliminary qualification at heat two. Both swimmers did not secure a slot to the finals.

CLOSE DEFEAT

The Oman hockey team began their opening match with a fighting 3-2 loss against hosts China at Gongshu Canal Sports Park Stadium on Sunday for the preliminary round for Pool B.

Oman scored twice through Ahmed al Noufali (20th minute - penalty) and Fahad al Lawati (52nd minute).

China found the target through Jieisheng Gao (33rd), Changliang Lin (44th - penalty) and Jieisheng Gao (54th minute).

Oman will meet Malaysia on Tuesday and take on Thailand on Thursday. They will conclude the group matches against Indonesia on September 30.

Yemen's Abdullah al Qadimi secures top spot

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

In a thrilling display of strategic prowess and skill, Yemen's Abdullah al Qadimi emerged winner of the inaugural preparatory tournament leading up to the World Amateur Chess Championship, which will be hosted by Oman in November.

The preparatory tournament, which followed the classic chess system of 7 rounds lasting 60 minutes each, witnessed intense competition with an additional 10 seconds granted for each move.

Over 100 local players, as well as participants from various countries residing in the Sultanate of Oman, showcased their strategic acumen in the training halls of the Sultan Qaboos Complex in Bausher from September 21 to 23.

Shortly following the final round of competitions, international referee Ruqaya bint Abdullah al Balushiyah, crowned the deserving winners. Abdullah al Qadimi, hailing from Yemen, secured the first place after accumulating six points. Banshi Ashraf from India claimed the second spot, also accumulating six points. The podium was completed by Medhat Magdy from Egypt



Bansi Ashraf from India claimed the second spot

in third place and Banuj Shui from India in fourth place.

Emerson Nabon clinched the fifth spot, while Oman player Hamoud al Busaidy achieved the sixth position with five and a half points. Saeed al Maamari, another Oman national team player, came in seventh place with five and a half points, followed by Ali al Maamari in eighth place with five points.

Notably, the tournament witnessed an impressive turnout of more than 40 national players from Oman, including prominent figures such as Mohammad al

Saeedi, Mohammad al Amri, Ahmed al Rahbi, Hamoud al Busaidy, Mana al Kathiri, Muslim al Amri, Amin al Ansi, Rashid al Jabri, and Salim al Amri.

The national team players, Anat al Issaya, Rawan al Balushi, Kawthar al Maamari, Hour al Shukaili, Al Anoud al Ghafri, and Youmna al Nadabi, also showcased their skills and participated fervently in the tournament.

The preparatory tournament served as a vital platform for fostering fair competition among players, elevating the technical prowess of national team players, and striving for advanced positions in the international classification. The event also facilitated invaluable opportunities for interaction, experience gathering, and practical implementation of the training received under the guidance of the team's technical staff.

The ultimate objective is to enhance the players' capabilities and prepare them effectively to represent the Sultanate of Oman in the upcoming World Amateur Championship. The Oman Chess Committee is dedicated to involving the largest possible number of Omani players to empower them in securing enhanced international classifications and titles.

Sultanate of Oman MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS AND YOUTH					
TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT					
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects					
Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Grade in Tender Board Registration	Last day to Purchase Tender Documents	Last Date of Tender Submission
17/2023	Services	CLEANING SERVICES TO ENTIRE CAMPUS AND FACILITIES TO MINISTRY'S VARIOUS BUILDINGS AT MUSCAT GOVERNORATE FOR THE PERIOD OF 1 st JANUARY 2023 TO 31 st DECEMBER 2023	Excellent Grade	05/10/2023	30/10/2023
18/2023	Services	MAINTENANCE OF LANDSCAPING WORKS TO MINISTRY'S CAMPUSES IN MUSCAT GOVERNORATE FOR THE PERIOD OF 1 st JANUARY 2023 TO 31 st DECEMBER 2023	First Grade	05/10/2023	30/10/2023
19/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	MAINTENANCE & OPERATION OF ELECTRO-MECHANICAL AND AIR-CONDITIONING UNITS TO MINISTRY'S VARIOUS BUILDINGS IN MUSCAT GOVERNORATE FOR THE PERIOD 1 st JANUARY 2023 TO 31 st DECEMBER 2023	First Grade	05/10/2023	30/10/2023
20/2023	Services	CONSTRUCTION OF GRASSED FOOTBALL PITCH WITH AUTOMATIC IRRIGATION SYSTEM, SUPPLY AND INSULATION OF FLOOD LIGHT AT AL SALAM SPORT CLUB (SHINAS BRANCH)	Excellent & First Grade	05/10/2023	30/10/2023
21/2023	Supply	SUPPORT LIBRARIES WITH THE BASIC EQUIPMENT OF THE OPERATING SYSTEM RFID TECHNOLOGY	Third Grade	05/10/2023	30/10/2023
Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om).					
The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site					
INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH					
Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om					

Assefa record in Berlin, Kipchoge wins men's race

Berlin: Ethiopian Tigist Assefa smashed the women's marathon world record by more than two minutes in Berlin on Sunday as Kenyan Eliud Kipchoge won the men's race for a record fifth time.

Assefa clocked 2hr 11min 53sec, more than two minutes ahead of the previous world mark of 2:14:04 set by Kenyan Brigid Kosgei in Chicago in 2019.

"I wanted to break the marathon world record, but I couldn't imagine that it would result in a time under 2:12," said the 29-year-old.

"I am very happy."

Assefa said she held back in the first half of the race "so that I wouldn't be tired in the second half... in the second part, I could bring a lot more power into it"

She said she hoped her win would "motivate many talented women, not only those on a high level but those who may be lower down to rise up."

Assefa finished almost six minutes ahead of Kenyan Sheila Chepkirui. Tanzanian Magdalena Shauri finished third, nearly seven minutes behind Assefa.



Tigist Assefa (L) and Eliud Kipchoge celebrate on the podium with their trophies after the Berlin Marathon. — AFP

Chepkirui told reporters she "had to suffer in the second half", but said "I'm happy, I'm on the podium."

Assefa broke away early in perfect conditions in the German capital and maintained her pace to

become the fourth woman to set the world record in Berlin but the first since Japan's Naoko Takahashi in 2001.

Assefa crossed the line just after men's world record holder Kipchoge won his race in 2hr 02min 42sec.

Kipchoge finished 31sec ahead of countryman Vincent Kipkemoi with Ethiopian Tadese Takele third at 42sec.

Kipchoge's fifth Berlin win takes him past Ethiopian Haile Gebrselassie's four victories but

the Kenyan finished outside his previous world record, set last year in Berlin, of 2:01:09.

"Sure, I expected myself to be able to set a world record again, but I can live with the fact that it didn't work out," Kipchoge told the post-race press conference.

"The beauty of sport is to accept the outcome and move on" Kipchoge said "sport is really beautiful".

Asked what had changed from his first win in Berlin to his last, he said "running is no longer an individual event, running is a team event."

Kipchoge, who has won the last two Olympic golds, looked forward to the 2024 Games in Paris, saying he "hoped to repeat his victory" but said he would be "happy (to be on) the podium".

COMING HOME

Despite doubts after a surprise sixth-place at the Boston Marathon in April, 38-year-old Kipchoge said he felt he was "coming home" at where he has set the world record at twice.

Kipchoge and Ethiopian Derseh Kindie pulled away from the pack early, the two crossing the halfway point with a split of 60:21, slower than the Kenyan's 2022 world-record time of 59:51.

Kindie, whose personal best stands seven minutes outside the world mark, kept pace with Kipchoge until 31 kilometres, where he suddenly fell back and appeared to drop out of the race, walking gingerly on the footpath as other runners overtook him.

Kipchoge kept up his pace and crossed the line well clear of other runners for a record fifth win.

Two minutes before the marathon began, police dragged climate protesters carrying buckets of orange paint off the course within sight of the runners standing on the starting blocks.

Only traces of paint remained as the race began on time.

Berlin mayor Kai Wegner started the race pressing a red buzzer, the organisers feeling the traditional starting pistol was inappropriate in light of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. — AFP



Oman team celebrating after snatching Gulf T20I title

Oman claims Gulf T20I title

MUSCAT: Oman cricketers seem to love making history in the shortest format of the game, in particular, when it comes to the inaugural edition.

Nearly 16 years after Oman had won the inaugural Asian Cricket Council (ACC) Twenty20 Cup in Kuwait, their first major title as Oman were adjudged joint winners with Afghanistan following a washout, the Men in Red have done it again.

On Saturday, Oman were crowned champions of the inaugural Gulf T20I Cricket Championship that concluded in Doha, Qatar.

In a thrilling final, Oman led by Aqib Ilyas, defeated UAE by five wickets with four balls to spare.

Having won the inaugural ACC T20 Cup, and then again in 2015 the latest trophy of the inaugural Gulf T20I Championship is a "massive" achievement in the words of the team's head coach Duleep Mendis.

Mendis, the former Sri Lankan captain, is the architect of Oman's rise in the T20 format and he continues to deliver with his men since joining the team in September 2012. Under Mendis, Oman have qualified twice to the ICC T20 World Cup (2016 and 2021) and have won the ACC T20 in UAE.

The latest title assumes

significance as this is the first edition of the Gulf T20I Championship and the regional cricket associations are hopeful that this tournament will be an annual affair and played across all the six GCC countries —Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait.

Skipped by Aqib Ilyas, the all-rounder led from the front at the Doha tournament, where the come-from-behind spirit was displayed in abundance by the team.

In his remarks after the title win, Mendis said: "I am very happy with the result. It was a show of character and grit by the boys to have come back strongly to claim the title after two defeats in the group stage.

"The bowlers did a fantastic job throughout the tournament. We had few issues in the top order during the early matches but the lower order rose to the occasion to save us in a few games."

Mendis added: "The best part of this highly competitive tournament was that our players peaked at the right time as we won the last two matches in the league stage [against Saudi Arabia and Kuwait] to head into the final high on confidence."

The head coach also gave full marks to the captaincy of Aqib Ilyas, who displayed his class with batting and bowling and was also

all praise for Ayaan Khan and the bowlers.

"There were so many contributions from the rest and it was heartening to see that the fielding came out good," he added.

Mendis said: "I am really impressed by the team's fighting qualities and the way they made a comeback in this tournament was just fantastic. To achieve this sort of success shows the team's character and strength and I hope they continue with this mentality ahead. It was a victory that will be remembered for long for the way the boys made a comeback."

Mendis added: "The win had a lot to do with the strong support we received from the OC chairman, Pankaj Khimji, Madhu Jesrani (OC secretary), Alkesh Joshi (treasurer) and other board members and support staff.

THRILLING FINAL

Chasing a victory target of 164 after restricting UAE to 163/5, Oman rode on Ilyas' knock of 67 and an unbeaten 53 from Ayaan to reach the target.

Shoaib Khan contributed vital 22 after the team was reduced to 11 for two. A 66-run stand between Ilyas and Shoaib put the team back on course. Earlier, Bilal Khan and Ilyas picked up two wickets apiece to restrict the UAE to 163. Skipper Mohammed Waseem top scored with 46.

BEGAN WITH A DEFEAT

Earlier in the tournament, Oman reached the final despite two defeats in the round-robin format.

Oman lost their opening match to UAE by 22 runs but exacted revenge for the trophy.

Oman bounced back to defeat the hosts Qatar by 19 runs but lost to Bahrain in one of the most thrilling games as Mendis' men went down by one run.

Oman then demolished Saudi Arabia by 47 runs and booked a place in the final with a massive 68-run win over Kuwait on Friday.

LEADING FROM THE FRONT

Skipper Aqib Ilyas emerged as the tournament's highest scorer with 90, scored in the opener against the UAE. His 52-ball innings was studded with ten boundaries and four maximums. Ilyas also scored a valuable half-century in the title clash against the UAE and was the tournament's second highest run-getter with 205 runs in five innings. He ended with an average of 41. His all-round effort in the final (67 and 2/24) earned him the player of the final award.

Ilyas was given good support by Ayaan Khan, who finished the tournament with a total of 182 runs at an average of 36.4.

Sakkari beats Dolehide to win Guadalajara title

Guadalajara: Maria Sakkari of Greece ended American Caroline Dolehide's fairytale run in the Guadalajara Open final on Saturday to win her first WTA 1000 crown and end a four-year title drought.

Second seed Sakkari powered past Dolehide, who is ranked 111th in the world, for a 7-5 6-3 victory to capture her second career title, ending the week without dropping a set.

Sakkari had lost six finals since winning her first title at the contest, before clinching victory after an hour and 43 minutes.

Sakkari, who has previously described Mexico as her second home, was presented with the champion's sombrero after her win and also wore the Mexican soccer team's shirt during the trophy ceremony.

"It's the biggest win of my career ... I'm just very, very grateful that it happened here," she told a news conference later. "I've said it many times this week, I just really enjoy my time here ... Tonight and tomorrow, it's going to be two very happy days for me." — Reuters

"I want to thank my family. I really wish they

were here with me. I want to dedicate this trophy to my grandfather who passed away last year, and my grandma who is watching at home."

In Saturday's final, Dolehide rallied from a break down in a tight opening set to take a 5-4 lead, but Sakkari won the next three games to take the set.

She broke for a 3-2 lead in the second set and held for 5-3 with her third ace of the contest, before clinching victory after an hour and 43 minutes.

Sakkari, who has previously described Mexico as her second home, was presented with the champion's sombrero after her win and also wore the Mexican soccer team's shirt during the trophy ceremony.

"It's the biggest win of my career ... I'm just very, very grateful that it happened here," she told a news conference later. "I've said it many times this week, I just really enjoy my time here ... Tonight and tomorrow, it's going to be two very happy days for me." — Reuters



Greece's Maria Sakkari celebrates with the trophy after winning her final match against Caroline Dolehide of the US. — Reuters

BEZZECCHI WINS INDIAN GRAND PRIX

AS BAGNAIA CRASH OPENS UP CHAMPIONSHIP



Bezzecchi celebrates with the trophy on the podium after winning. — Reuters



NOIDA: Marco Bezzecchi of VR46 Racing won the inaugural Indian Grand Prix on Sunday with a dominant performance from start to finish while Ducati's Francesco Bagnaia suffered a crash that blows the world championship contest wide open.

Pole-sitter Bezzecchi lost out on a sprint podium after a collision with team mate Luca Marini, eventually finishing fifth, but on Sunday there was no rider in the chasing pack who could match the determined Italian's pace up front.

Pramac Racing rider and sprint winner Jorge Martin, who risked a penalty by unzipping his leathers in the heat, finished second while Yamaha's Fabio Quartararo completed the podium after the two were involved in a tense battle on the final lap.

World championship leader Bagnaia seemed to be cruising in second place but lost his balance on turn five with eight laps to go, allowing Martin to move up to second and close the gap to 13 points while Bezzecchi is 44 points behind.

"I'm very happy, it was a tough race, very long. After yesterday, unfortunately I was hit in the start and today I wanted revenge," Bezzecchi said in a pit lane interview.

"I started well. I got on the lead early and then I was focused. I enjoyed this track."

Bagnaia initially took the lead on the straight at the Buddh International Circuit, with Martin braking late and going wide in a desperate but ultimately futile attempt to

keep the faster Ducati behind him.

But Bezzecchi also capitalised to move up to second before the pole sitter moved into the lead at the end of the first lap and his searing pace allowed the Italian to extend his lead to more than two seconds after four laps.

MARTIN MOVES UP

That was the signal for Martin to risk an overtake on Bagnaia with a lunge on the inside and he made it stick, much to Bagnaia's surprise as the championship leader pulled out of a quick turn to avoid a collision.

But with nine laps to go, Martin seemed to be struggling with his front tyre and that opened the door for Bagnaia to retake second place before the Italian crashed.

Martin was visibly struggling in the hot and humid conditions and after keeping Quartararo at bay, he got down on his knees in the pit lane as his team poured bottles of water down his racing suit.

The race was shortened by three laps on the request of riders due to hot and humid conditions during practice sessions. The Spaniard later fainted and was propped up at the fence below the podium as MotoGP's medical director assessed him, but he was back on his feet after taking on some fluids. Six-times MotoGP champion Marc Marquez looked set to battle for third but the Honda rider fell on turn one on the fifth lap and eventually finished ninth. — Reuters



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Oman strengthens geologic hydrogen exploration with US collaborations



The officials signing memorandums of understanding (MoUs).

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

In a significant development for Oman's flourishing energy sector, Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, has recently signed two groundbreaking Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs). These agreements have been forged with 'Eden Geopower', an American company, and the Omani Earth Sciences Consultancy Centre. Together, these MoUs signify a remarkable milestone in the realm of geologic hydrogen exploration, underlining Oman's steadfast commitment to advancing clean energy solutions and global energy security. Al Hadhrami underscores the strategic importance of geologic hydrogen within Oman's comprehensive energy transition plan. He expressed his enthusiasm for the expanding hydrogen sector, recognising its significance not only from an economic standpoint but also for its potential contributions to environmental sustainability. As the world pivots towards cleaner energy sources, hydrogen is poised to play an instrumental role in bolstering global energy security. Consequently, robust research and exploration in this sector are of paramount importance to attain the most favourable outcomes. Moreover, Al Hadhrami stressed the vital role of international collaboration and coordination with experts and partners in advancing the scientific and technical dimensions of geologic hydrogen. These partnerships also serve as magnets for attracting investments, which are

indispensable for unlocking the full potential of this clean energy source. Oman's ultimate aim is crystal clear: to establish itself as a leading and trusted player on the global stage in the domain of geologic hydrogen. The MoUs inked with 'Eden Geopower' and the Omani Earth Sciences Consultancy Centre represent a substantial stride in bolstering cooperation in this field. These agreements have been meticulously designed to foster scientific dialogues, conduct in-depth preliminary studies, and pinpoint suitable locations for experimental research. Importantly, this collaborative effort encompasses the active participation of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, guaranteeing a comprehensive approach to geologic hydrogen exploration. One of the focal points of these agreements is the identification of appropriate locations for geologic hydrogen exploration. These sites will serve as the cornerstone for experimental research, propelling Oman closer to harnessing the tremendous potential of this clean natural resource. It's worth noting that Oman has already embarked on the green hydrogen journey by allocating numerous sites for investment and forging partnerships with globally acclaimed developers in this field. This collective endeavour aims to significantly curtail carbon emissions and ensure a reliable energy supply on a global scale. Eng Muhannad bin Al Khattab al Hinai, Director of the Hydrogen Policies and Strategies Department at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, emphasised the profound significance of research and exploration in the realm of geologic hydrogen. **TO PAGE 15**

Oman's economic revival to be sustained during 2023: CBO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

The macroeconomic outlook of the Omani economy has significantly improved, successfully overcoming the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing global geopolitical tensions, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO). The apex bank's upbeat assessment of Oman's economic outlook was outlined in its 2022 Annual Report issued here on Sunday, September 24, 2023. "The steadfast implementation of reforms agenda under the strategic direction of Oman Vision 2040, along with favourable oil prices draw an optimistic macroeconomic outlook for Omani economy for 2023. Economic activities in the Sultanate of Oman are already witnessing revival, with real output growing, and inflation being contained at low levels," it stated. According to the Central Bank, the oil prices are expected to remain at a higher-level providing support to hydrocarbon activities. The non-hydrocarbon activities are also projected to show a moderate growth in real terms in 2023 with the expected increase in demand for Omani exports. The fiscal outlook for 2023 is projected to improve as a result of oil windfalls and fiscal consolidation measures, which have had a positive impact on both fiscal and external positions. The expected continuation of non-hydrocarbon growth is likely to contribute to an improved fiscal outcome, potentially leading to a fiscal surplus. This comes in line with the government's commitment to fiscal consolidation and opens up opportunities for productive expenditures and support for



The macroeconomic outlook of the Omani economy has significantly improved.

economic activities. Additionally, the external sector is expected to benefit from robust demand for Omani non-hydrocarbon exports. Overall, the outlook for 2023 indicates a sustained revival in economic activities in the country, it stressed. "The recovery of the Omani economy has now been firmly established, as evident by its continued progress in overcoming the economic repercussions of health conditions and the global geopolitical tensions. The nominal GDP of the Omani economy grew by 30 per cent in 2022, which was driven by improvements in both the hydrocarbon and non-hydrocarbon sectors, showing growth rates of 61.6 per cent and 16.9 per cent, respectively, the report said. In the non-hydrocarbon sector, the recovery was broad-based with all major sectors showing positive growth during 2022. Non-petroleum industrial activities expanded by 23.5 per cent in 2022 mainly due to rebound in nominal output from manufacturing by 49.6 per cent.

The real GDP (base year 2018) of Oman grew by 4.3 per cent during 2022 as compared with a growth of 3.1 per cent in 2021. The improvement in real GDP growth was supported by all the major sectors with output from petroleum activities showing a remarkable growth of 10.2 per cent supported by 5.9 per cent growth in natural gas output. Among the non-petroleum industrial activities, the output from manufacturing in real terms witnessed a growth of 17 per cent, 'mining and quarrying' and 'electricity and water supply' witnessed growth of 10.5 per cent and 4.5 per cent, respectively. In the services sector, 'accommodation and food services', 'transport and storage' and 'wholesale and retail trade', showed robust growth in real output during 2022 indicating a revival in contact-based services, which were the worst affected segment by the pandemic. Conversely, the output of construction sector, 'agriculture, and fishing' in real terms declined by 23.2 per cent and 9.7 per cent in 2022, respectively. The Inflation rate during 2022

remained subdued, well below global average, benefiting from the monetary policy framework, fixed exchange rate regime and fiscal policy measures. The average consumer price inflation in Oman was 2.8 per cent in 2022 compared to 1.6 per cent in 2021. Given the country's dependence on imports for meeting a large part of day-to-day requirements, the global inflation conditions had a dominant impact on prices in the Sultanate of Oman. The impact of global inflationary pressures on domestic inflation was, however, to some extent contained by appreciation in the nominal effective exchange rate (NEER) of the Omani Rial, which appreciated (y-o-y) by 6.3 per cent in December 2022 amidst strengthening of USD, and government interventions that had largely insulated the domestic inflation from global inflation spikes. Oman's public finance achieved remarkable positive fiscal performance in 2022, surpassing previous years, driven by higher oil and reform measures undertaken by the government. **TURN TO PAGE 15**

Duqm to host Oman Shell's blue hydrogen and ammonia project

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

The Ministry of Energy Minerals (MoEM) says it is extending every support to Oman Shell's continuing studies into the technical and commercial viability of its proposed blue hydrogen and ammonia project. Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, led a government team which met with Oman Shell's Senior Vice-President and Country Chair, Walid Hadi, recently to discuss the latest developments on the

project. Shell is the developer of the proposed project which aims to supply blue (low carbon) hydrogen and ammonia to local and international markets enabled by capturing and storing the carbon dioxide (CO2) associated with the production process. A suitable CO2 store for the proposed project has been identified in collaboration with PDO. Shell has selected Duqm as the location of its blue hydrogen and ammonia manufacturing facilities where there are opportunities to



supply local industries with low carbon hydrogen. Commenting on the role that the plan could play in the creation of a hydrogen economy in Oman, Al Aufi said: "The Sultanate of Oman is committed

to its declared target of Net-Zero Emissions by 2050. This blue hydrogen and ammonia project has the potential to accelerate the transition of customers to low carbon fuels, even as large-scale Green Hydrogen becomes available. The Ministry therefore supports Shell's efforts to prove the commercial and technical viability of the project over the next phase." Commenting on the ongoing study, Walid Hadi said: "As the developer of this aspired blue hydrogen and ammonia project, Shell continues to support Oman's Vision 2040 and its ambition to

reach Net-Zero Carbon Emissions by 2050 by supplying low carbon fuels domestically and abroad. Through pre-feasibility stage, we aim to mature the technical design, commercial arrangements with the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and customers and demonstrate the broader in country benefits of the project. "We, at Shell, see blue and green hydrogen projects as reinforcing the strengths of each other in Oman and are pleased to be the lead developer also of the Green Energy Oman renewable hydrogen project."

BankDhofar facilitates seamless participation in QQGN IPO

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, one of the leading financial institutions in Oman, is pleased to announce its pivotal role in facilitating the participation of its valued customers in the upcoming Initial Public Offering (IPO) of OQ Gas Networks SAOG (QQGN). The QQGN IPO presents a significant investment opportunity, as BankDhofar is committed to ensuring that its customers have a convenient and accessible experience when participating in this exciting venture.

The customers can apply for the QQGN IPO digitally through the bank's user-friendly mobile app. This digital platform allows for instant and hassle-free participation from anywhere. On the other hand, for customers who prefer a face-to-face approach, they can also visit



any of BankDhofar's branches to apply for the QQGN IPO through MCD E form. Our dedicated staff will be available to assist throughout the application process. Recognising the diverse needs of our retail customers,

BankDhofar is offering a 1:1 IPO Finance option via its mobile banking app. Customers can access the funds they need directly through the app. In addition to the application, customers can go directly to any of BankDhofar's

branches. This means customers can secure the necessary funds with ease to invest in the IPO. It is worth mentioning that IPO Finance from BankDhofar comes with 0% interest, ensuring that customers can participate in the QQGN IPO without incurring additional financial costs. There is a nominal processing fee of 0.5% for IPO applications, making it a cost-effective option for them. The IPO subscription for individuals begins on September 26, and closes on October 5, 2023. As for institutions; it begins on September 26 and closes on October 9, 2023. BankDhofar understands the importance of this IPO to our customers and is dedicated to providing them with the necessary tools and support to seize this investment opportunity.

Aloft Muscat launches Saturday brunch fiesta at The Backstage restaurant

MUSCAT: Aloft Muscat is excited to announce the launch of its sassy Saturday brunch fiesta at The Backstage restaurant, where culinary excellence meets affordability and assures an exceptional dining experience along with live entertainment. The brunch is available every Saturday from 11:30 AM to 3:30 PM, making it the perfect weekend treat for friends and family. The Saturday brunch at The Backstage all day dining restaurant offers an array of international and Middle Eastern fusion flavours, live cooking stations and sensations that will leave customers craving for more. Guests can customise their brunch experience, selecting from two enticing packages:

- Soft Sassy RO 10 and
- House Savvy RO 15

The inviting ambiance of The Backstage complements its cool-



vibes dining experience perfectly. With its modern and elegant decor, it provides the ideal backdrop for a leisurely and enjoyable meal. The recently opened Aloft Muscat is strategically located in the middle of the dynamic capital city at Ghala, exhibiting the perfect blend of the city's buzzing, yet calm nature, creating an experience that is well rounded. For more information and reservations, please contact us on: email - sales.muscat@aloft.com, call - +968 2270 1777 or WhatsApp - +968 9659 4108.

Sohar International to expand portfolio with financial & non-financial services

MUSCAT: Staying committed to its vision to be a world-leading Omani service company that helps customers, communities, and people to prosper and grow, Sohar International has furthered its transformational journey to go beyond banking. The bank has proudly launched a first-of-its-kind in Oman, an innovative ecosystem of financial and non-financial services through its mobile banking apps that perfectly complement customers' lifestyles enabling them to live a better life. With the integration of these services within the Sohar International Mobile Banking app, the initial phase of the app's launch has categorised the services into distinct sections, namely 'My Life' and 'My Goals'. Leveraging these new



integrations to convert its current apps into a one-stop platform, Sohar International Mobile Banking app offers convenient options enabling customers to book air travel tickets, make hotel reservation, purchase gifts vouchers and much more. Commenting on the development, Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer at Sohar International said, "At

Sohar International, we thrive on digitalisation, the key to triumph in today's world. It fuels boundless efficiency, agility, and innovation, empowering us to exceed customer expectations. Our commitment to innovation drives growth, aligning with Oman's digitalisation goals and uplifting communities. Together, we're shaping a brighter future, in sync with Oman Vision 2040."

National Finance named best performing company at Alam Al-Iktisaad Awards 2023

MUSCAT: Recognising its outstanding achievements over the past year, National Finance was recently honoured with the esteemed 'Best Performing Company' Award in the Mid-Cap category at the prestigious Alam Al-Iktisaad Awards 2023. The accolade — another feather in the company's hat — underscores National Finance's unparalleled pursuit of excellence, innovation and scaling new heights in the Sultanate of Oman's finance sector. The honour was presented by HH Sayyid Melek bin Shihab al Said and was received by Ahmed al Maawali, Deputy Head of Retail at National Finance, on behalf of the company. The awards, organised by the country's leading business magazine Alam Al-Iktisaad, was graced by the presence of Chief Guest HH Sayyid Melek bin Shihab al Said and hosted by Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Mashani. The event also saw in attendance distinguished senior government dignitaries, top business leaders, financial consultants, decision makers and esteemed members of the business fraternity. Beaming with pride upon the win, Tariq al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer, National Finance, said, "This



award serves as a testament to National Finance's dedication and constant commitment to providing the fastest and most flexible solutions to serve our customers in the best possible way. Our extensive experience, strong collaborations, strategic business practices, and hard-working and dedicated employees are the reasons behind our great achievements. This recognition reinforces our continuous commitment to delivering unparalleled financial services, staying abreast of market developments, and improving people's lives by adapting our products to meet customer needs."

Bank Nizwa acts as collecting bank for QQGN's impending IPO



MUSCAT: Committed to the innovation of diversified cutting-edge Islamic banking offerings, Bank Nizwa, the Sultanate of Oman's pioneering Islamic bank, announced its proud participation as a collecting bank for the highly anticipated OQ Gas Networks Initial Public Offering (IPO). In line with the bank's dynamic approach towards establishing strategic collaborations with key players across industries, Bank Nizwa has made subscribing to the IPO accessible to a wider audience through this move. This collaboration enables Bank Nizwa's valued retail customers to subscribe shares in the QQGN IPO through the bank's user-friendly Mobile Application. Furthermore, Bank Nizwa corporate customers and non-Bank Nizwa retail customers can submit their bids through the bank's branches.

OQ Gas Networks recently announced its intention to float 49% of its share capital via an IPO. Marking a significant milestone in Oman's financial sector, the IPO is set to be the biggest to be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) with 2,122,005,720 shares offered for subscription. Commenting on the momentous partnership, Saif al Rawahi, Assistant General Manager Investment, Treasury, Government Relation and Project Finance at Bank Nizwa, said, "As the country's most-trusted Islamic bank, we at Bank Nizwa are proud to be the Collecting Bank for QQGN's IPO as it aligns with our dedication to supporting the economic development of Oman. We are excited to be able to make this offering accessible to our valued customers in a hassle-free, convenient and secure manner."

QQGN holds IPO roadshow in Ibri

IBRI: The branch of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) at the Wilayat of Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate hosted, yesterday, Sunday, the third roadshow on the initial public offering (IPO) of OQ Gas Networks (QQGN) (Under transformation from a closed joint stock company to a public joint stock company). These roadshows aim to educate the investors, citizens and residents about the system of subscribing in the floated shares and targeted categories. QQGN intends to float up to (49%) of its shares in an IPO, which provides investors with an opportunity to take part in the development journey of the company. In 2022, the company transported about 39.4 billion cubic metres of gas from six gas producers to a varied consumer base including 130 gas consumers along 4,031 kilometres of gas pipelines. Mansoor Ali al Abdali, Managing Director of QQGN, said: "OQ Gas Networks is the



exclusive operator of the main gas transportation infrastructure in the Sultanate of Oman. The company plays a vital role in connecting gas producers with consumers through its assets that include gas pipelines and networks supported by compression and gas supply stations, which generate transportation and delivery revenues. Al Abdali explained that QQGN intends approving a semi-annual dividend distribution policy to pay the profits of shares in cash after the IPO. The company

expects to distribute dividends amounting to RO 33 million for the first nine months of 2023 in January 2024 and RO 11 million for the last three months of 2023 in April 2024. He pointed out that the demand on gas in the Sultanate of Oman has increased. Furthermore, he noted that it is expected to be in the range of 37.7 billion cubic metres and 54.5 billion cubic metres by 2043 with the rise in economic activity and manufacturing in all vital sectors in Oman.

For his part, Saif al Badi, board member of OCCI and chairman of OCCI's branch at Al Dhahirah Governorate, said: "IPOs contribute to attracting national and foreign investments in governmental assets and boosting the savings of individuals. This results in increasing the cash flows and creating foreign partnerships that enhance the opportunities to exchange expertise and experiences." Headed: "IPOs also contribute to broadening the ownership of companies and achieving mutual benefits. QQGN's IPO is one of the biggest underwritings in the history of Oman. Listing the shares of the company in Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) will contribute to enriching it with more investors and underwriters from the Omani citizens and residents. The company has great capabilities such as the advantage of being the exclusive gas distributor in the Sultanate of Oman, which provides guarantees for generating revenues and profits."



CBO firms up plans for roll-out of Open Banking in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, SEPT 24

A framework enabling the introduction of Open Banking – a tech-driven service with the potential to transform the banking and financial services industry – is currently being formulated under the auspices of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Having grown exponentially across wide swathes of the global financial landscape, Open Banking is set to make inroads in the Omani banking and financial sector as well upon the eventual adoption of the regulatory framework.

The fintech-based platform, based on the use of application programming interfaces (API), enables banks to collaborate with third-party payment service and financial service providers to create a smoother user experience for consumers.

Oman's apex bank says it has been crafting an Open Banking API Strategy for the sector. "The Open Banking API framework project is currently in its advanced stages of the procurement cycle.



The fintech-based platform enables banks to collaborate with third-party payment service.

The project is expected to kick-off in 2023, where the review of Open Banking Strategy and setting up the technical, data and security standards will be discussed and finalised as well as selecting vendor, licensed banks (external stakeholders) through Oman Banks Association," the Central Bank stated in its newly published 2022 Annual Report.

Significantly, the Open Banking initiative stems from a broader effort by the Central Bank to ignite the growth of a robust fintech ecosystem in the

Sultanate of Oman.

Tahir bin Salim al Amri, CBO Executive President, commented: "The banking sector remained sound and resilient, amid continued technology adoption, and innovation in products and business models. More importantly, close monitoring of developments within the fintech ecosystem has been prioritised, and the necessary steps have been taken to further promote vibrant, inclusive, safe and efficient digital financial products and services.

Taking this perspective into

account, the CBO has proactively undertaken additional measures in 2022 to allocate substantial resources towards bolstering cybersecurity and technology stability to ensure the continued security and resilience of our IT systems.

Furthermore, the CBO has prioritised investments in data management, aiming to effectively leverage the full potential of data. These concerted efforts will significantly contribute to fostering fintech-enabled financial inclusion and enhancing the efficiency of various payment systems."

According to market experts, Open Banking has the potential to stimulate innovation, as well as provide a level playing field for tech platforms and startups.

Consequently, large conventional banks are compelled to improve their offerings in order to compete with smaller, nimble and tech-savvy players entering their turf. Among the beneficiaries of this competitive landscape are consumers who will enjoy fee reductions, improved technology and customer service.

Omani, Saudi firms invited to bid for design of EZAD Phase 1 infrastructure



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, SEPT 24

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has announced a tender for Omani and Saudi companies to bid for providing advisory services for designing and supervising the implementation of infrastructure facilities for the Integrated Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah Governorate (EZAD).

OPAZ invited local specialised companies to get the terms and conditions of the tender from the website of the General Secretariat of the Tender Board. The deadline for participating and purchasing the tender documents was set for October 2, 2023.

OPAZ set the date for interested companies in bidding for the project to visit the Zone on October 3, and the deadline for receiving bids was set on October 26.

Yahya bin Khamis Al Zadjali, Planning Advisor to OPAZ Chairman, said, "The tender was announced after OPAZ had finished its thorough analysis and plans for establishing the Integrated Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah Governorate.

The scope of this tender includes the design and supervision of the first phase's infrastructure facilities, including roads, electrical installations, water and sewage networks, telecommunications networks, gas networks, industrial waste treatment and necessary area facilities like administrative and commercial buildings and some ancillary facilities.

The initial phase of the comprehensive plan for the construction of the Integrated Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah is currently being finalised by OPAZ."

"This Zone plays a strategic role in enhancing bilateral trade between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by attracting companies from the two countries to establish their projects within the Zone and find economic partnerships to reduce the production and export costs, make it easier to supply goods and products and provide high quality industries.

Additionally, the Zone provides job opportunities for Omanis in various sectors and industries, streamlined with Oman's Vision 2040 goals", Al Zadjali explained.

Oman and Türkiye trade relations seek greater vistas

KABEER YOUSUF

MUSCAT, SEPT 24

In an attempt to explore greater vistas of bilateral trade, representatives from Oman and Türkiye will gather at the Sheraton Muscat under the "Turkish-Omani Exporters Assembly" banner yesterday (September 25).

Speaking to the Observer, Mohammed Hekimoglu, Turkish Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman said that the Assembly, organised in association with the Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Türkiye, will seek ways to develop new business with major exporters from Türkiye with their counterparts in Oman.

"This Assembly is first of its kind and are aiming to seek ways for further strengthening the bolster relations between the two friendly countries and it holds special place in the history of the bilateral relations," he said.

The B2B Meetings, held as part of the Assembly will host experts from both countries between 10am-5pm and Istanbul Textile and Apparel Exporters Associations, along with sever's top business owners and exporters representing different industry sectors are present in Oman as part of the Türkiye Exporters Assembly.

Several one-to-one meetings are organised with top executives from companies producing and exporting home textile, cleaning products (chemicals), packaging, software systems, furniture, carpet, food (dry fruit& nuts, fresh fruits & vegetables, olive & olive oil), among others.

Oman's economic revival to be sustained during 2023: CBO

FROM PAGE 13

Crude oil prices in 2022, surpassing the levels observed in the previous year. The average Oman oil price in 2022 was \$95.4 per barrel, higher by 48.4 per cent than that in a year ago, while oil production during the year increased by 9.6 per cent compared to 1.9 per cent in 2021. These developments have generated fiscal space for the government to undertake productive expenditure while remaining on the course of fiscal consolidation spelt out under the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan (MTFP).

Government revenue during

2022 witnessed a notable increase of 29.3 per cent compared to the previous year. This was primarily driven by higher oil and gas revenue as well as other current revenues.

The government expenditure also increased by 7.3 per cent in 2022 from the level seen in the previous year. The surge in oil revenues provided a cushion for the economy, leading to the Sultanate of Oman reporting its first surplus since 2014.

The government has successfully restored fiscal sustainability by enhancing non-oil revenue, increasing spending efficiency, and

controlling the budget deficit. This resulted in a fiscal surplus of 2.6 per cent in 2022 from a deficit of 3.6 per cent in 2021. These effective measures enabled the government to successfully decrease the public debt to GDP ratio to 40.2 per cent in 2022 from 61.7 in 2021.

As a result of the continued efforts in debt reduction and improved fiscal outcome, Oman experienced positive and stable improvements in its credit ratings outlook during 2022, as recognised by credit rating agencies, the report added.

Oman strengthens geologic hydrogen exploration

FROM PAGE 13

Despite being in its nascent stages, the exploration and extraction of hydrogen reservoirs from beneath the Earth's surface represent a potential opportunity to uncover another natural resource for clean energy. Al Hinai stressed the need to deepen our understanding of geologic hydrogen, conduct geological surveys to delineate its locations, and craft strategies for its exploration and production.

Furthermore, Al Hinai encouraged the active involvement of startups, small to medium-sized companies, and established oil and gas companies in the geologic hydrogen sector. These smaller entities bring innovation and motivation to delve into new fields and technologies, offering unique insights into exploration and production.

Collaboration with well-established energy companies,



The officials signing memorandums of understanding (MoUs).

with their extensive experience in geological surveys and energy extraction, as well as

substantial human and financial resources, can accelerate progress significantly. Such collaborative

efforts are a driving force for making strides in this modern and unique field.

Oman has ambitious plans to emerge as one of the world's leading producers of clean hydrogen.

Substantial steps have already been taken in this direction, with the issuance of Royal Decree No. 10/2023 in February.

This decree allocates land for the development of renewable energy and clean hydrogen projects. Collaborative efforts with the Department of Energy, private sector entities, and research institutions are actively underway, and the United States is deeply engaged in exploring the potential associated with Geologic Hydrogen production.

In a significant gesture of support, the US Department of Energy has recently announced an allocation of \$20 million to support research and experimentation in the exploration and production of geologic hydrogen.

Negotiation skills for entrepreneurs



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The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant.

In the dynamic world of entrepreneurship, one might argue that the ability to negotiate effectively is as vital as having a revolutionary product or service. For entrepreneurs, negotiation isn't just a skill; it's an art. It's about building relationships, identifying mutual benefits, and driving towards outcomes that offer value to all parties involved. As the playing field of business gets more intricate, honing these skills becomes even more crucial.

1. Understanding the importance of negotiation: Every facet of starting and running a business requires negotiation. From raising capital, hiring employees, securing partnerships, to even finalising a business space — negotiations are omnipresent.

- Successful negotiation can

save money, accelerate growth, and avoid potential conflicts.

2. Essential negotiation skills for entrepreneurs:

- Active listening: This is more than just hearing words. It's about understanding the underlying motivations and concerns of the other party. Responding to these can provide an edge in negotiations.
- Preparation: Know your numbers, understand market trends, and anticipate potential objections. The more prepared you are, the more confident you'll be.
- Building rapport: People are more inclined to negotiate in good faith with someone they trust and like. Establishing a connection can pave the way for more fruitful discussions.
- Knowing your walk-away point: Every entrepreneur should

know their bottom line in any negotiation. This clarity prevents getting swept up in the moment and making concessions that aren't in your best interest.

- Flexibility: While you need to have red lines, it's equally essential to be adaptable. Sometimes, changing your approach can lead to better outcomes.

3. Common pitfalls in negotiation:

- Over-negotiating: Pushing too hard can sour the deal. It's essential to know when to compromise and when to stand firm.
- Not thinking win-win: The best negotiations are those where both parties feel they've achieved something. Aim for solutions where everyone wins.
- Failing to understand cultural nuances: In today's

globalised world, entrepreneurs often negotiate across cultures. Misunderstandings stemming from cultural differences can derail negotiations.

4. Practice makes perfect: Like any skill, negotiation improves with practice. Role-playing negotiation scenarios, attending workshops, or even hiring a coach can offer invaluable insights and improvements.

Furthermore, each real-world negotiation offers lessons. Reflecting on what went well and what could've been done differently is a continuous learning process.

5. The ethical dimension: While negotiation often involves a bit of strategy and sometimes even gamesmanship, maintaining integrity is paramount. Authenticity, honesty, and ethics should be the bedrock principles. Short-term wins achieved by dubious means can lead to long-term losses, especially in reputation. In conclusion, the art of negotiation, when mastered, can propel an entrepreneur's ventures to great heights.

However, it's essential to remember that the goal is not just to 'win' but to create solutions that benefit all parties involved. And as we dive deeper into the nuances of entrepreneurship in the forthcoming articles, remember that negotiation is but one piece of a much larger puzzle.

Next up, we will explore the realm of "Strategic Decision Making in Startups" — a topic that converges the paths of intuition, data, and foresight. After all, what's an entrepreneur without the ability to make the right decisions at the right moments? Stay tuned.

Latin America's growth conundrum



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A protestor holds a placard that reads 'better times' in Valparaíso, Chile, during a demonstration, in this file photo. – Reuters

Economic theory suggests that poor countries should, over time, converge towards the income levels of advanced economies. While that has happened in East Asia and Central Europe, Latin America still lags behind. Since 1960, only a few countries in the region have managed to narrow the gap between their per capita income and that of the United States — and even in those cases, the gains have been small.

As we explain in a new report for the G30, there is no single cause for Latin American economies' mediocre growth over the decades. In some countries — such as Argentina, Ecuador, and Venezuela — there will be little to no sustained growth until policymakers address serious outstanding fiscal, debt, and (in some cases) inflation problems.

Brazil, too, has struggled to achieve sustained growth. Not only has its growth rate per capita been lower than that of the US for most of the past 40 years, it was even negative half the time during that period.

While inflation and extreme poverty have fallen, macro policies have yet to deliver sustained low interest rates and lower volatility, and microeconomic policies have been woefully inconsistent, indicating a surprising inability to learn from past errors and successes.

As a result, informal labour arrangements are common, unemployment remains high, investment remains low, and productivity has stagnated. In Mexico, micro distortions and poorly designed social policies have led to a widespread misallocation of resources.

Though there have been suitable reforms and closer trade integration with Canada and the US, these developments have had only a small impact on growth, owing partly to the growing economic divide between Mexico's north and the south.

Low investment in physical and human capital in the south has coincided with increased investment in the north, due to near-shoring.

Making matters worse, increased violence and a decline

in state capacity have contributed further to the weak economic performance, threatening Mexico's future prospects.

Notwithstanding the recent global inflationary spike, other Latin American countries — among them Colombia, Peru, Chile, and Uruguay — have managed to stabilise their economies and achieve decades of low inflation and low financial volatility (for the most part).

By pursuing macro-stabilisation policies and opening themselves to international trade, they have benefited from high-growth episodes that raised per capita incomes and brought unprecedented prosperity.

But even in these more successful cases, growth slowed long before income levels had converged to those of advanced economies, suggesting that macro stability is a necessary but not sufficient condition for sustained growth. All four countries still need a growth strategy aimed at overcoming market and government failures, with a goal of diversifying the economy and developing new sectors with high growth potential. More broadly, Latin America remains one of the most unequal regions in the world.

Although policies in many countries substantially reduced

inequality and poverty in the first decade and a half of this century (thanks in part to the commodity boom), the pandemic caused substantial backsliding. Many countries therefore must recover lost ground.

The political economy of the region also remains problematic. The final decades of the twentieth century brought widespread democratisation — a major achievement — but now democratic backsliding is a major concern. Some countries, such as Venezuela and Nicaragua, are no longer democratic at all, while others, including El Salvador, are exhibiting increasingly authoritarian tendencies.

Even among the many countries that remain firmly democratic, institutional design problems have made governance difficult. The peculiarly Latin American combination of presidential regimes and proportional electoral systems often produces governments that lack parliamentary majorities.

With no mandate, they are unable to pursue reforms or fulfil their campaign pledges, leading to deeper voter frustration and disenchantment.

With declining trust in institutions across the region's political landscape, Latin America seems to be caught in a

low-credibility, low-performance trap. Because citizens do not trust the government, law enforcement and consistent adherence to government rules and regulations are weak.

As a result, policies often have poor results, confirming citizens' distrust and thus completing the circle of dysfunction. Restoring trust and rebuilding state capacities are two sides of the same problem. Solving it will require a coordinated effort, involving both technocratic tinkering and bold political leadership.

But in an atmosphere of polarisation and political deadlock, engineering deep and lasting reforms is an uphill battle. Mediocre economic and distributional outcomes will continue to poison the well of mutual trust, leading to further political fragmentation and polarisation, and a diminished capacity to make tough choices.

But it is not all doom and gloom. The Mexican government's recent populist and autocratic tendencies have been effectively checked by the judicial system, and electorates elsewhere have begun to respond positively to calls for reform.

One can still imagine large-scale political bargains in which a strengthening of

the region's social safety net and an improvement in the quality of public services are coupled with reforms to increase the attractiveness of productive investment. Boosting productivity and lowering inequality are obvious policy goals, but they need to be supported by public-sector reform.

For many Latin American countries, faster and more equitable growth, and a more diversified and resilient economy, remain within reach.

The region is well placed to produce abundant clean energy, and it is richly endowed with the minerals needed for the transition to a low-carbon economy. New technologies such as green hydrogen, which could be a source of sizeable hard-currency earnings, can help to reignite growth.

Latin America is not condemned to fall into stagnation and political deterioration. The slide can be halted before it becomes irreversible.

But while better outcomes are easy to imagine, they will require good politicians, good policies, and good luck. If there is going to be a change across the region, it needs to happen now.

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr Saad bin Hamoud bin Ahmed Al Haili, Minister of the Supreme Court Sayyid Khalifa bin Said bin Khalifa bin Ahmad Al Haili, Chairman of the Administrative Judiciary Court Shuaib Al Mubtar, and Khalifa bin Said bin Khalifa bin Ahmad Al Haili, Chairman of the Administrative Judiciary Court Shuaib Al Mubtar, were present at the ceremony.

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and its commemoration of the century of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknotes, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. (OMN 10 04)

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

MUSCAT: The frequent arrival of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should adhere to social distancing guidelines as being on duty. A lot of new arrivals the downtown Muscat and its adjoining areas reveal how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder. While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not. "In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should adhere to social distancing guidelines as being on duty. A lot of new arrivals the downtown Muscat and its adjoining areas reveal how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder. While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not."

score away a group of people at a soccer in Ruwi. The Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health have said it is not enough times that enough times that the spread of COVID-19 while expressing has been. "The attitude of some people is not acceptable that they gave the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can secure them away," he told the "Observer". (OMN 10 04)



art & life

MONDAY | SEPTEMBER 25, 2023 | RABEE AL AWWAL 9, 1445 AH

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BY ZUWAINA AL SULAIMANI

In the heart of Oman, a land known for its expansive deserts and scorching sun, the Omani burqa has been a time-honoured tool to protect against the harsh elements. Traditionally worn by Bedouin women, this veil has shielded their faces from the relentless heat and swirling sands. However, it's also become a canvas for artistic expression through the endeavours of a small business named "The Magical Burqa," owned and managed by the talented Maryam al Muqbali.

Maryam embarked on her journey with "The Magical Burqa" project on May 28, 2022, while pursuing a degree in business administration at Sohar University. Simultaneously, she is a gifted artist who envisions her creations as a harmonious fusion of Omani culture and art. When asked about her aspirations,

Maryam passionately said, "My goal is to combine Omani culture and art." Her journey began with a profound love for her culture and a natural talent for drawing.

Maryam emphasises that her small business provides her with a unique platform to express her artistic concepts and convey her thoughts and emotions to society modern and innovatively. Every piece she crafts is imbued with deep meaning, drawing inspiration from nature, art, experiences, and more. Her belief is that customers don't merely purchase a product; they invest in a reflection of their emotions - love, beauty, authenticity, strength, and belonging.

In less than a year, Maryam has sold over 200 burqas within Oman and internationally in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Her work even gained recognition when "A Magic Burqa," photographed by

Tasneem al Sawaqi, was featured in the 20th Digital Horizons Student Forum.

Reflecting on the challenges she encountered, Maryam recalls the doubts and questions that initially clouded her path. She questioned whether society would accept her idea if she could effectively communicate it, and if she possessed the courage to bring it to life. But her unwavering love for her craft and her faith in its power propelled her forward. She was determined to create a magical experience that seamlessly merged the past and the present.

For Maryam, one of the most rewarding aspects of her business is the opportunity to share a part of Omani culture with those who may have little or no prior knowledge of it. She derives immense joy from sharing art, love, and culture with people, recognising the enrichment and inspiration that sharing brings to both

the giver and receiver.

Maryam's latest creation, 'The Power of Colour and Women,' draws inspiration from nature and features vibrant colours mirroring Oman's natural elements like water, flowers, and minerals. These colours symbolise the flow, growth, and brilliance of life. The materials used in crafting these burqas embody softness, flexibility, and authenticity - attributes that mirror the essence of a woman's being.

Maryam describes her journey of "The Magical Burqa" as a mirror reflecting loving and meaningful thoughts and messages. Her journey from conception to creation has produced exquisite pieces of art and served as a bridge between cultures, sharing the rich tapestry of Omani heritage with the world. Through her small business, Maryam al Muqbali continues to weave artistry, culture, and tradition into the fabric of contemporary life.





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Jungkook, Anitta draw fans to Central Park aid fest despite rain

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE gathered in a swampy Central Park for a concert urging global development aid, with Jungkook of BTS fame and Brazil's Anitta highlighting the marathon show's first half.

Jungkook had the poncho-clad crowd screaming and swaying along as he serenaded them with hits including "Still With You" during the Global Citizen Festival marked by a chilly, persistent rain.

Wearing acid wash jeans and a brown shirt, the megastar told fans it was necessary to "make an impact together to make sure everyone, everywhere has access to their basic rights like food and education."

He wasn't billed as a headliner but Jungkook was a major draw of the night: many drenched concertgoers streamed out of the park just after his set ended, even though the evening was set to continue for another three hours.

Earlier in the evening Anitta brought her impressive twerks and dance party of a show to the stage, performing hits including her recent "Funk Rave."

Brazil's biggest pop star called attention to the importance of protecting the Amazon rainforest, reminding fans it's "the lungs of our planet."

She also said just prior to kicking off her booty-shaking set that governments must do more to "protect the people there, the indigenous people, the communities there... whose only reality is the Amazon."

And rappers including Busta Rhymes and Common put on a 50th anniversary of hip hop tribute, one of many that has been put on across the city in recent months.

Still to come are headliners Lauryn Hill and the Red Hot Chili



Peppers.

FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER

Taking place since 2012 as world leaders gather in New York for the UN General Assembly, Global Citizen distributes tickets for free to supporters who pledge to take actions such as sending letters to their governments in support of development aid.

Pledges came from leaders including French President Emmanuel Macron, who announced via video message a \$150 million commitment to the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

"We have to fight together against poverty, climate change and for biodiversity," Macron said. "This is why we want to take our part as well."

The Rome-headquartered IFAD is an arm of the United Nations aimed at addressing poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries.

Global Citizen welcomed Macron's commitment in a statement, adding that "much more needs to be done to provide crucial support to millions of small-holder farmers around the world,



who produce 70 per cent of food in low and middle-income coun-



tries."

The institution urged governments to double their climate adaptation funding, and make sure IFAD reaches its funding

target of \$2 billion by the end of 2023.

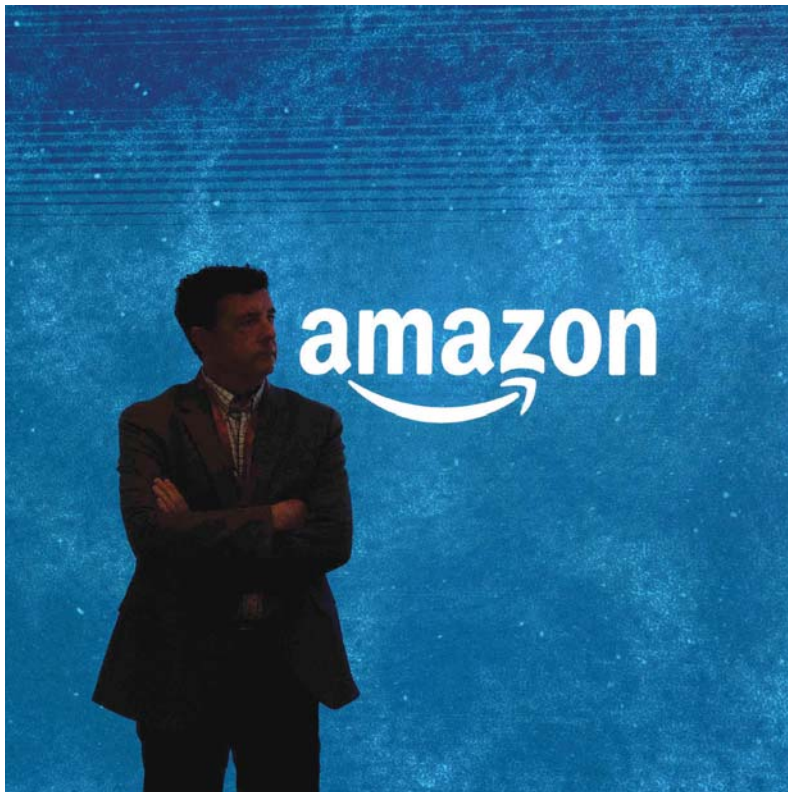
Along with Macron, they said Norway had pledged \$90 million to IFAD — **AFP**

TECHNOLOGY

Amazon empowers Alexa with generative AI

AMAZON'S POPULAR ALEXA digital assistant is about to be supercharged with the powers of generative artificial intelligence, the company said on Wednesday, as the tech giant steps into the AI race dominated by ChatGPT, Google and Microsoft.

Voice assistants like Alexa or Apple's Siri are often designated as perfect candidates to



have their sometimes-glitchy and robot-like technology streamlined with capabilities of generative AI.

Generative AI, such as used in the ChatGPT chatbot, delivers content as complex as a poem or scholarly essay in just seconds, and Amazon's goal is that Alexa could do that and even more with verbal commands from a user's living room or kitchen.

At an event at the company's offices near Washington, the company said that an English-language version of Alexa AI would be made available as an opt-in on all its devices in the United States in the coming months.

"It's going to take some time to integrate these technologies into the surface area that is Alexa. But I am super optimistic that we are off to a wonderful an excellent start," said Dave Limp, Amazon's senior vice

president of devices and services.

With the change, Alexa will be able to converse with a more personable style and drop its robotic tone, the company said.

Alexa would also tap into real-time information and create the semblance of a personal rapport with users that would include an awareness of their habits or favourite sports teams.

"For example, you could say 'Alexa every morning at 8 am turn on the coffee machine, open the blinds, dim the lights in the study and play my morning news,' and boom — it creates the routine," Limp said.

While widely plugged as the next stage of consumer technology, in the past decade Alexa and its connected smart home devices have yet to become big money spinners for Amazon, with Google and Apple also

struggling to make traction in the space.

Daniel Rausch, the executive in charge of Alexa, told reporters that the AI would put an extra emphasis on accuracy and that its efforts in AI were not comparable with chatbots that have been shown to output inaccuracies or go off the rails.

"Accuracy in smart home means yes, we did turn on the right light, we did lock the right door, we are sure about the state of the security system," he said.

At the launch event, Amazon also introduced its latest Echo 8 smart home hub as well as a soundbar for televisions and new AI-fuelled search capabilities on its FireTV service.

Limp, Amazon's longtime device chief, is retiring after more than a decade in the role amid reports he will be replaced by a senior executive from Microsoft — **AFP**



Expressive image

SCIENCES

Major asteroid sample brought to Earth in NASA first



The Osiris-Rex probe's final, fiery descent through Earth's atmosphere was perilous, but NASA managed to engineer a soft landing at 8:52 am local (1452 GMT), in the military's Utah Test and Training Range. — AFP

A SEVEN-YEAR SPACE VOYAGE came to its climactic end Sunday when a NASA capsule landed in the desert in the US state of Utah, carrying to Earth the largest asteroid samples ever collected.

Scientists have high hopes for the sample, saying it will provide a better understanding of the formation of our solar system and how Earth became habitable.

"Touchdown of the Osiris-Rex sample return capsule!" a commentator said on NASA's live video webcast of the landing.

It completed a 3.86-billion-mile (6.21 billion-kilometer) journey. It marked "the US's first sample return mission of its kind and will open a time capsule to the beginnings of our solar system," the US space agency said in a post on X, the former Twitter.

The Osiris-Rex probe's final, fiery descent through Earth's atmosphere was perilous, but NASA managed to engineer a soft landing at 8:52 am local (1452 GMT), in the military's Utah Test and Training Range.

Four years after its 2016 launch, the probe had landed on the asteroid Bennu and collected roughly nine ounces (250 grams) of dust from its rocky surface.

Even that small amount, NASA says, should "help us better understand the types of asteroids that could threaten Earth" and cast light "on the earliest

history of our solar system," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said.

"This sample return is really historic," NASA scientist Amy Simon told AFP. "This is going to be the biggest sample we've brought back since the Apollo moon rocks" were returned to Earth.

Osiris-Rex released the capsule early Sunday — from an altitude of more than 67,000 miles (108,000 kilometers) — some four hours before it landed.

The fiery passage through the atmosphere came only in the last 13 minutes, as the capsule hurtled downward at a speed of more than 27,000 miles per hour, with temperatures of up to 5,000 Fahrenheit (2,760 Celsius).

Its rapid descent, monitored by army sensors, was supposed to be slowed by two successive parachutes as it made its way to the 37-mile by nine-mile landing zone.

The main chute, however, deployed "much higher than was originally anticipated," at about 20,000 feet rather than the planned 5,000 feet, the NASA commentator said.

NASA images showed the tire-sized capsule on the ground in a desert wash, with scientists approaching the device and taking readings.

Meanwhile, the probe that made the space journey fired its engines and shifted course away

from Earth, NASA said, "on its way" for a date with another asteroid, known as Apophis.

Scientists predict that asteroid will come within 20,000 miles of Earth in 2029.

The team will carefully airlift the device by helicopter to a temporary "clean room" nearby.

NASA wants this done quickly and carefully to avoid any contamination of the sample with desert sands, skewing test results.

On Monday the sample is to be flown by plane to NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston. There, the box will be opened in another "clean room."

NASA plans to announce its first results at a news conference October 11.

Most of the sample will be conserved for study by future generations. Roughly one-fourth will be immediately used in experiments, and a small amount will be sent to mission partners Japan and Canada.

Japan had earlier given NASA a few grains from asteroid Ryugu, after bringing 0.2 ounces of dust to Earth in 2020 during the Hayabusa-2 mission. Ten years before, it had brought back a microscopic quantity from another asteroid.

But the sample from Bennu is much larger, allowing for significantly more testing, Simon said.

Asteroids are composed of the original materials of the solar

system, dating back some 4.5 billion years, and have remained relatively intact.

They "can give us clues about how the solar system formed and evolved," said Osiris-Rex program executive Melissa Morris.

"It's our own origin story." By striking Earth's surface, "we do believe asteroids and comets delivered organic material, potentially water, that helped life flourish here on Earth," Simon said.

Scientists believe Bennu, about 500 meters (1,640 feet) in diameter, is rich in carbon — a building block of life on Earth — and contains water molecules locked in minerals.

Bennu surprised scientists in 2020 when the probe, during its brief contact with the asteroid's surface, sank into the soil, revealing an unexpectedly low density, like a children's pool filled with plastic balls.

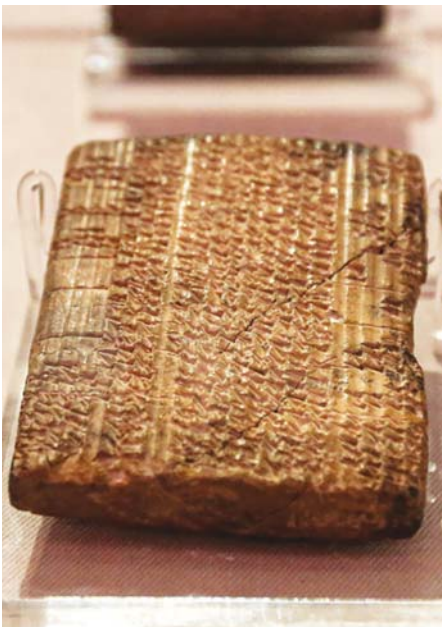
Understanding its composition could come in handy in the — distant — future.

For there is a slight, but non-zero, chance (one in 2,700) that Bennu could collide catastrophically with Earth, though not until 2182.

But NASA last year successfully deviated the course of an asteroid by crashing a probe into it in a test, and it might at some point need to repeat that exercise — but with much higher stakes. — AFP

CULTURE

Iran says thousands of ancient clay tablets returned from US



IRAN SAYS IT HAS received thousands of Achaemenid-era clay tablets from the United States in the fifth such instalment, following a drawn-out legal effort to repatriate the antiquities.

"After the two-year follow-up of the government... the Achaemenid tablets confiscated by the American government were returned to the country," said a statement posted on Iran's presidency website late on Thursday.

The 3,506 tablets were repatriated on the plane that also brought home the Iranian delegation from New York after it attended the United Nations General Assembly.

This is the fifth batch of such antiquities returned to the Islamic republic.

"We hope that the rest of these tablets will be returned as soon as possible", Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said on Thursday night after returning from New York.

Found at the ruins of Persepolis, the capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire which ruled from the 6th to 4th centuries BC in southern Iran, the repatriated tablets display how the ancient society was organised and its economy managed.

The tablets were returned to Iran by the University of Chicago's Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, West Asia & North Africa, formerly known as Oriental Institute.

In the 1930s, the university had received on loan around 30,000 tablets or tablet fragments found at Persepolis for research purposes, Iranian media previously reported.

A large portion of the tablets were returned in three batches between 1948 and 2004 before the rest were blocked by legal action initiated by American survivors of an attack in Israel in 1997 carried out by the Palestinian group Hamas.

Blaming Tehran for supporting the armed group, the plaintiffs demanded the seizure of the tablets and their sale put towards the \$71.5 million that Iran was ordered to pay in the case.

The proceedings only ended in February 2018 when a US Supreme Court decision banned the seizure of the works.

But the reimposition of US sanctions on the Islamic republic since August 2018 has complicated the return of the antiquities to Iran.

In October 2019, the National Museum of Iran put on display around 300 similar tablets out of 1,783 that were returned from the United States earlier that year in the fourth stage of restitution. — AFP