

P13

OMAN SUSTAINS GROWTH AMID NON-OIL SECTOR RECOVERY



P12

LIVERPOOL GO TOP OF PREMIER LEAGUE TABLE AFTER MAN CITY DROP POINTS



P20

IS AI THE KEY TO TRANSFORMING HEALTHCARE IN OMAN?



MUSCAT

OQEP LAUNCHES LARGEST IPO

The subscription for two billion shares of OQ Exploration and Production Company, the largest in Oman's history, begins on Monday and will run until October 9 for individuals and till October 10 for institutional investors. This offering marks the first public subscription in the Sultanate of Oman's exploration and production sector, following the successful IPOs of Abraj Energy Services and OQ Gas Networks. The IPO represents 25 per cent of the company's shares, divided into three categories. Institutional investors have been allocated 800 million shares, equivalent to 40 per cent of the total offering, priced between 370 and 390 baisas per share.

DETAILS ON P13

ECONOMIC TIES WITH TANZANIA

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) organised the Oman-Tanzania Business Forum. The event explored means of enhancing business and economic partnerships between the Omani and Tanzanian private sectors, especially in the fields of construction, real estate, food security, mining, energy, transport and logistic services. Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), said that the forum is considered an opportunity to boost the historic relations.

DETAILS ON P15

Oman calls for ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman has stressed that its foreign policy is based on a solid vision of adopting the pillars of dialogue and tolerance as an approach to addressing all issues and challenges.

This vision, Oman affirmed, seeks to achieve peace and establish relations based on mutual respect, positive cooperation and harmony among countries. This was stated by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, while delivering the Sultanate of Oman's speech before the UN 79th General Assembly (UNGA-79) in New York.

Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation to Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, for his strenuous efforts in leading the United Nations and his tireless pursuit to establish and implement the rule of international law, in order to achieve justice and peace, and in a manner that reflects the vision of the United Nations for a world



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy delivering the Sultanate of Oman's speech before the UN 79th General Assembly in New York.

in which security, stability, peace and prosperity prevail for all.

In this context, Sayyid Badr underlined the Sultanate of Oman's full support for the endeavours of the Secretary-General and the efforts of the United Nations in promoting international peace and security.

The foreign minister said that the Sultanate of Oman, represented by its leadership,

government and people, believes in using legitimate and peaceful means to settle disputes and conflicts.

Oman, added the foreign minister, calls for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, Lebanon and the Red Sea region, and addressing the causes of the conflict by ending the illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, achieving justice for the Palestinian people on the basis of the two-state solution and establishing an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital on the 1967 borders.

Sayyid Badr added that the Sultanate of Oman stresses the necessity of granting Palestine a full membership in the United Nations, putting an end to the policy of genocide practised by the Israeli occupation forces against the Palestinian people, and alleviating the human suffering imposed on them.

TURN TO P6

Low pressure brings rains in governorates

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Thunderstorms and rains were reported from various parts of Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah and Al Sharqiyah North governorates, due to the impact of the upper trough of low pressure.

Wadi Bani Kharous, in the Wilayat of Al Awabi and Wadi Bani Ghafir in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, in Al Batinah South Governorate, are on spate by late afternoon on Sunday, and more wadis are expected to have flash floods as the Oman Met Office issued heavy rain alert accompanied by thunderstorms over parts of Al Hajar Mountains extending to the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman and the mountains and coastal areas of Dhofar Governorate.

"The effect of the system has begun, and it is raining over Al Hajar Mountains, but



most of the rain is expected in the evening. We can expect heavy rains on Monday as well," said the weather forecaster at Oman Met Office.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, has announced suspension of in-person classes and a shift to remote learning in the governorates of Al Batinah South and Al Dakhiliyah, from Sunday evening.

This decision follows alerts from the National Early Warning Centre regarding the likelihood of heavy rains and potential flash floods across these governorates.



RECORD-BREAKING SUCCESS: GOLF LINKS AT AL MOUJ MUSCAT SELL OUT IN JUST A WEEK

With 28 residences and 261 luxury apartments, Golf Links becomes the most sought-after neighborhood

Al Mouj Muscat has proudly announced the unprecedented sell out of the Golf Links within a week of the launch. With all 28 residences and 261 apartments claimed in record time, this achievement underscores the growing demand for premium homes in Oman, as well as the trust and confidence buyers place in Al Mouj Muscat.

Nestled within the lush surroundings of the Al Mouj Golf Course, Golf Links offers a seamless blend of nature and modernity. The neighborhood combines breathtaking views of the golf course and nearby coastline with the convenience of Oman's premier lifestyle destination. This unique location, paired with world-class amenities and proximity to prestigious hotels like The St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort and the upcoming Okura Resort Muscat, has made Golf Links one of the most

sought-after addresses in the country.



CEO, Nasser Al Shaibani: "The success of Golf Links showcases Al Mouj Muscat's strategic vision of creating integrated lifestyle communities in harmony with Oman's natural beauty. This achievement underscores our commitment to shaping the future of community living in the Sultanate."

Beyond the stunning views, the Golf Links feature elegantly designed four-bedroom residences and spacious one to three-bedroom apartments that cater to a range of lifestyles. Whether for growing families or individuals seeking a peaceful retreat,

the development offers thoughtfully crafted living spaces with exclusive access to premium facilities.



Vice President of Sales, Saleh Al Siyabi: "The swift sell-out of Golf Links reflects our strategic understanding of the market's evolving needs and our ability to design homes that resonate with discerning buyers."

The sell-out of the Golf Links is a testament not only to the appeal of Al Mouj Muscat's signature developments but also to the broader shift toward high-quality, integrated lifestyle communities in Oman. The residences provide easy access to walking and cycling paths, recreational facilities, and



a host of dining and leisure options at the Al Mouj marina and retail precincts, making it an ideal choice for residents who value both convenience and tranquility.



Vice President of Marketing, Salma Al Hashmi: "Our strategic campaign approach not only captured attention but also delivered measurable outcomes. A testament to the seamless blend of creativity, market understanding and data-driven insights, translating into significant returns on investment and reinforcing our position as a market leader in real estate."

For those seeking to be part of future developments at Al Mouj Muscat, stay tuned for upcoming opportunities that promise to redefine luxury living in the Sultanate.

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 32°C Min 28°C

SALALAH: Max 28°C Min 26°C

NIZWA: Max 32°C Min 23°C

in the Urban Planning Sector
Urban October Conference and Home & Building Expo

Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre



SULTAN HAITHAM CITY

The exhibition includes:

- Models of future projects
- Elevator Pitch Session
- Urban Planning Hackathon: Edition 4 (City Challenge)
- Provincial Development Session
- Signing of usufruct contracts
- Signing of purchase agreements for social housing projects
- Launch of a competition for youth
- Signatures in Sultan Haitham City
- Greater Muscat Session
- Entertainment Session on Planning
- Showcasing global experiences and expertise
- Participation from all provinces



OQEP

IPO

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Production SAOG**
(under transformation)

**Subscription
opens today**

**Initial Public Offering of
2,000,000,000 Shares**

Category I

Subscription Price Range:

Bzs 370 to Bzs 390 per Share

Category II Subscription Price:

For Omani Individuals at Bzs 351 per Share,
calculated as the Maximum Price of
Bzs 390 less a discount of 10 per cent.

Category II Subscription Price for

Non-Omani Individuals: at a Maximum Price
of Bzs 390 per Share

Category I Offer Period:

30 September 2024 to 10 October 2024

Category II Offer Period:

30 September 2024 to 9 October 2024



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OQ Group

Issue Manager

Joint Global Coordinators

Collection Agents



This announcement has not been reviewed or approved by the Oman Financial Services Authority or any regulatory authority elsewhere and the information contained in it does not constitute a public offering of securities or solicitation of any offer to buy securities for the purpose of Omani law, including Commercial Companies Law (Royal Decree 18/2019), Securities Law (Royal Decree 46/2022), Executive Regulations of Capital Market Law (CMA Decision 01/2009) or Regulations for Public Joint Stock Companies (Decision No. 27/2021) which can only be done through a prospectus approved by and registered with the Oman Financial Services Authority. This announcement does not, therefore, constitute (and should not be considered) a prospectus for the public offering of securities in the Sultanate of Oman.





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MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

INTERNATIONAL TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee at Ministry of Information announces its Tender for the following work:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
7/2024 (372/2024) at E-Tendering	Supply, Delivery and Commissioning of FM Transmitters at Magshan Station	International Excellent Frist	14/10/2024	19/11/2024	25/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

2. Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.

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

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

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

3. The Ministry has the right to:

1) Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.

2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone : 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)

Shrimp Festival begins today

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Governorate of Al Wusta, with support from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, will host this year's Shrimp Festival from September 30 to October 3, under the auspices of Shaikh Ahmed bin Musallam al Kathiri, Governor of Al Wusta. The festival will primarily take place in Mahout and Duqm, according to ministry officials.

This event serves as a prelude to Oman's annual shrimp season, a celebrated time when fishermen across various governorates — Muscat, Al Wusta, Al Sharqiyah South and Dhofar — harvest this valuable marine resource, bringing it to market and delighting seafood enthusiasts. October and November mark the prime shrimp fishing season, when these local delicacies become widely available in markets and commercial centres.

"The festival highlights the significance of shrimp in Omani tradition, with 12 shrimp species found in Oman's waters," a spokesperson from the ministry noted. "Although Oman's coastal waters are not densely packed with shrimp, the Indian white shrimp and tiger shrimp are particularly prized for their abundance and size, comprising around 75 per cent of Oman's shrimp stock."

Fishing activities typically take place in the early hours, between 4 am and 10 am, with fishermen targeting shallow waters of 5 to 7 metres in depth. The ministry has also launched awareness programmes aimed at sustainable shrimp fishing as global demand continues to rise, driven by the nutritional benefits of shrimp.

In 2022, Oman produced an impressive 2,799 tonnes of shrimp, valued at over RO 7 million, underscoring the importance of this industry to the country's economy. Shrimp prices remain accessible to the general public, ranging from RO 2 to RO 4 per kilogramme.

The Shrimp Festival will celebrate the tradition of shrimp fishing and showcase its crucial role in Omani culture and the national economy.

Governorates digital initiative launched

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology on Sunday launched a "Governorates Ambassadors Digital Transition Initiative". The ministry was represented in the project by the National Digital Transition Programme (Tahawul). The initiative seeks to benefit from the elite in the field, national cadres, technicians and professionals who have the passion and skills in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The initiative seeks to raise public awareness about the use of smart and advanced digital services and solutions.

— ONA



Recall

Recall Date: 30/09/2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Audi e-Tron GT	2024	19

Recall consequence

On Audi e-Tron GT vehicles manufactured within a specific period, cracks may occur on the brake hoses on the front axle over time, resulting in brake fluid escaping. Consequently, we cannot rule out the sudden failure of the brake circuit on the front axle, brake circuit on the rear axle remains functional. However, your vehicle's braking performance will be noticeably restricted.

Recall Action

The brake hoses and brackets on the front axle must be replaced on the affected vehicles.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>



هيئة حماية المستهلك
Consumer Protection Authority
www.pacp.gov.om



خط المستهلك
Consumer line
80079009
80077997

During Official Working Hours
Contact Number +968 22845100



المتميزة للسيارات
Premium Motors

Petrol, Electric, Hybrid or Plug-In Hybrid? Your Guide To Going Green.

By David Swain, Managing Director at OMASCO

As we look back on World EV Day that was celebrated during September – a worldwide awareness campaign created to promote the shift to electric vehicles (EVs) – it's clear that the automotive industry is driving towards a greener, more sustainable future. According to the Global EV Outlook 2024, in the first quarter of 2024, electric car sales saw an increase of approximately 25% compared to the same period in 2023. EVs and hybrid vehicles (HEVs) are among the most talked-about new vehicle models. While both options present fascinating alternatives to the traditional internal combustion engine (ICE) model cars, they also have distinct differences that potential buyers should understand before making their choice between Electric, Hybrid, or ICE.

Traditional ICE vehicles rely solely on engines powered by petrol or diesel and have been the standard for over a century, with familiarity, widespread availability, and well-established refuelling infrastructure – from the network of service stations to more recent 'fuel-delivery' innovations like Cafu. The European Environment Agency confirms that while ICE vehicles generally offer long-range and quick refuelling times, they produce higher emissions than EVs and HEVs. Regular maintenance is also required to keep fuel vehicles running smoothly, which tends to increase costs over time as mechanical failures increase with age.

Fully electric models, which are celebrated for their zero tailpipe emissions, align perfectly with the goals of World EV Day. These vehicles are powered entirely by electricity, with a motor or motors drawing energy from rechargeable batteries. To recharge, EVs must be plugged into an electric power source, which can be done at home using a standard outlet, a dedicated EV charger, or at public charging stations. The Alternative Fuels Data Center (AFDC) highlights that one of the most significant advantages of EVs is that they produce zero tailpipe emissions, making them a cleaner option for the environment. Additionally, EVs typically require less maintenance, as there are lesser moving parts compared with traditional fuel vehicles. In line with Oman's 2050 Vision, which emphasizes reducing

carbon emissions and promoting clean energy, the adoption of NEVs (New Energy Vehicles – a term commonly used for electric and hybrid vehicles) plays a crucial role in the nation's strategy to achieve a sustainable and eco-friendly transportation system.

Hybrid Vehicles (HEVs)

Hybrid vehicles (HEVs) combine an ICE model with an electric motor, which supports the engine in moving the car forward to deliver improved fuel efficiency. Traditional hybrids do not need to be plugged in to recharge them. Instead, it charges itself through regenerative braking and the internal combustion engine. So, while HEVs still use petrol, they use far less of it, making them a greener option. Hybrids also offer the flexibility of using petrol for longer trips while benefiting from electric power for shorter urban commutes.

Plug-In Hybrids (PHEVs)

Plug-In Hybrids are a step up from traditional hybrids. They work similarly, combining an engine with an electric motor. However, they have larger batteries that you can charge by plugging them in. This means they can run on electricity alone for short trips, and then switch to petrol for longer journeys, giving you the best of both worlds.

Electric Vehicles (EVs)

Electric Vehicles run entirely on electric motor and have zero tailpipe emissions, making them the most environment-friendly or sustainable form of driving. One of the most common fears about EVs is 'range anxiety' - the worry that the battery will run out of charge before reaching a destination. Fortunately, today's EVs provide a substantial range per charge, with many models capable of travelling over 300 kilometres on a single charge. Also helping to reduce that anxiety is the fact that across the Arabian Gulf, governments and the private sector are working together to increase the network of charging stations - making it easier than ever to find a point to recharge, whether at home, at work, or on the go.

Both EV and HEV batteries are designed to last for years, often exceeding the vehicle's lifespan – with many manufacturers offering 8-year battery warranties for increased peace of mind. Advancements in battery technology also drive down replacement costs, making long-term ownership more affordable.

Top Tips for Choosing the Right Vehicle for You:

- ❑ **Assess Your Driving Habits** Consider your daily commute and long-distance travel needs. EVs are great for urban driving and short trips, while hybrids offer flexibility for longer journeys.
- ❑ **Evaluate Charging Infrastructure** Check the availability of charging stations in your area and whether you can access a home charger or recharge while you're at work.
- ❑ **Consider Maintenance Costs** While EVs generally require less maintenance, hybrids might offer lower overall fuel costs compared to ICE vehicles.
- ❑ **Test Drive** Take the time to test drive different models of ICE, electric, and hybrid vehicles. Pay attention to how each vehicle handles, accelerates, and the overall driving experience to see which one suits you best.
- ❑ **Long-Term Costs** Factor in potential savings from EVs in terms of total cost of ownership, thanks to lower fuel costs, decreased maintenance, and other incentives for electric and hybrid vehicles.

As we reflect on this year's World EV Day, let's recognize the importance of these technological advancements and the environmental benefits they bring. OMASCO's lineup of electric and hybrid vehicles from prestigious brands like Honda and Volvo, including models like the advanced Honda Accord Hybrid and the eco-friendly Volvo EX30, offers consumers a way to participate in this sustainable revolution. Visit your nearest OMASCO showroom in Oman to discover how you can contribute to a cleaner environment and embrace a sustainable lifestyle with the latest in electric and hybrid vehicle technology.



Sayyid Badr, UN Secretary-General discuss regional developments

NEW YORK: Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), received Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy on the sidelines of the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

During the meeting, Guterres commended the efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman, under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin



Tarik, to enhance peace and security in the world and consolidate dialogue and multilateral cooperation in the region and beyond.

For his part, Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation to the UN Secretary-General for his wise management of the international organisation.

He valued the stands undertaken by the Secretary-General in support for

action to establish justice and apply rules of international law and international humanitarian law.

The meeting also touched on updates in a number of regional and international issues of common interest, most notably developments in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, and efforts made to ensure an immediate ceasefire and contain military escalation in the region. — **ONA**

INNOVATION CLINIC TACKLES KEY CHALLENGES

BALQEES ALORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

The Scientific Research and Innovation Clinic has resumed its discussions, focusing on the critical pillar of funding and the potential legislation needed to address the gaps in Oman's national scientific research and innovation system. The clinic aims to analyse these challenges comprehensively, formulating executive initiatives and recommendations to strengthen support for the system, enhance its role in bolstering the national economy, and align with the goals of "Oman Vision 2040." Additionally, it seeks to improve Oman's ranking on the Global Innovation Index.

Dr Jamila bint Ali al Hinaiyah, Executive Director of the Clinic, highlighted the clinic's importance, particularly given its timing, as it coincides with preparations for Oman's eleventh five-year development plan.

The clinic is focused on identifying the core challenges in the national research and innovation ecosystem and developing sustainable solutions through collaborative executive initiatives. These initiatives are informed by input from all stakeholders, drawing on regional and international best practices, and ensuring alignment with national efforts to foster a knowledge-based



The clinic is focused on identifying the core challenges in the national research and innovation ecosystem and developing sustainable solutions through collaborative executive initiatives

economy and society.

In its first week, the clinic focused on the two foundational pillars of the system, analysing their initiatives and identifying the resources required, particularly regarding funding and the necessary legal frameworks. This week, the discussions have extended to the research and innovation infrastructure and human capital within the sector. The clinic has embraced a collaborative approach, engaging participants from institutions across the national research and innovation landscape through central discussions and consultative sessions. This inclusive methodology has not only produced a list of actionable initiatives but has also generated a repository of innovative ideas and proposals.

Sultan bin Saif al Amri, Head of the Scientific Zones Axis, emphasised that scientific zones are a vital component of the national research and innovation ecosystem, playing a pivotal role in accelerating the transition to a knowledge-based economy. These zones facilitate economic development by creating an environment that fosters the flow of knowledge and innovation between academic institutions and businesses. The clinic's work on this axis has produced a roadmap for establishing, managing, and developing scientific zones in Oman, with a focus on national priorities such as attracting investment and maximising the economic and social returns from research and innovation.

The clinic continues to document its findings and recommendations across all axes, with the ultimate goal of contributing significantly to Oman's journey towards a knowledge-driven future.

Muscat, Salalah airports feted at World Customer Service Summit

MUSCAT: Oman Airports celebrated a national achievement as Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport were honoured at the 2023 World Customer Service Summit, which brought together the global airport sector under one roof in Atlanta, USA.

This recognition comes as a result of the two airports receiving several prestigious awards for customer experience in 2023, acknowledging the significant efforts made in the Sultanate of Oman to enhance the quality of services provided to passengers.

Muscat International Airport received the award for Best Airport in the Middle East for Airports Serving 5 to 15 million passengers annually and the award for Best Airport in the Middle East for Quality of Services.

Additionally, the airport earned

distinguished global recognition for its unprecedented achievement of winning multiple awards over five consecutive years under the Airport Service Quality (ASQ) programme, joining the ranks of elite global airports to receive this prestigious honour.

Salalah Airport was also recognised with several awards, including Best Airport in the Middle East, in the Category of Airports Serving Less than 2 Million Passengers, Best Airport Staff in the Middle East Across All Categories, Most Seamless Airport Procedures in the Middle East, Most Enjoyable Airport in the Middle East, and Cleanest Airport in the Middle East Across All Categories.

The awards were presented during a ceremony held on the sidelines of the World Customer Service Summit hosted in Atlanta, Georgia, US.



Campaign on climate hazards kicks off in Dhofar

SALALAH: Activities of a national campaign to raise awareness of the risks of climate conditions and tsunamis began on at Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah. It is second leg in the campaign which covers all the wilayats of Dhofar Governorate and will continue until October 7, 2024.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The activities include field visits, meetings and seminars, a media awareness event, simulations of emergency scenarios and an awareness exhibition to showcase examples of adopting safe behaviour during adverse climatic conditions.

The campaign pursues a clear approach based on an action plan targeting different segments of society. It focuses on the speed of response and awareness about



The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. — **ONA**

the early warning system designed to handle multiple risks. It also highlights individual and institutional readiness to mitigate the effects of emergency situations. It underscores the concept of community partnership in recovering from the effects of these situations.

The campaign is organised by the National Committee for Emergency Management in partnership with different departments. These include the Ministry of Information, the Civil Aviation Authority (represented by the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre), the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority(CDAA), Dhofar Governorate, the Directorate General of Education, the Directorate General of Social Development in the Governorate and the Youth Centre. — **ONA**

TRA discusses initiatives to reduce the screen time of children

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Nearly 86 per cent of children use the Internet in the Sultanate of Oman, of which 43.5 per cent of them use it to search for information while 34 per cent of them use it for entertainment and communication according to a study last by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) a few years ago.

The details were revealed report by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) during a dialogue session on Sunday said nearly 21 of children browse social media for more than five hours a day. The dialogue session also discussed the proposed law to limit children's use of the Internet in terms



of conditions and procedures apart from initiatives by telecom companies. Hamida al Ajmi of TRA defined a child according to the International Telecommunication Union as any person under the age of 18 years according to Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, noting that the Omani Child Protection Law

No. 22/2014 defined a child as any human being who has not completed the age of eighteen years. TRA initiatives to protect children using telecommunications services include the following initiatives the 'Be Aware' and the national awareness campaigns. Omantel also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (Unicef) to support child care programmes in the Sultanate of Oman, and enable the Secure Net-programme with parental control features such as content filtering, pause, break time and study time. Safe Net service acquisition links also enabled the service, which is designed to protect users and their children.

THE ROYAL GUARD OF OMAN

Tender Advertisement

The Royal Guard of Oman, invites tender for the following:-

Tender Reference	Subject	Tender Document Value	Submission Date
08/2024	Provision for Insurance Policy Covers for year 2025	R.O. 25/- non-refundable	04 th Nov 2024

Specialized Companies providing insurance and registered with Procurement and Contracts Directorate of the General Directorate of Finance, Royal Gurad of Oman and the General Secretariat of Tender Board - Sultanate of Oman, having Grade I & above, can collect the tender document from the Tender Committee Secretariat, Royal Guard of Oman, Seeb during working hours from **Monday 30th September to Sunday 06th October 2024.**

Wax-sealed Tenders addressed to the Chairman - Tender Committee should be submitted to RGO before 1200 hours on the submission date along with a Tender Bond the name of the Royal Guard of Oman equivalent to 1% (One Percent) of the value of the Tender from any registered Bank in the Sultanate of Oman,. The tenderer shall not reveal his identity other than the tender title and the address mentioned below.

No Tender will be accepted after the submission date. The Royal Guard of Oman reserves the right to accept or reject any Tender without giving reasons.

Tender Committee
P.O Box 381, C.P.O
Postal Code 111



Oman joins Arab-African Peace, Development conference

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman took part in a conference titled 'Peace and Development in Arab and African Framework', held at the headquarters of the Arab League in Cairo.

Oman was represented by Abdullah bin Nassir al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League.



The conference discussed the challenges of peace in the Arab region and the African continent, the opportunities for peace in the Arab and African framework, the regional and international

competition in the Arab and African region. It also explored prospects and opportunities for achieving peace and advancing the development process with innovative mechanisms. — ONA

Symposium focuses on elderly care and disease awareness

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, SEPT 29

The National Alzheimer's Symposium 2024 was inaugurated in Al Batinah North Governorate under the auspices of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North. With the participation of health leaders such as Dr Khalid al Saadi, Director General of Health Services in Al Batinah North, the Deans of the National University of Science and Technology's College of Medicine, and Oman College of Health Sciences, the symposium aims to tackle Alzheimer's disease and dementia-related challenges. Held in conjunction with World Alzheimer's Month, the symposium is a collaborative effort involving the General Directorate of Health Services



The National Alzheimer's Symposium was held recently in Al Batinah North.

in Al Batinah North, the Saham Health Complex, University Medical City, and the Oman Alzheimer's Association. The event is a key initiative to raise public awareness of Alzheimer's, improve diagnostic and treatment services, and highlight the support needed by patients and caregivers. Special attention is being placed on promoting

healthy lifestyles that could mitigate Alzheimer's risk. According to Dr Huda al Qutaybi, a mental health consultant, this is the first time the symposium is being held outside Muscat, a significant milestone in raising national awareness. "Our government's focus on the elderly is evident, with approximately 167,000

Omanis now registered for elderly benefits. In Al Batinah North alone, over 70 dementia patients were diagnosed in just the past month at Sohar Hospital's new elderly and dementia clinic," said Dr Huda. Key topics of discussion include the realities of dementia, advancements in Alzheimer's diagnosis and treatment, palliative care, and interventions for behavioural symptoms. Dr Huda also underscored the need for better facilities and legislative reforms to support elderly patients and their caregivers. "This symposium is crucial in addressing the health, social, and legal impacts of Alzheimer's, urging decision-makers to improve services and create facilities that honour the dignity of this vulnerable group," she added.

Pre-incubation programme registration opens: Riyadh

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority has announced the opening of registration for its pre-incubation programme, designed to nurture innovative ideas in social entrepreneurship. The programme aims to train and equip participants with the skills needed to develop sustainable businesses that address social challenges and create lasting social impact. Social entrepreneurship involves using innovative, practical solutions to tackle societal issues with limited resources, while generating income and ensuring long-term sustainability. The pre-incubation program focuses on helping entrepreneurs create products, services, or business models that not only solve social problems but also contribute to broader social and economic growth. The programme targets entrepreneurs, small and medium enterprise (SME) owners, and artisans who wish to develop and scale their businesses with a social focus. Participants will learn how to validate their project ideas through market research, create business models, develop marketing strategies, and prepare comprehensive business plans that serve the community. The Authority highlighted the vital role of entrepreneurship in driving both national and social economic development. Supporting entrepreneurs with diverse projects will strengthen the national economy and create employment opportunities, contributing to Oman's growth



and prosperity. The pre-incubation programme, managed by the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development, seeks to prepare, empower, and train entrepreneurs to compete locally and internationally. Through training in financial management, marketing, and risk management, participants will be better positioned to enter the Omani market, compete globally, and contribute positively to their communities. Abdullah Mohammed, a participant in the programme, shared: "I joined to gain the knowledge needed to launch my general contracting business. The programme has helped me develop strategic plans for generating sustainable income and achieving my business goals, while also ensuring my project serves the community." Maryam bint Salem, owner of a restaurant and fellow participant, expressed her gratitude: "This programme has been invaluable in helping small business owners like me. We learned how to conduct feasibility studies, develop effective marketing strategies, and contribute to the local community. I truly appreciate the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority for supporting and encouraging such impactful initiatives."

Madeeha discusses school performance framework



MUSCAT: Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, met with Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukailiyah, CEO of Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQAE), in the presence of Dr Abdullah

bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, and the Directors-General of the Ministry, at the Oman Hall in the Ministry's General Diwan. The meeting included a presentation by expert William Maxwell, in which he discussed the

framework of the school performance evaluation mechanism prepared by the Authority, the stages of implementing the framework, and the role of the Ministry in implementing the evaluation system. The aspects of cooperation between the two parties were also discussed.

Oman calls for ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon

FROM P1

He affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman believes in the importance of intensifying efforts to contain escalation and tension and stop the bloodshed by resorting to rational dialogue, the rules of international law, the United Nations Charter and international legitimacy resolutions, respecting the sovereignty of states, the unity of their territories and non-interference in their internal affairs in a way that guarantees all countries and peoples the right to live in security, peace and dignity. Meanwhile, Sayyid Badr pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman is moving forward with its programmes in the field of social

protection, through an integrated system that backs various segments of society, including women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities, as well as social insurance and job security programmes. He noted that this is an indicator of the progress made by the Sultanate of Oman in the field of sustainable development, and its ongoing efforts to develop these programmes in line with the best international practices, in addition to providing educational, health and social care to all segments of society. The minister stated that the Sultanate of Oman affirms its continuous support for youth and their empowerment, as it considers them the pillar of

the future, the focal point of sustainable development and the driving force for innovation, construction and development. Sayyid Badr pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman stresses the importance of promoting respect and peaceful coexistence among peoples, and calls for combating all forms of discrimination, racism, hatred and violence. **CLIMATE CHANGE** He pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman is exerting great efforts in addressing the challenges of climate change and reducing emissions, and stimulating investment in renewable energy projects in accordance with the Zero Carbon Neutrality Strategy

2050. This, said the minister, is being done through clean energy projects, green hydrogen and solutions that adopt nature as an approach. He explained that the efforts and development programmes of the Sultanate of Oman come in line with the national vision, Oman Vision 2040, which is the cornerstone for achieving economic and social development goals and facing future challenges. He affirmed that submitting the second voluntary national report reflects Oman's deep commitment to the principles and global goals of sustainable development, and highlights the progress achieved in various development fields. — ONA

Road connections to Khazaen economic city opens



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) on Sunday inaugurated the project of road connections (7 km) of Khazaen Economic City. The project links the city with Al Batinah Expressway. Further, the project comes within the framework of the Ministry's efforts to link the national roads network with Khazaen Economic City. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



Firefighters work at a residential area hit by a Russian air strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. — Reuters

RUSSIA POUNDS UKRAINE'S ZAPORIZHZHIA

KYIV: Russia hit the Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia with multiple guided bombs on Sunday, wounding at least 16 people, and damaging railways, infrastructure, and residential and commercial buildings, Ukrainian officials said. Ivan Fedorov, the governor of the Zaporizhzhia region, said that Russian forces hit three city districts with a total of 13 guided bombs. The strikes injured at least 16 people, including two children aged 8 and 17 years old, he said. President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a post on the Telegram that several residential buildings, the city's infrastructure, and railways were damaged in the strikes. He posted pictures from the sites of the attacks, showing charred cars, a hole blown through a residential building, and rescuers battling fires. Local officials said trains were delayed and diverted while rescuers cleared up the debris. — Reuters



Pope Francis takes to the tarmac in a wheelchair, flanked by Belgian Minister of Interior Annelies Verlinden (2nd L), northeast of Brussels. — AFP

POPE ENDS BELGIUM VISIT WITH MASS

BRUSSELS: Pope Francis presided over an open-air mass in Brussels on Sunday, capping a three-day visit to Belgium that grappled with past scandals and current debates over the role of women in the Catholic Church. Gathered in bright morning sunshine, about 40,000 faithful, some waving Belgian and Vatican flags, packed the King Baudouin stadium, north of the capital, for the ceremony. The Argentine pontiff, 87, arrived shortly after 9:00 am, and toured the stadium in his Popemobile, cheered on by worshippers, including many young people and families. Belgium's King Philippe and Queen Mathilde were also in attendance. During his stay, the pontiff was repeatedly questioned about the Catholic Church's dark legacy of child abuse, which casts a long shadow in Belgium. — AFP

ONGOING SEARCH

Rescuers search for missing migrants



Patrol boats and helicopters searched on Sunday for about 48 migrants missing since their boat sank near the Spanish island of El Hierro in what threatens to be the deadliest such incident in 30 years of crossings from Africa to the Canary Islands. Officials said that nine people, one of them a child, have been confirmed as dead after their boat sank in the early hours of Saturday morning. — Reuters

TORY RACE

Conservatives assemble to find a leader



Britain's opposition Conservatives gather for an annual conference on Sunday, licking their wounds from a historic election defeat and locked in battle over the party's future direction. The four-day meeting in Birmingham, central England, comes three months after the Tories were ousted from power by Labour, with Keir Starmer taking over as prime minister. It is the Conservatives' first conference in opposition since 2009. — AFP

BRUTAL BOMBS

Israeli air strikes kill 11 Palestinians



Israeli military strikes across the Gaza Strip have killed at least 11 Palestinians, health officials in the enclave said on Sunday, as Israeli planes bombarded several northern, central and southern areas. A school sheltering displaced Palestinians in Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip was among buildings hit, killing four people and wounded several others, Gaza medics said. It's nearly a year since Gaza war started. — Reuters

NEPAL DEATHS FROM HEAVY RAINS HIT 151



People stranded at the Tribhuwan Highway look on as rescue personnel work to retrieve the bodies of the victims from a landslide triggered by heavy rainfall in Dhading, Nepal. — Reuters

KATHMANDU: Nepal has shut schools for three days after landslides and floods triggered by two days of heavy rain across the Himalayan nation killed 151 people, with 56 missing, officials said on Sunday. The floods brought traffic and normal activity to a standstill in the Kathmandu valley, where 37 deaths were recorded in a region home to 4 million people. Authorities said students and their parents faced difficulties as university and school buildings damaged by the rains needed repair. "We have urged the concerned authorities to close schools in the affected areas for three days," Lakshmi Bhattarai, a spokesperson for the education ministry, said. Some parts of the capital reported rain of up to 322.2 mm, pushing the level of its main Bagmati river up 2.2m past the danger mark, experts said. But there were some signs of respite on Sunday morning, with the rains easing in many places, said Govinda Jha, a weather forecaster in the capital. Television images showed police rescuers in knee-high rubber boots using picks and shovels to clear away mud and retrieve 16 bodies of passengers from two buses swept away by a massive landslide at a site on the key route into Kathmandu. — Reuters

Israel strikes Hezbollah's Beirut stronghold again

ISRAEL carried out a fresh attack on Sunday on Hezbollah's southern Beirut bastion, a Lebanese security official said, with the Israeli military announcing a "precise strike". The latest attack came days after a similar strike killed the group's powerful leader Hassan Nasrallah, sending tensions soaring amid intensive Israeli strikes on the country's east, south and south Beirut. "Israel carried out an air strike on Beirut's southern suburbs," said the Lebanese official, requesting anonymity to discuss sensitive matters. Correspondents heard a loud explosion and saw smoke billowing from the area. Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported a "violent raid carried out by Israeli warplanes", adding that ambulances had rushed to the area of Beirut's southern suburbs. A witness said that a rocket hit a building, which instantly collapsed. In recent days, Israel has shifted the focus of its military operations from Gaza to Lebanon, after nearly a year of low-level cross-border fire with Hezbollah, killing hundreds in Lebanon and displacing scores more. The group began exchanging cross-border fire with Israel in support of Palestinian Hamas a day after the group's October 7 attack on Israel, which triggered war in the Gaza Strip. France's foreign minister will travel to Lebanon on Sunday, his ministry said, amid spiralling fears that the region could be headed towards an all-out war. Jean-Noel Barrot will take off from Paris shortly, to land in Lebanon on Sunday evening to "exchange with the local authorities and bring French support, especially humanitarian", the foreign ministry said in a statement. On Saturday, Barrot spoke with Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati, saying



A municipal worker gestures as he stands amid the rubble next to a damaged building in the aftermath of an overnight Israeli strike in Beirut's southern suburbs. — AFP

Paris was calling for "an immediate halt to Israeli strikes in Lebanon" and was "opposed to any ground operation", according to the foreign ministry. Intense Israeli attacks may have forced up to a million people to flee parts of Lebanon in possibly the worst displacement crisis in the tiny country's history, Prime Minister Najib Mikati said on Sunday. Mikati told reports that "the estimated number is very high and may reach one million" -- which would amount to roughly a sixth of Lebanon's population.

Israel said on Sunday it killed another senior Hezbollah official in an air strike on the Lebanese capital after dealing the group a seismic blow by assassinating its leader, Hassan Nasrallah. Israel announced the killing of Nabil Qaouq, a member of Hezbollah's central council in a strike. The past week's waves of strikes on Hezbollah strongholds around Lebanon have also plunged the Mediterranean country and the wider region into fear of even more violence to come. — AFP

OPINION

Translation offers chances but also faces many challenges



SANDHYA
RAO MEHTA

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

AS International Translation Day is celebrated on September 30 every year, this is an opportune time to reflect on the role of translation in our networked world and the opportunities and challenges that it offers. In 2017, the International Federation of Translators recognised “the role of professional translation in connecting nations, and fostering peace, understanding and development”. The theme in 2024 is the challenges of copyright. As the organisers of ITD (International Translation Day) state, it is their remit to highlight “the recognition of translations as original creative works in their own right”. This brings out important technical, ethical, and even philosophical issues that have always been associated with translation. Who owns a translated work? Is it the original creator or the translator? What if the translation goes far beyond the scope of the original work? Would it still be considered a translation or become an original work? Such issues are not limited to the creative translation of novels or poems but apply to legal, commercial and administra-

tive documents. Part of this debate is whether translation is a creative process. While many agree that it is because the translator is re-creating a text for a specific linguistic audience, others believe that translators are not doing anything original – just working on an already established text but in another language. This is more of a grey area in less creative fields, particularly in legal and commercial documents. Who owns the copyright of a translated text? Is it the original owners of the document who may have interpreted the law in a certain way, or the translator whose translation may be slightly different from the original? Digitalisation and artificial intelligence have changed the nature of this conversation altogether. Today, when a translation can be created within minutes by AI, who would the translator be acknowledged to be? Even leaving the trustworthiness of the translation aside, would a machine be likely to be the translator? In current debates on translation, a machine has not yet been recognised as owning the copyright to a document. That is because machines are not seen to

We need more translations to ensure continuous and seamless communication across cultures, whether in a literary or commercial sphere

be ‘intellectual creators’, unlike human translators. The laws regarding copyright in translation are less clear when it comes to literary texts. If a work is commissioned to be translated, the copyright often remains with the original author, but when translations are publicly available, older texts like the classics, the translator does have copyright as the process would require more creativity. Translators have increasingly been asking for more legal protection of their work and be seen as producers of original work, rather than just mechanical re-writers of existing texts. This debate is not merely academic but has significant implications in the legal and commercial fields where a word or a phrase can carry much weight. The burden on translators is not light. Today, we need more translations to ensure continuous and seamless communication across cultures, whether in a literary or commercial sphere. Recognising the role of translators as producers of original knowledge and texts will protect them and ensure equitable compensation for their work.

NEPAL DAM-BUILDING SPREE POWERS E-VEHICLES BOOM

ANUP OJHA
Taxi driver Surendra Parajuli’s decision to buy an electric cab would have been unthinkable a decade ago, when chronic power cuts left Nepalis unable to light their homes at night. But a dam-building spree has led to dirt-cheap energy prices in a landlocked Himalayan republic otherwise entirely dependent on fossil fuel imports, meaning the switch has put more money in his pocket. “It has meant huge savings for me,” Parajuli, the proud new owner of a battery-powered and Chinese-made BYD Atto 3, said in the capital Kathmandu. “It gives 300 kilometres in a single charge and costs me a tenth of what petrol does. And it’s environmentally friendly.” Kathmandu is ground zero of an incipient transport revolution set to see the clapped out cars that clog its traffic-snarled streets make way for emissions-free alternatives. More than 40,000 electric vehicles are on the roads around the mountainous country, according to official estimates — a small fraction of the 6.2 million motor vehicles currently in service. But demand is insatiable: more than a quarter of those vehicles were imported in the 12 months to July, a near-threefold increase from the previous year. Neighbouring China, now the dominant player in electric vehicles globally, is supplying nearly 70 per cent of the market. “EVs are genuinely suitable for Nepalis,” Yajya Raj Bhatt, a prospective buyer at an electric vehicle motor show, said. “Before, we had to rely on petrol cars, but now we can drive independently.” More than four in five Nepalis did not have access to electricity at the turn of the century, according to the International Energy Agency. But rapid investment in dams, which generate 99 per cent of Nepal’s baseload power, has transformed the energy grid since. Hydropower output has increased fourfold in the past eight years, according to government figures, while 95 per cent of the population now has access to electricity. The country has already signed deals to export surplus power to coal-dependent India and has its sights set on future revenues by raising its current 3,200 megawatts of installed power generation capacity to 30,000 megawatts over the next decade. — AFP

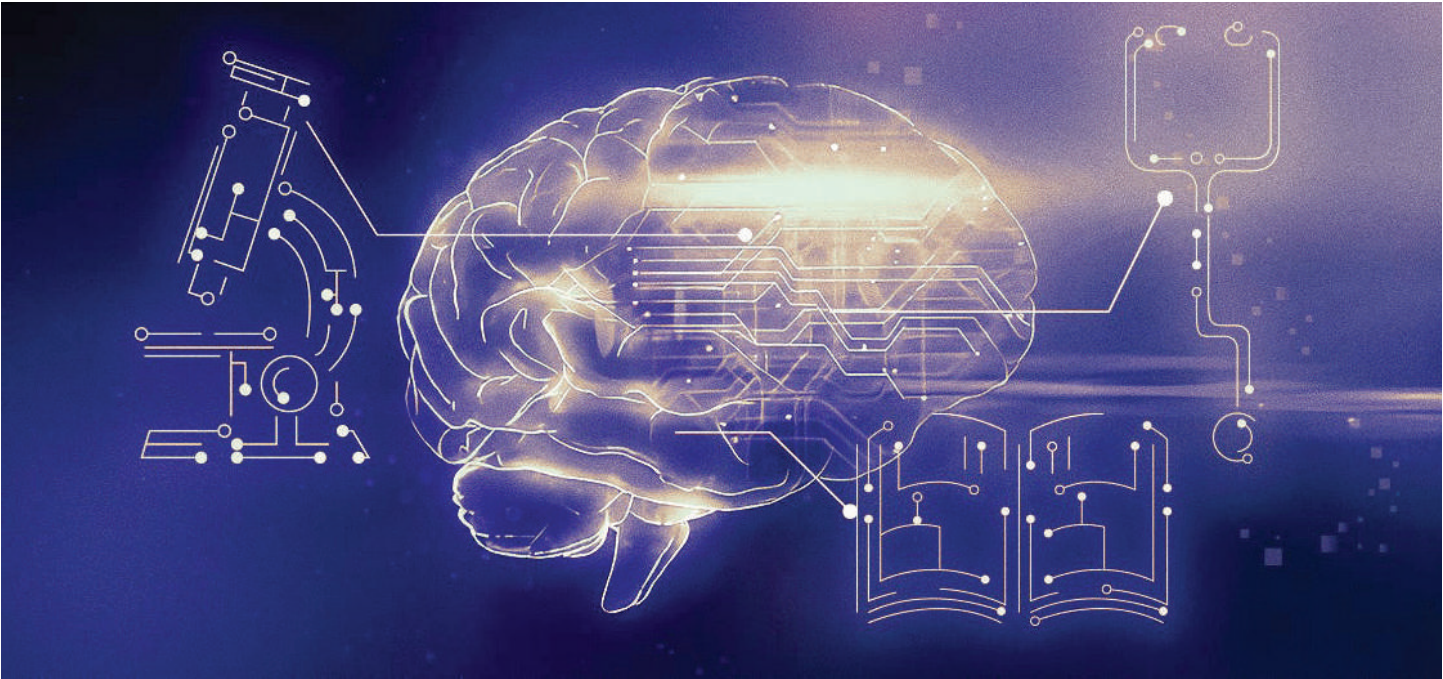


DR MUAMMAR
BIN ALI AL TUBI

THE quest to understand the mysteries of the mind is an ongoing journey. From ancient times, philosophers have tried to grasp its nature, resulting in various schools of thought. While some ancient philosophers approached the mind as part of a metaphysical realm, modern materialists, like physicist Michio Kaku, view it as the product of human evolution — a biological byproduct of the brain’s development. Some philosophers equate the mind with consciousness, blurring the lines between mind, brain and awareness. Yet, modern fields like quantum physics recognise that the mind and consciousness possess dimensions beyond the purely biological. For instance, physicist Roger Penrose introduced the concept of a ‘quantum mind,’ suggesting a cosmic consciousness that transcends time and space. This perspective implies that the mind’s complexity cannot be fully explained by science alone. While I have explored the philosophical dimensions of the mind in previous discussions, I now want to focus on its cognitive role in the digital age. The digital realm has brought new ideas to the forefront, particularly in how knowledge is created and processed. Different philosophical perspectives address how the mind perceives and processes

information. Some, like Immanuel Kant, argue that the mind possesses a prior knowledge, or cognitive categories, that exist before human experience. On the other hand, empiricists like John Locke believe the mind is shaped purely by sensory experience. Rather than delve into the origins of these philosophical schools, my focus is on how the mind functions within the context of today’s digital advancements. As we’ve progressed from agricultural and industrial societies to the digital age, the role of reason has transformed. The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has prompted some thinkers to claim that the mind can be reduced to a digital process, governed by AI’s increasing ability to replicate human reasoning. Recently, a new generative AI model, labelled ‘01’, was introduced. This model surpasses previous iterations, such as ‘ChatGPT 4o’, in its capacity for logical reasoning. It demonstrates how AI can simulate human thinking and rationality. This shift brings new questions about how we understand rationality in a digital context, particularly in how AI now plays a vital role in the cognitive process. Digital tools, capable of complex thought and analysis, are becoming significant contributors to human knowledge creation. This digital transformation calls for a reassessment of our educational systems. A

personal experience highlights this need: several years ago, I spent months trying to develop a mathematical algorithm for an AI system. Despite using various resources, the task was incredibly time-consuming. However, with today’s AI models, I recreated the same algorithm in just a few hours by engaging in a logical dialogue with the AI, which leveraged its mathematical and programming abilities to achieve the desired result. This experience raises important questions: How will the interaction between human and digital brains impact the knowledge-creation process? It is clear that human mental processes are evolving, moving from reliance on books and discussions to collaborations with digital systems. However, we must avoid the dangers of over-dependence on AI, which could lead to intellectual stagnation. In advocating for modernising education, I am not suggesting we replace the human mind with AI. Rather, I propose a partnership between the human mind and AI, where both can work together. The traditional educational system resists this collaboration out of concern for ethical standards, but we can safeguard these principles while still embracing AI’s ability to accelerate and enhance knowledge production. Translated by Badr al Dhafari



Navigate your patience in hard times



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Life is filled with various challenges, often appearing unexpectedly. No one can deny this reality; we all experience hiccups, difficulties, disappointments, and obstacles in one form or another. Regardless of their intensity, these challenges bring a pain that demands our attention, time, and effort. Each dawn presents a surprise, whether pleasing or frustrating!

Every morning comes with a unique experience while some days may bring multiple challenges. Life is not consistent, and neither are the experiences that we come across. What truly matters is how we handle each challenge that comes our way. Obstacles can either make or break us, depending on our reactions and attitudes. Some individuals are easily provoked and tense, while others remain self-controlled and patient. Human beings are not alike.

Since we have control over how we navigate our days, it is essential to maintain a positive outlook on each experience. Managing our reactions, attitudes, and feelings is not always easy, but it is crucial to strive for a fulfilling day and to savour each moment. Helen Keller, an American lecturer and author, emphasised that “optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.”

Often, all we need is a daily dose of patience to alleviate tension, frustration, and disappointment. A positive and hopeful

mindset can reduce stress as well. Staying optimistic and confident enhances our patience, enabling us to achieve our goals and maintain a more positive perception. This mindset makes us less reactive, which can lead to better decision-making.

Stress, regret, and anger do not help us achieve anything. When confronted with uncertainty, negativity, or fear, it is vital to pause and think before acting. Life is short, and it should not be wasted on sadness and disappointment. We should regard challenges as opportunities for growth, turning disabilities into abilities that create new possibilities. Always strive to be positive and believe in yourself, for you are greater than any obstacle that might break you down.

As the saying goes, “A minute of patience equals ten years of peace.” If you find your thoughts drifting into negativity, recall a positive incident to help redirect your mindset. Patience is not merely the ability to wait; it is the ability to maintain a good attitude while waiting. Although exercising patience is challenging, we must do our best to overcome its bitterness. As Aristotle wisely noted, “Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet.”

Practically speaking, everyone should embrace the need for patience when faced with life’s challenges. As emotionally sensitive beings, it is essential to be fair to ourselves by allowing time to fully understand our situations and the possible

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reasons behind them. Clarity will emerge, enabling us to think wisely about potential solutions to whatever comes our way.

Additionally, seeking support from others can be invaluable. Consulting a trusted friend, colleague, or loved one can provide perspective and guidance. A word of encouragement or a helping hand can offer new insights and enhance decision-making. As the saying goes, “A friend in need is a friend indeed.”

In fact, when we seek consultation, we gain reassurance in our choices. Discussing our thoughts and plans with others can help us clarify our goals and boost our confidence sometimes. Hearing constructive feedback can validate our ideas or prompt us to refine them, making us more prepared to move forward. Knowing that we have sought input from trusted individuals can instil a sense of confidence in our decisions.

As life’s challenges can be emotionally taxing, consulting with friends, family, or colleagues not only provides practical advice, but also offers emotional support. Sharing struggles can lighten the emotional load, making it easier to cope with stress and anxiety. Having someone to talk to can foster a sense of connection and community, reminding us that we are not alone in our experiences. Remember that every conversation is an opportunity to learn or expose us to new ideas, strategies, and resources.

Slow Mpox response is another pandemic wake-up call

It feels like a movie we have already seen. A new viral strain is killing people in some of the world’s poorest countries, and although vaccines against the pathogen exist, production shortages and regulatory barriers are preventing them from reaching those in need.

The response to the mpox outbreak in Central Africa suggests that we have not learned the lessons of Covid-19, when inequitable access to vaccines prolonged the pandemic and worsened its economic consequences. Even more alarmingly, it demonstrates how unprepared we are for a new global health crisis.

There are two silver linings, however. The first is a matter of luck. While the coronavirus was transmitted very easily because it was airborne, mpox spreads much more slowly via close contact, which has limited its toll. The World Health Organisation counts around 100,000 confirmed mpox cases since January 2022, and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention reports 724 mpox deaths in 2024.

Second, this crisis presents an opportunity. By working together to clear the roadblocks to the mpox response, governments, international organisations, and the biopharmaceutical sector can better prepare for future pathogens. The easiest roadblocks to dismantle are regulations that make it harder for vaccines to be manufactured and distributed across borders. Mpox vaccines received regulatory approval in the European Union, Japan, the United States, and Canada after an outbreak in 2022. Yet in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the country hit hardest by the outbreak that started last year, regulatory authorities didn’t approve mpox vaccines until June, placing an additional hurdle in the way of incoming donated shots.

Many low-income countries rely on the WHO to assess vaccine safety and efficacy, and WHO approval is also necessary for Gavi and Unicef to start large-scale vaccine orders and distribution. Despite the WHO’s hard



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future global health
crises*



The WHO counts around 100,000 confirmed mpox cases since January 2022.

work, its rules prevented it from declaring mpox to be an emergency and authorising emergency use of mpox vaccines until mid-August, when the disease’s spread had made it a public-health problem of international concern.

The WHO’s declaration paved the way for Unicef to launch a tender for up to 12 million doses through 2025. In parallel, the WHO worked with manufacturers and regulators to gather the data necessary for full “pre-qualification” of mpox vaccines (which also covers non-emergency use). The first of these was granted on September 13, and a few days later, Gavi reached an agreement with the manufacturer, Denmark’s Bavarian Nordic, to purchase 500,000 doses for delivery this year.

To avoid such delays in future emergencies, countries must be better prepared to receive vaccines. Governments could start recognising regulatory approvals by other countries, and they can use the negotiations on a proposed WHO Pandemic Agreement to give national and regional regulators and the WHO new tools to speed up approvals.

Smooth cross-border trade is vital in health emergencies. During the

Covid-19 pandemic, multi-country supply chains helped ramp up production and distribution of desperately needed personal protective equipment, test kits, and billions of vaccine doses. By 2021, global trade in medical products was worth \$1.5 trillion, up 29 per cent from 2019, according to World Trade Organisation data. But there were disruptions along the way, with several governments restricting exports and cutting off vaccine access for many import-dependent countries.

Another issue is evident in the fact that, until US President Joe Biden’s recent donation of one million mpox vaccine doses, the DRC had received only a few hundred thousand, even though its population is above 100 million. Here, we see a problem that goes beyond trade barriers: there has been far too little headway towards diversifying vaccine manufacturing and building extra production capacity.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, 80 per cent of world vaccine exports came from only ten countries, which meant that export restrictions in just a few of them were sufficient to disrupt global supplies. Decentralising vaccine and diagnostics production

to more developing countries would help to shock-proof supplies. But doing so requires action across multiple fronts by governments, international organisations, and the private sector.

Intellectual property is one front. During the pandemic, WTO members reached a hard-fought decision on Covid-19 vaccine IP that provides tools to diversify production capacity. For mpox and future health threats, pharmaceutical companies have a responsibility to be proactive.

By preparing to reach voluntary agreements with potential partners, they can rapidly scale up production around the world as needed. Given that the Medicines Patent Pool has a proven track record of facilitating such agreements, we should focus on making this approach work even better.

Developing countries, for their part, should ensure that their legislative and regulatory frameworks are ready to support local or regional manufacturing, whether through voluntary licenses from patent holders or by taking advantage of flexibilities in WTO IP rules. The WTO, the WHO, and the World Intellectual Property Organisation can help governments in this area. **@Project Syndicate, 2024**

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES

OMANI TENNIS
PLAYERS TAKE PART IN
ASIAN EVENT



Al Rahbi, Al Mazrouei, Al Busaidy and coach Sofiane Doub at Doha championship

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

The Oman Tennis Association (OTA) has selected three players to represent the Oman national under-14 tennis team in the Third Asian Junior Championship in Doha, Qatar, from September 28 to October 5. Mutaz al Mazrouei, ranked sixth in the tournament, Abdulrahman al Rahbi, ranked tenth, and Azzan al Busaidy are aiming to reach the main rounds of the championship. The team is coached by Sofiane Doub, and the team manager is Faisal al Balushi.

The team has prepared well for this championship following an intensive training programme in France. The camp provided a valuable opportunity to develop the players' technical skills. Additionally, they participated in the recent Arab Championship in Tunisia, which helped enhance their performance.

OTA continues its efforts to secure regional, continental and international participation for its players, aiming to ensure improvements in international rankings. Each season, a comprehensive programme is prepared, including tournaments, training camps, weekly training sessions and local competitions for various age groups to further enhance the players' performance.



OMAN COACH FOCUSES ON FITNESS AND TACTICS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

OMAN FOOTBALL team head coach, Rasheed Jaber, said the newly unveiled coaching staff of the national team comprised his former colleagues, who are experienced. This came during the opening training session of the Red Warriors at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex last week.

"I was very keen to select the proper names for the coaching staff. Therefore, there were some names on the list that I worked with a couple of years ago. I trust my coaching staff will help me in developing the players and the team in general to reach the desired goals," he said.

"I respect Abdulaziz al Maqbali's decision on ending his international football career as a player. We were looking forward to him continuing, as he can still deliver a lot on the field, but ultimately, we respect his decision," Jaber said.

After the training, Oman will play against Kuwait on October 10 at 8:00 pm (Oman

time) at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The technical practice session began with some physical training under the supervision of Mohammed Waseem. The players were then divided into groups to execute mental and control training. The coaching staff later focused on technical and tactical training by allocating players to their proper positions to evaluate their readiness and improve harmony among them.

The team had a gym training session on Sunday, while in the evening, the players went into their daily training.

Last week, Jaber unveiled the Red Warriors' official list for the forthcoming clashes against Kuwait and Jordan on October 10 and 15, respectively, in the AFC Asian Qualifiers - Road to 26. The unveiled squad featured a mixture of new names, including Ahmed al Riyami (Al Khabourah), Mulham al Sunaidy (Al Nasr), Mohammed Ramadhan (Seeb) and Yazeed al Mashani (Al Nasr).

OMAN SQUAD:
Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Fayez al Rushedi, Ibrahim al Rajhi, Mohammed al Musallami,

Ahmed al Khamisi, Mohammed Ramadhan, Khalid al Buraiki, Ghanim al Habashi, Ali al Busaidy, Ahmed al Kaabi, Amjad al Harthy, Abdulaziz al Shamousi, Mulham al Sunaidy, Harib al Saadi, Abdullah Fawaz, Arshad al Alawi, Sultan al Marzouqi, Jameel al Yahmadi, Yazeed al Mashani, Abdulrahman al Mushefiri, Zaher al Aghbari, Ahmed al Riyami, Nasser al Rawahi, Salah al Yahyaie, Omar al Maliki, Mohsin al Ghassani, Essam al Subhi, Hatim al Roushdi.

After the clash with Kuwait, the team will travel to Amman for an away match against Jordan at Amman International Stadium. The Red Warriors will play two more matches in November, hosting Palestine on November 14 and Iraq on November 19 at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. The Asian qualifiers will then pause for four months, with the Red Warriors resuming their games against South Korea in Seoul on March 20. The team will then travel to Kuwait for a tight clash on March 25 in Kuwait City. The concluding two matches will be on June 5 and 10, with the national team facing Jordan in Muscat and Palestine in Doha, respectively.

MoCSY concludes sports science forum in Muscat

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

The Sports Science Forum, which brought together 100 medical professionals from national teams, sports clubs, military institutions and the Ministry of Health, concluded on Sunday. The forum took place at the Intercity Hotel in Al Khuwair from September 27 to 28, under the auspices of Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth.

The forum focused on four key themes: orthopaedic surgery, physical therapy, sports nutrition and sports psychology. The importance of these disciplines in athlete care was highlighted through a series of panel discussions and presentations, addressing major challenges and innovative solutions for dealing with anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries. The discussions included decision-making processes regarding ACL reconstruction and featured a guide and programme for physical therapy specific to these injuries.

Additionally, the forum touched

on post-surgery aspects, such as bio-mechanical performance analysis of the knee and the impact of surgery on joint stability.

The forum also addressed the psychological factors that precede and follow ACL surgery, with participants emphasising the significant role psychological support plays in the recovery process. Athletes receiving comprehensive psychological care tend to respond more quickly to rehabilitation programmes. In this context, the importance of proper nutrition, especially protein, was highlighted as a factor in accelerating post-surgery recovery, with studies showing that adequate protein intake helps strengthen injured muscles and reduces muscle mass loss during the recovery period.

SURGICAL SUCCESS
The forum discussed how surgeons can make the optimal choice of ligament type based on the nature of the injury and the patient's needs. Furthermore, the latest research on the bio-mechanical aspects of the knee and the effect of surgeries on joint stability was discussed, with experts pointing out that a thorough



Photos by [Saleh al Sharji](#).

evaluation of each case increases the chances of surgical success and a quick return to track and field.

The forum aimed to enhance the efficiency of medical teams by presenting the latest scientific research and global expertise in ACL injuries, which are among the most common injuries in sports. According to statistics from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, 74 per cent of sports injuries over the past three years were related to the ACL, making this forum an important opportunity to strengthen cooperation between various medical and sports entities.

A group of doctors and experts participated in the sessions, presenting advanced treatment techniques, such as using physical therapy in ACL rehabilitation post-surgery, and providing treatment tailored to the needs of athletes.

The discussions also covered factors influencing treatment choices, such as the timing of surgery and the type of ligament used, emphasising the importance of individualised decisions based on each athlete's condition to ensure the best treatment outcomes.

FIRST QUARTER



SALALAH SECURE TWO WINS TO TOP GROUP B IN HOCKEY LEAGUE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

Salalah Club scored a hard-fought 1-0 victory over Al Nasr Club in the 2024 Oman Hockey League held at the Sultan Qaboos Cultural and Entertainment Complex in Salalah.

The first quarter saw a clear balance between the two teams, as they exchanged attacks without posing any real threat on goal, ending the period in a scoreless draw. In the second quarter, both teams continued their cautious defensive play, with attempts from Al Nasr and Salalah to break through the opposing defences, but to no avail, as the score remained 0-0 by half-time.

At the start of the third quarter, the situation changed, and Salalah players managed to score the only goal of the match in the 40th minute through player Shafi al Shatri, following a quick and well-organised counterattack, giving his team a 1-0 lead.

In the final quarter, Al Nasr intensified their efforts to find an equaliser, but Salalah's defence remained solid and was able to repel the attacks, ending the game with Salalah securing a 1-0 victory and earning three valuable points in their league campaign.

Salalah thrash Dhofar 4-1 in Group B

In another Group B match, Salalah achieved a resounding 4-1 victory over Dhofar.

The match began with a clear dominance from Salalah, with player Ayman Faraj scoring the opening goal in the 5th minute following a fast counterattack, sealing the first quarter with a 1-0 lead. The performance between the teams balanced out afterward, but Dhofar was unable to equalise in this half. In the second quarter, Dhofar returned strongly to the match, managing to score the equaliser in the 25th minute through player Ahmed Said, who struck a powerful shot after an accurate pass. The match remained tied 1-1 until the end of this quarter. The third quarter witnessed attempts from both teams to break the deadlock, as they exchanged attacks with notable performances from the goalkeepers, but neither team managed to score, ending the quarter in a draw.

In the final quarter, Salalah took full control of the game, with Samir Jamaan scoring the second goal in the 49th minute after a brilliant solo effort. Salalah didn't stop there, as Talal Beit Hazem added a third goal in the 52nd minute, capitalising on Dhofar's defensive lapses. Ayman Faraj sealed the win with a fourth goal in the 55th minute after a swift counterattack.

Alcaraz wins as ‘China’s Nadal’ extends fairytale



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz reacts against Tallon Griekspoor. — AFP

CARLOS Alcaraz barrelled into the China Open quarterfinals on Sunday in just 56 minutes as 595th-ranked Zhang Shuai extended her historic run.

Rain in Beijing played havoc with the schedule but four-time Grand Slam champion Alcaraz made rapid progress under the roof of the Diamond Court with a 6-1, 6-2 demolition of Tallon Griekspoor. The 39th-ranked Dutchman looked shellshocked.

Alcaraz, the second seed behind Jannik Sinner, faces seventh-seeded Karen Khachanov next after an ominous showing of intent from the 21-year-old Spaniard.

The Russian Khachanov booked his place with a hard-fought 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (11/9) victory over Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo.

In the only other match completed on the day in the men's draw, Chinese wildcard Bu Yunchaokete pulled off a shock 6-2, 6-4 win over Italian sixth seed Lorenzo Musetti.

There was home joy too in the women's draw as another Chinese wildcard, Zhang Shuai, reached the last 16 to add another chapter to her fairytale tournament. The 35-year-old had not won a singles match in more than 600 days when she arrived at the prestigious WTA 1000 event last week.

The two-time Grand Slam singles quarter-finalist, who has been plagued by injuries, has now won three matches in a row after a 6-2, 6-3 defeat of Belgium's Greet Minnen.

Zhang, who faced Minnen as the lowest-ranked player to reach the China Open third round in the tournament's history, faces Poland's 23rd seed Magdalena Frech next.

Zhang hails from Tianjin, near Beijing, and said she felt very much at home on the hard courts of the Chinese capital.

So at home in fact that she compared herself jokingly to the Spanish great Rafael Nadal on his favourite surface of the French Open. "When I am on the court I feel so like Rafa Nadal on Court Philippe-Chatrier," she laughed.

US Open runner-up Jessica Pegula survived a scare to set up a meeting with Spain's Paula Badosa. The second seed from the United States fought back to beat Russia's Veronika Kudermetova 6-7 (9/11), 6-1, 6-2.

The 30-year-old Pegula is chasing a seventh WTA Tour title. The 19th-ranked Badosa booked her place with a straight-sets win over Slovakian qualifier Rebecca Sramkova.

The top women's seed in Beijing is Aryna Sabalenka, who defeated Pegula in New York earlier this month for her third Grand Slam crown.

World number one Iga Swiatek is not in Beijing because of "personal matters".

— AFP

Al Bashayer defeat Ahli Sidab in Credit Oman Basketball Cup

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

Al Bashayer team trumped Ahli Sidab 84-54 during the third edition of the Credit Oman Basketball Cup 2024 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The match saw a strong performance from Al Bashayer, who excelled throughout the game, with several players standing out, including Osama al Riyami, Hadid Bait Bakhit, Said al Saadi and Ahmed al Halhali. On the Ahli Sidab side, standout performances came from Adil al Battashi, Sami al Ghilani and Haitham Bani Araba.

The first quarter began with a clear advantage for Al Bashayer, as Ahmed al Halhali scored a three-pointer, followed by another three-pointer from Said al Saadi, putting the team ahead by 6 points. Ahli Sidab responded with two points from Sami al Ghilani, but Al Bashayer continued their pressure, scoring an additional basket through Mahmoud al Suli. The two



Photo by Zakaria al Falahi

teams exchanged attacks, with Al Bashayer scoring 20 more points, while Ahli Sidab managed only 6 points, ending the first quarter with Al Bashayer leading 28-12.

In the second quarter, Al Bashayer maintained their dominance despite Ahli Sidab's attempts to reduce the deficit. Hadid Bait Bakhit scored 4 points with two successful shots from under the basket, while Haitham Bani Araba added two points for Ahli Sidab. The teams continued to exchange attacks, with Al Bashayer

adding 17 points and Ahli Sidab 12 points, ending the period with Al Bashayer leading 49-26.

The third quarter saw no major changes in the flow of the game, as Al Bashayer maintained their control. Osama al Riyami scored 3 points from a free throw and Said al Saadi added a three-pointer, while Ahli Sidab tried to respond with a three-pointer from Ahmed al Jahwari. The third quarter ended with Al Bashayer leading 72-38.

In the fourth quarter, Ahli Sidab's performance improved noticeably, with Al Jahwari scoring two three-pointers at the beginning of the period. Both teams continued to exchange attacks, but Al Bashayer maintained their lead until the end of the game, finishing 84-54.

The match was officiated by international referees Rashid al Mashifri as the first referee, Ali al Salmani as the second referee and Mazen al Hilali as the third referee, while the table officials were Hafidh Oulad Ahmed, Yaqoub al Nadabi and Majid al Akhzami.

Recall

RECALL DATE: 30-09-2024

KIA

stinger (CK)

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
Stinger (CK)	Nov 2016 - Mar 2023	15

*Not all vehicles in this production period, are affected.
#Subject to revision, based on the information received from the manufacturer, from time to time.

Recall consequence

On some Stinger (CK) of 2016 - 2023 MY produced within specific production date range provided in TSB. Overtime, the left-hand (LH) turbo charger oil feed pipe and hose assembly may deteriorate due to exposure to radiant heat from the exhaust manifold. This lead to oil leaks which is in the presence of hot exhaust components, increase the risk of an engine compartment fire while driving. The affected vehicle may experience oil leak, burning smell, white smoke from engine compartment and / or illumination of the engine oil pressure warning light. The estimated defect ratio is 1%. However, Kia is conducting this recall as preventive measure to avoid the risk

Recall Action

Verify affected vehicles as per the VIN list, inspect the oil leakage and replace turbo charger oil feed pipe as per KMC recommendation. All affected vehicles will be inspected and repaired at no expense to the vehicle owner.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pocp.gov.om>

Movement that inspires

Contact details: Toll free - 80073222
Working days: Sunday - Thursday
Working Time: 8:30 - 17:30 hrs.

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SPORTS

LIVERPOOL
GO
TOP
OF
PREMIER
LEAGUE
TABLE

LIVERPOOL CLIMBED to the top of the Premier League table on Saturday with a 2-1 victory at Wolverhampton Wanderers after Manchester City dropped points for the second week in a row to slip back. City were held 1-1 at Newcastle United while Arsenal left it late to beat Leicester City 4-2, with both clubs now a point behind Arne Slot's men.

"Feels good (to be top), you want to be up there but it doesn't tell me that much at the moment," Slot, whose side moved to 15 points after six games, said. "If you look at Wolves they are down in the table but they played much better than that today.

"After 19 games, it'll tell me something but not after six."

Liverpool centre back Ibrahima Konate headed home his first ever league goal and Mohamed Salah converted a second-half penalty to restore the Reds' lead after Rayan Ait-Nouri levelled for Wolves after some sloppy defending by Konate.

City led through Josko Gvardiol's opener at St. James' Park but had to be content with a 1-1 draw as Anthony Gordon levelled from the penalty spot after the break.

Arsenal, who drew 2-2 at City last weekend after conceding a last-gasp equaliser, joined Pep Guardiola's side on 14 points from six games with City ahead on goal difference.

Chelsea have 13 points after they came from a goal down to beat Brighton & Hove Albion 4-2 on Saturday with Cole Palmer scoring all of his side's goals in a stunning first half.

Palmer is the first player in Premier League history to score four goals before halftime.

“
We had chances to score, but this is their stadium and they had chances to score, so I'm happy.

GUARDIOLA

Brighton led early on at Stamford Bridge through French forward Georginio Rutter but the 22-year-old Palmer struck an 11-minute hat-trick, including a penalty and a superb 30-metre free kick into the top corner.

Carlos Baleba pulled a goal back for Brighton almost immediately but Palmer struck again shortly before halftime from an assist by Jadon Sancho.

"I just said to Cole, he scored four but he could have scored two or three more," Chelsea boss Enzo Maresca said. "It is important he continues to be hungry and ambitious.

"The best thing for me is that he enjoys, he loves football, he's always in the same way and it is something fantastic."

CITY PUNISHED

City appeared to be coping well without midfield lynchpin Rodri, who this week was ruled out for the season with a knee injury sustained last week against Arsenal.

But they failed to build on the lead given to them by Gvardiol in the 35th minute and paid the price. Gordon went down under a challenge from City goalkeeper Ederson just before the hour mark. The forward picked himself up to dispatch the penalty, sending Ederson the wrong way.

"We had chances to score, but this is their stadium and they had chances to score, so I'm happy (with a point)," Guardiola, whose side remain unbeaten, said.

Arsenal were cruising as Gabriel Martinelli scored his first goal since March and then set up Leandro Trossard to make it 2-0 on

the stroke of halftime against Leicester.

But two goals by James Justin early in the second half drew Leicester level against the odds. Arsenal sealed the win though as Trossard's close-range shot deflected in off Wilfred Ndidi in the fourth minute of stoppage time before Kai Havertz made absolutely sure with virtually the last kick of the game.

Everton got their first win of the season and moved out of the bottom three as Dwight McNeil's double saw them come from a 1-0 deficit to beat Crystal Palace 2-1 at Goodison Park.

Brentford became the first team in Premier League history to score inside the first minute of three successive games as Bryan Mbeumo struck after 37 seconds at home to West Ham United.

But Tomas Soucek's goal earned West Ham a 1-1 draw.

Nottingham Forest's early-season surge was ended as they went down 1-0 at home to Fulham.

Fulham forward Raul Jimenez converted a second-half penalty to give Marco Silva's side the points and hand the hosts their first league defeat of the season. — **Reuters**

Liverpool's Mohamed Salah celebrates scoring their second goal. — Reuters





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BUSINESS



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RECORD BREAKING

OQEP LAUNCHES OMAN’S LARGEST IPO



The IPO represents 25% of the company’s shares, divided into three categories.

MUSCAT: The subscription for two billion shares of OQ Exploration and Production Company, the largest in Oman’s history, begins today and will run until October 9 for individuals and October 10 for institutional investors.

This offering marks the first public subscription in Oman’s exploration and production sector, following the successful IPOs of Abraj Energy Services and OQ Gas Networks.

The IPO represents 25% of the company’s shares, divided into three categories. Institutional investors have been allocated 800 million shares, equivalent to 40% of the total offering, priced between 370 and 390 baisas per share. Another 800 million shares, also 40% of the total, have been set aside for individual investors, split equally between major and small individual investors.

Small investors can subscribe to a minimum of 500 shares and a maximum of 28,500, while major investors can subscribe to a minimum of 28,500 shares without a maximum limit. The remaining 400 million shares, or 20% of the offering, have been reserved for key investors.

Omani individual investors will receive a discounted price of 351 baisas, a 10% reduction designed to encourage broader participation and investment.

Eng Ahmed bin Said al Azkawi, CEO of OQ Exploration and Production, stated that preparations are on track, and the IPO will open new opportunities for growth in the exploration and production sector.

Oman sustains growth amid non-oil sector recovery

THE OMANI

economy continued to maintain a positive growth trajectory in 2023, driven by the recovery of key non-oil sectors, according to the Central Bank of Oman’s (CBO) annual report.

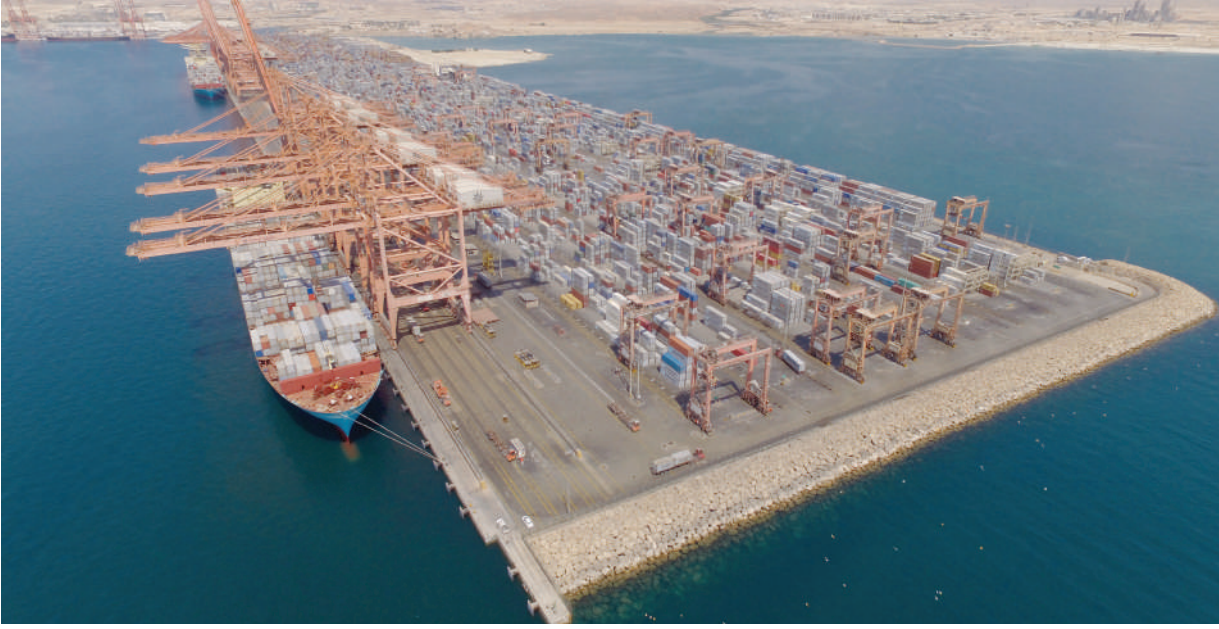
While the overall real GDP growth for the year was recorded at 1.3%, a significant decrease from the 9.6% witnessed in 2022, this was largely due to the production cuts agreed upon by the OPEC Plus group. The non-oil sectors, however, showed resilience, with non-oil GDP growing by 2.4% in real terms, compared to the 9.1% growth in the previous year.

The growth in non-oil sectors was led by agriculture and fishing, which expanded by 6.9%, reflecting Oman’s strategic efforts to diversify its economy and reduce dependence on oil.

The services sector also recorded healthy growth, increasing by 3.5%. However, non-oil industrial activities faced a slight contraction, declining by 0.4%, which points to some challenges in industrial growth outside the oil sector.

A key highlight of the report was the sharp decline in inflation, which fell to 0.9% in 2023, compared to 2.5% in 2022. This decrease was attributed to prudent fiscal and monetary policies, including the government’s efforts to stabilise prices through its fixed exchange rate system.

The report praised these policies for helping to maintain price stability, which in turn supported the overall economic environment.



The non-oil sectors, however, showed resilience, with non-oil GDP growing by 2.4% in real terms.

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In terms of fiscal performance, Oman continued to make significant strides, achieving a financial surplus of 2.2% of GDP in 2023.

This improvement was supported by favourable global oil prices and the government’s enhanced fiscal discipline. Public debt was reduced significantly, with the debt-to-GDP ratio declining to 36%, compared to 40.2% in 2022. This fiscal consolidation was further reflected in the continuous improvement of Oman’s credit rating throughout the year.

The banking sector also showed promising results. The report noted that total banking assets increased by 7.8%, reaching RO 41.8 billion by the end of 2023. Credit growth was recorded at 4.3%, bringing total credit granted to RO 30.5 billion.

Total deposits in the banking system grew by 12.3%, reaching RO 29.1 billion. Non-performing loans remained low at 4.5%, while the capital adequacy ratio stood at 18.9%, indicating a healthy banking sector with strong liquidity.

On the external front, Oman’s trade balance continued to support the economy. The trade surplus, along with improvements in the services and primary income accounts, helped the country achieve a current account surplus of RO 1.014 billion in 2023.

The financial account, meanwhile, recorded net outflows as a result of debt repayments by both the government and corporations, reflecting ongoing efforts to strengthen fiscal sustainability.

— ONA

Oman taps international firms for flood mapping project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

THE partnership of prominent engineering consultancy firm Renardet SA & Partners and UK-based HR Wallingford, specialists in flood defence maintenance and emergency planning, has been picked by the Omani government for a key study designed to bolster the country’s preparedness against flood risks.

The client is the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, which has tapped the partnership for a contract to provide ‘Consultancy Services for Updating and Preparing of Flood Hazard Maps and Preparation of Flood Risk Management & Emergency Plans’.

According to Boris Abris, a senior expert at Renardet Oman, the project is being carried out under two separate tenders – the first covering the governorates of Muscat, Dhofar and Musandam,



The updated flood risk maps will prove beneficial to the goal of strengthening emergency preparedness, bolstering urban planning, and other strategic objectives.

and the other encompassing the governorates of Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi.

Speaking at the Korea-Oman Green Industry Business Roundtable held in Muscat recently, Abris said the entire study is being undertaken in three phases.

Phase A, focusing on rainfall and flow data analysis, will include a preliminary flood risk assessment as well as estimates of rainfall-runoff trends and peak floods. As part of Phase B, hydraulic modelling and flood hazard mapping will be undertaken. Finally, Flood Risk Management and Emergency Plans will be drawn up in Phase C.

The study, the expert noted, is not without its challenges. Much of Oman’s landmass, he said, is comprised of a complex geomorphology characterised by high mountains at the upper parts of basins, followed by flat areas towards the coastal

zones, where population density is at its highest.

Additionally, most streams are non-perennial with intermittent flow greatly varying during the year.

Likewise, complex flow patterns with braided channels in flat areas, coupled with a lack of accurate actual hydrometric and hydrologic data of wadis, pose challenges for effective hydrologic and hydrodynamic modelling, he stated.

An explainer issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in August underlined the importance of the initiative in helping categorise areas of flood risk based on their severity – minimum, medium and maximum.

The updated maps will also support the operations of the National Emergency Management Committee when prioritising the deployment of resources in the event of flood events.

Furthermore, the flood risk maps

will also be beneficial to urban planners who need to factor in potential flood hazards when planning future cities and civil developments.

Renardet Oman has a well-established track record in providing engineering consultancy and advisory solutions to authorities overseeing critical infrastructure, flood protection and related schemes in the country. UK partner HR Wallingford’s expertise supports policy, emergency planning, decision-making, and asset management through expert risk assessments.

The daylong business roundtable was organised by the Embassy of South Korea in the Sultanate of Oman, with the support of the Korean Ministry of Environment, Korea Environmental Industry and Technology and Korea Trade Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA). A number of Omani and Korean public and private sector organisations were represented as well.

BUSINESS/ADVERTORIAL

BANKDHOFAR OFFERS
CONVENIENT QQEP
IPO SUBSCRIPTION



MUSCAT: BankDhofar, the second largest networked branches in Oman, is pleased to announce its role in facilitating the highly anticipated QQ Exploration and Production (QQEP) Initial Public Offering (IPO).

As part of the offering, the bank will provide a 1:1 loan facility for retail and corporate bank customers, making it easier for participation in this milestone. The offering comprises of a total of two billion shares (the largest IPO in Oman's history), representing 25 per cent of QQEP's total issued share capital.

The IPO is expected to raise up to RO 780 million (equivalent to \$2.026 billion) at the top of the price range, valuing QQEP up to RO 3.120 billion (equivalent to \$8.104 billion).

Highlights

The IPO is expected to raise up to RO 780 million, equivalent to

\$2.026 BILLION, at the top of the price range, valuing QQEP up to RO 3.120 billion (equivalent to \$8.104 billion).

The QQEP 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.

Customers can apply for the QQEP IPO digitally through the bank's user-friendly

mobile app.

This digital platform allows for instant and hassle-free participation and customers can also visit any of BankDhofar's 130 strong branch network to apply through MCD E-form.

The staff are trained and are 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 per cent interest for the first 15 days from IPO Listing, ensuring that customers can participate in the QQEP IPO without incurring additional financial costs. There is a nominal processing fee of 0.25 per cent + VAT for IPO applications with the maximum cap of RO 125 + VAT, making it a cost-effective option for them.

The subscription periods open from September 30, 2024, with the Category I offer closing on October 10, 2024 and the Category II offer closing on October 9, 2024. This initiative reflects BankDhofar's continued commitment to offering innovative financial solutions that empower both retail and corporate customers.

QQEP launches IPO
roadshow in Salalah

QQ Exploration and Production (QQEP) held an IPO roadshow in Salalah to promote its landmark share offering. The event, hosted at the Sultan Qaboos Complex for Youth Culture and Entertainment, was attended by HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, alongside prominent officials, dignitaries and local citizens. The roadshow marks an important milestone for QQEP, as it seeks to expand its ownership base and engage with investors from across the country.

Eng Ahmed bin Said al Azkawi, CEO of QQEP, underscored the significance of the IPO, describing it as the largest share offering in Oman's history. This pioneering initiative in the oil and gas exploration and production sector is a crucial step towards enhancing Omani participation in national enterprises.

In alignment with Islamic Sharia principles, QQEP has introduced a 10-per cent discount on share prices for Omani citizens, setting it apart from non-citizen entities and individual investors.

The IPO is closely aligned with the government's economic diversification policies under Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises citizen engagement in the private sector and encourages the growth of the non-oil economy.

By broadening the ownership of government-linked companies, QQEP aims to provide citizens with the opportunity to invest in



The roadshow marks an important milestone for QQEP, as it seeks to expand its ownership base and engage with investors from across the country.

In alignment with Islamic Sharia principles, QQEP has introduced a 10-per cent discount on share prices for Omani citizens, setting it apart from non-citizen entities and individual investors.

Oman's upstream energy sector, further empowering the private sector to play a leading role in driving economic growth.

Shaikh Naif bin Hamed Fadel, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Chamber in Dhofar Governorate, emphasised that the IPO represents a significant opportunity for Oman's economic diversification efforts. He highlighted the crucial role IPOs play in empowering the private sector and attracting both national and foreign investments.

As Oman's energy sector evolves in line with global economic trends, Shaikh Naif pointed out that the QQEP IPO is expected to

attract significant interest from investors, driven by the company's strong market position and promising profit outlook.

Mahmoud bin Abdullah al Hashimi, Chief Operating Officer of QQEP, provided an overview of the company's operations, noting that QQEP's average daily production has increased nearly 14-fold since its inception, reaching 250,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (kboe/d) on a working interest basis by 2023. The company now accounts for approximately 14 per cent of Oman's total oil, gas and condensate production, making it a key player in the national energy landscape.

NATIONAL
FINANCE'S
TAILORED
SOLUTIONS
EMPOWER
SMEs

MUSCAT: Acknowledging the pivotal role that SMEs play in fostering a vibrant and resilient economy, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman's leading finance company, cements its standing as a trusted partner for growth for SMEs by offering an array of tailored solutions designed to enhance the competitive edge of small and medium-sized enterprises.

This strategic diversification of solutions reflects the company's commitment to nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit, driving innovation and cultivating successful, home-grown brands across various industries. Recognising the multifaceted challenges faced by SMEs in scaling operations, adapting to a



dynamic business environment, and navigating shifting consumer preferences, the company offers a comprehensive suite of finance solutions. Established SMEs seek to expand benefit from a range of tools designed to enhance short-term liquidity and ensure long-term financial stability.

To meet the needs of SMEs, the company offers flexible plans and provides working capital requirements and any other financing needs. Additionally, National Finance facilitates rapid and straightforward financing for vehicles and machinery, equipping SMEs with the necessary resources to optimise their operations.

Commenting on the company's commitment to strengthening the SME sector, Tariq al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, remarked, "At National Finance, we understand the critical role SMEs play in job creation and community empowerment, as well as their significant potential to drive national progress and development."

NBO partners with PayByte to enhance digital payment solutions in Oman

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced a strategic partnership with PayByte, a leading Oman-based digital payment solutions provider, to enhance the digital payment landscape across the Sultanate of Oman.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between NBO and PayByte marks a significant step towards providing a more convenient, secure and innovative payment solutions for businesses and consumers in Oman.

Dr Ali bin Salim al Shukaili, Assistant General Manager and Head of Digital and E-Channels at NBO, commented: "We are excited to partner with PayByte, a company that shares our vision for innovation and excellence in digital payments.

"This collaboration allows us to offer our customers more convenient and secure payment options,

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between NBO and PayByte marks a significant step towards providing a more convenient, secure and innovative payment solutions for businesses and consumers in Oman.



solidifying NBO's position as an aspiring leader in the digital banking space. With PayByte, we are committed to drive digital transformation in Oman, providing our clients with the best possible financial services."

PayByte operates as a payment aggregator offering comprehensive methods of digital payment services, including an online invoice system, Payment Gateway, QR Code solutions

and a Marketplace platform.

These services are accessible via the PayByte website and mobile applications, available on both iOS and Android platforms.

Through this partnership, NBO aims to leverage PayByte's cutting-edge technology and expertise to deliver enhanced customer payment experiences.

The collaboration aligns with

NBO's commitment to providing innovative financial solutions that meet the evolving needs of its clients.

PayByte's commitment to innovation, transparency and security makes it an ideal partner for NBO.

The company strives to provide a more convenient payment experience through adaptable customer support and quick transaction cycles.

With a focus on open communication and regulatory compliance, PayByte ensures that the solutions developed are both secure and reliable, offering peace of mind to merchants and consumers alike.

As NBO continues to expand its digital capabilities, this partnership with PayByte represents a significant milestone in the bank's journey towards enhancing the digital payment ecosystem in Oman.

Oman-Tanzania forum boosts economic ties

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

THE Omani-Tanzanian Business Forum, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), was held in Muscat with a focus on strengthening trade and economic partnerships between the private sectors of Oman and Tanzania. The forum aimed to explore collaborative opportunities in several key sectors, including construction, real estate, food security, mining, energy, transportation, and logistics.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, delivered the opening address, emphasising that the forum serves as a platform to enhance the long-standing historical relations between Oman and Tanzania.

He highlighted the positive developments in economic ties between the two nations, noting that the number of Tanzanian companies registered in Oman has increased by 23.8% over the past two years, alongside a 13.5% rise in investment during the same period. These figures underscore the growing mutual interest in expanding trade and investment collaboration.

Omar Saeed Shaban, Minister of Commerce and Industrial Development in Zanzibar, also addressed the forum, stressing the essential role the private sector plays in driving economic growth.



A key highlight of the forum was the signing of seven memoranda of understanding (MoUs) between Omani and Tanzanian companies.

The number of Tanzanian companies registered in Oman has increased by

23.8%
over the past two years, alongside a 13.5% rise in investment during the same period.

He encouraged both sides to capitalise on available investment opportunities and work towards strengthening economic and trade cooperation.

The Chairman of the OCCI, Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, echoed these sentiments, adding that the forum provided a valuable opportunity for business leaders to explore the investment climate, incentives, and opportunities in both countries.

He stressed that the growing trade exchange between Oman and Tanzania encourages further efforts to deepen bilateral partnerships.

A key highlight of the forum was the signing of seven memoranda

of understanding (MoUs) between Omani and Tanzanian companies. These agreements span various sectors, including construction, real estate, agriculture, information and communications technology (ICT), renewable energy, investment, and consulting services.

The event also featured presentations on investment incentives, as well as bilateral meetings between Omani and Tanzanian business owners to discuss potential partnerships and ventures.

An accompanying exhibition showcased Tanzanian companies from various sectors, offering insights into the investment opportunities available in the East African nation.

IBRI ORGANIC FARM EARNS GLOBAL CERTIFICATION

IBRI: The Organic Farm in Ibri, operated by Oman Palm Development Company, has achieved a significant milestone by receiving the advanced international organic agriculture certification, “Ecocert.” This recognition establishes the farm as the largest certified organic palm farm in Oman, setting a benchmark in the nation’s organic agriculture sector.

Located in Al Dhahirah Governorate, the farm currently cultivates 35,000 date palm trees across 4.8 million square meters, featuring premium varieties such as Fardh, Khalas, Fahol and Majdool.

The farm’s certification under the Ecocert programme allows its products to be sold in both the US and European markets, significantly expanding its reach and



Located in Al Dhahirah Governorate, the farm currently cultivates 35,000 date palm trees across 4.8 million square metres.

boosting its global competitiveness. This achievement underscores the com-

pany’s commitment to adopting sustainable and organic agricultural practices, enhancing Oman’s position in the international market for high-quality organic dates.

Eng Masoud bin Saeed al Hinai, Senior Specialist for Agricultural Operations at Nakheel Oman Development Company, emphasised that this certification reaffirms the farm’s dedication to meeting international standards and strengthens its reputation in the organic farming industry.

He added that the company plans to expand the total number of palm trees to 50,000 in the coming years, focusing on varieties that are in high demand in global markets. — **ONA**

Measures to combat telecom cyber fraud, screen addiction among children

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

THE Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) held a dialogue session at the Movenpick Hotel in Muscat on Sunday, bringing together the Authority and a number of beneficiaries from various entities to discuss a range of topics related to the telecommunications sector.

During the session, the TRA highlighted its efforts to improve telecommunications services, including the discontinuation of 3G services and their replacement with 4G and 5G services to keep up with technological advancements and enhance user experience. It also discussed the transition of internet subscribers from low-speed networks to fibre optics and 5G networks, enabling them to benefit from higher speeds and better quality.

The session also covered the importance of internal building

connections and the specifications of devices and cables used.

The session addressed the issue of spam and fraudulent messages, with the TRA noting its tangible efforts to curb cyber fraud in co-operation with licensees. A joint working group between the TRA and licensees was formed to monitor fraudulent cases and develop effective solutions to reduce them.

Additionally, the TRA directed licensees to implement technical measures and solutions to combat this issue, along with launching awareness campaigns aimed at increasing public awareness of the risks of cyber fraud and how to avoid it.

Regarding the protection of children from screen addiction, the TRA pointed out that 86 per cent of children in the Sultanate of Oman use the internet, prompting the launch of several initiatives aimed at raising awareness among children and families about the safe use of technology. Among these



The TRA forum aimed to strengthen communication with beneficiaries and facilitate the exchange of opinions.

initiatives is the national awareness campaign for children on the safe use of communication services.

The TRA has also dedicated a section in the Beneficiaries’ Rights Regulation to protect child users of telecommunications services. The session aims to strengthen

communication with beneficiaries and facilitate the exchange of opinions on the services provided, contributing to the development of the communications sector and the enhancement of service quality, the TRA said in a post.

Eng Nasser al Jabri, Director of

the Service Quality and Universal Service Department, highlighted during his presentation that approximately 2 million complaints have been registered for around seven million mobile subscribers. These complaints, which cover various services such as network quality, promotional offers, and number-related issues, have been analysed to identify key problems.

Al Jabri noted that the Authority has implemented several initiatives aimed at improving service quality, including upgrading 1,920 stations to modern technologies and transitioning 26,000 subscribers from copper cables to 5G and fibre optic services.

Additionally, attendees from various telecommunications companies participated in the event, sharing their suggestions on how to enhance security measures. Their contributions focused on improving cybersecurity protocols and addressing concerns related to data privacy and fraud prevention.

INVESTMENT LANDSCAPE



This is the second upgrade made to Oman’s credit rating in 2024.

OMAN’S CREDIT RATING UPGRADE TO ENHANCE FDI

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 29

HIGHLIGHTING the ongoing impacts of Vision 2040 on Oman’s economic environment and investment landscape along with the strenuous efforts made to reduce public sector debt and strengthen government finances, S&P Global Ratings has once again upgraded Oman’s long-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings to ‘BBB-’ from ‘BB+’. This is the second upgrade made to Oman’s credit rating in 2024.

The renowned financial information and analytics agency has further assigned a stable outlook for Oman’s economic stability.

S&P noted in its report that this assessment balanced the potential benefits of the fiscal and economic reform programme of His Majesty’s Government, including the introduction of VAT, subsidy reforms and a comprehensive fiscal stability program launched in October 2022 as well as the continued diversification of the economy, against the economy’s structural susceptibility to adverse oil price shocks.

Ibtisam al Farooji, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said: “S&P’s upgrade is a strong endorsement of Oman’s dynamic investment landscape and economic environment.

It sends a clear message to the international business community that Oman is a better place than ever to invest, to set up a business and grow, to take advantage of our regional connectivity and integration across the GCC.

The strength of Oman’s competitive offer was also amplified by the IMF predicting we will have the highest economic growth rate in the Arab World in 2024 and last year’s rating of Oman as the fourth most attractive country for foreign direct investment in the FDI Standouts Watchlist 2023.”

She added: “Of course the most important result of investment in our key sectors of manufacturing, logistics, renewables, fisheries, logistics and mining is the generation of quality long-term job and career opportunities for our ambitious young talent. Significant too is the creation of in-country value and ensuing possibilities for Oman’s SMEs and entrepreneurial community.”

S&P forecasts Oman’s real GDP will expand about 2 per cent per year on average over 2024-2027 and the government will post fiscal surpluses of 1.9 per cent of GDP over the same period.

OPINION

The growing presence of Islamic Finance



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The author is a National-Level Award-Winning Outstanding Women Educator and Scholar in Strategic Management. She is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat and a member of Knowledge Oman

ISLAMIC finance, a unique financial system guided by the ethical principles of Islamic law (Shariah), sets itself apart from conventional finance in several ways. It prohibits paying and charging interest (Riba), promoting profit and loss sharing. This system is underpinned by tangible assets, ensuring a more secure and ethical approach to finance.

Islamic finance banks are committed to ethical investments, avoiding harmful or unethical activities like alcohol and gambling. Moreover, they shun excessive uncertainty and speculation, fostering a responsible financial management culture that inspires industry confidence.

The roots of Islamic finance run deep, with its origins dating back centuries in the Middle East.

This rich heritage, dating back to the Middle Ages, is a testament to the enduring principles of Islamic finance.

The modern Islamic banking and finance industry began to take shape in the mid-20th century. The Mit Ghamr Savings Bank, Egypt, first experimented with Islamic banks.

From 1963 to 1967, the pioneering experiment combined the idea of German saving banks with the principles of rural banking within the general framework of Islamic values.

The pivotal moment for Islamic finance came in 1975, marked by establishing the

Dubai Islamic Bank and the Saudi Arabia Islamic Development Bank.

As of 2024, the global Islamic finance market is estimated to be around \$2.5-4.5 trillion. From 2024 to 2031, the industry is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10-12.67%.

The market is expected to reach \$5.1-6.7 trillion in 2031. Africa and the Middle East have the most significant market shares. The region with the quickest growth is Asia-Pacific.

Nearly 95% of the world's Sharia-compliant assets are concentrated in just ten countries: Iran and Saudi Arabia each have a 25-30% market share, Malaysia: 12%, UAE: 10%, Qatar and Kuwait combined: 5.5%, Bahrain and Turkey: 3.5% each, and Pakistan and Indonesia: 2% each.

The Middle East Islamic Finance market is a diverse landscape that includes Islamic banking, which accounts for 56% of the industry growth, Islamic insurance (takaful), Islamic bonds (sukuk), and other Islamic financial institutions and Islamic funds.

Based on geography, the Islamic financial market includes Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq, Iran, and the rest of the Middle East—the Middle East accounts for 77.4% of the total Sharia-compliant assets. Iran and Saudi Arabia are the largest markets, accounting for over \$400 billion in assets.

Oman's Islamic finance sector is relatively young compared to other Gulf Cooperation

Highlights

The market is expected to reach

\$5.1-6.7 trillion in 2031. Africa and the Middle East have the most significant market shares. The region with the quickest growth is Asia-Pacific

Council (GCC) countries, but it has been proliferating since its introduction in 2013.

Oman's Islamic banking sector is steadily growing, with total assets of RO 7 billion. The industry is projected to reach 20% of the overall bank assets by 2025. Moody's Investors Service rated Turkey and Oman as the fastest-growing Islamic financing markets in the world in 2021.

Iran and Saudi Arabia are at the top of the area in asset accumulation, highlighting their crucial position in the global Islamic banking scene.

The market also displayed post-Covid-19 resilience, driven by a growing demand for Sharia-compliant products through Islamic banks' digital platforms. The growth emphasises the Middle East's crucial role in global Islamic finance.

The Islamic finance market shows a solid growth trajectory and increasing global relevance driven by ethical and economic factors. With Islamic banking present in more than 80 countries, the sector is growing outside of traditional Muslim-majority nations. The industry faces challenges, like limited standardisation and harmonisation of Shariah interpretations, regulatory inconsistencies across jurisdictions, and a shortage of skilled professionals in Islamic finance. Despite the challenges, the sector is poised for robust growth and innovation in the future.

KAMALA HARRIS' ECONOMIC PLAN BOWS TO REALITIES

UNLIKE the prior two Democratic presidents, if Kamala Harris wins the November election, she would likely not be entering office in the midst of a cataclysmic economic crisis. But the difficult circumstances Barack Obama and Joe Biden found themselves in during the financial crisis and pandemic, respectively, actually gave them a bit of creative breathing room when it came to economic policy.

If Harris manages to defeat Republican candidate Donald Trump, she will likely face a much more constraining fiscal and political environment than her predecessors, a fact that she seems to recognise in the modest economic plan she released on Wednesday.

The plan, which in 82 pages largely fleshes out policies Harris has already mentioned on the campaign trail, is heavy on tax credits — new small business owners get a \$50,000 deduction, first-time homebuyers get a \$25,000 boost, new parents would get \$6,000 in the first year of their baby's life.

Highlights

The federal government's 2024 budget deficit is

\$1.9 TRILLION,

and while the Federal Reserve is now in a rate-cutting cycle, interest rates are just off multi-decade highs, making additional debt more expensive to finance.

trillion, and while the Federal Reserve is now in a rate-cutting cycle, interest rates are just off multi-decade highs, making additional debt more expensive to finance.

With the inflation boogeyman only newly-tamed, policymakers will be justifiably reluctant to embark on major new stimulative spending anytime soon. Politically, Harris, if she wins, is likely to enter office without Democratic control of the Senate. That would severely limit her legislative capabilities, in contrast to Obama and Biden.

Still, on the upside for Harris, there are some things the federal government must do next year, regardless of who controls which offices. Most importantly, there will need to be some sort of grand bargain on taxes, given the expiration of many of the provisions in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act at the end of 2025. That sets her up to get at least some of what she wants. She, too, would need to make a deal with Republicans. But she'll have enough leverage to ensure her plans are at least not dead on arrival. — Reuters



MICHAEL R STRAIN

The writer is Director of Economic Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute, is the author, most recently, of The American Dream Is Not Dead (But Populism Could Kill It)



A mans walks past in front of national debt display in Washington. — Reuters

US Vice President Kamala Harris released a detailed policy book this week. The words "national debt" are mentioned only once. At this month's US presidential debate, the word "debt" was not mentioned once. Neither were the words "revenue," "spending," and "budget."

To be fair, Harris mentioned the budget deficit in her policy book and twice during the debate, arguing that former President Donald Trump's tax plan would add to it and that her policies are more fiscally responsible. But apart from a brief mention here or there, neither candidate is engaging in a serious discussion of the country's disastrous fiscal trajectory.

America's debt is on a perilous path, and silence is no solution. In the 1980s and 1990s, the US debt-to-GDP ratio was around 39%; by 2010, it had grown to 60.6%. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects that the national debt will grow steadily for decades, equaling aggregate economic output by 2025 and rising to 122.4% of GDP by 2034.

Some might argue that assigning blame for the structural deficit to either spending or revenue is a confused accounting or politically motivated economic analysis because the deficit is a gap (revenue minus spending). I disagree. America's fiscal

imbalance is driven by too much government spending, not too little tax revenue. Between 1974 and 2023, tax revenue averaged 17.3% of GDP, while government spending averaged 21%. By 2034, the CBO projects that tax revenue will be slightly above this average, at 18% of GDP, but that government spending will be much higher, at 24.9%. The government's rising debt can thus be attributed to outlays, which are expected to grow faster than revenue.

Moreover, only three spending categories are projected to grow over the next decade: Social Security, Medicare, and interest payments on outstanding debt (which are estimated to surpass the defence budget this year). Government outlays on everything else — from the military and education to scientific research and national parks — are expected to fall. Addressing America's fiscal problem therefore requires leaning heavily on cuts to Social Security and Medicare. Of course, an increase in tax revenue would reduce the deficit. But even allowing the 2017 tax cuts to expire fully — a policy neither Trump nor Harris supports — would not be enough to stop the debt from growing to unsustainable levels over the long-term, given the projected increase in spending.

According to the Committee for a Re-

sponsible Federal Budget's debt model, fully repealing the 2017 tax cuts, coupled with taxing capital gains and dividends as ordinary income, would reduce the expected debt-to-GDP ratio in 2050 by only four percentage points, from 155% to 151%.

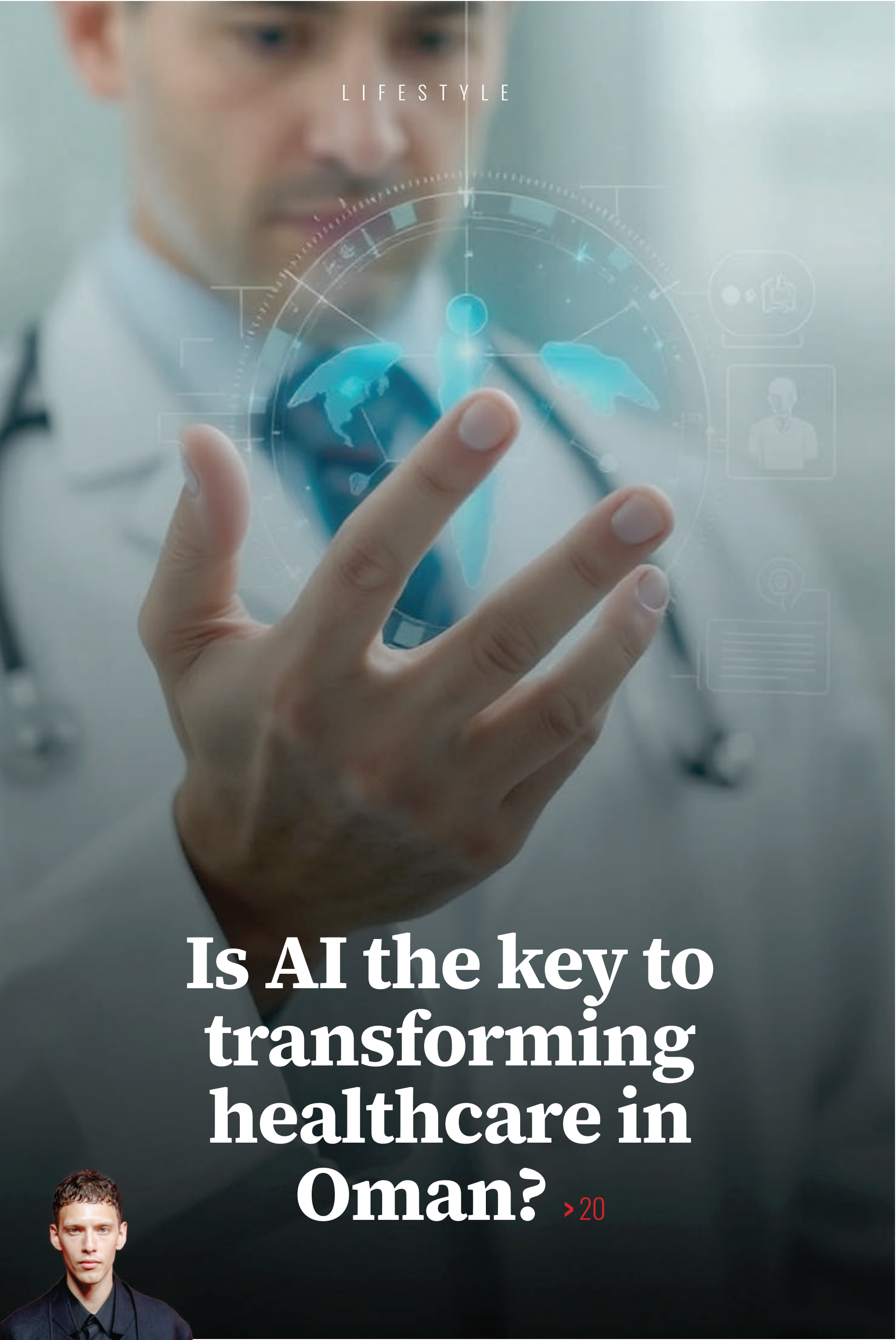
With several fiscally momentous events on the horizon, Trump and Harris should be pressed to address this issue. For starters, many provisions of the 2017 tax cuts will expire next year. How are the candidates thinking about reforming the tax code in light of the nation's fiscal challenges?

The Social Security trust fund will be insolvent in 2035, and Medicare's hospital insurance trust fund will be depleted the following year. Those estimates, from the programmes' trustees, vary over time depending on a variety of factors, but the money could run out earlier than is currently forecast.

Both Trump and Harris have stated their opposition to cuts to Social Security and Medicare, but neither has answered the obvious follow-up questions: Given the nation's ever-rising debt, how can such cuts be avoided? And why would avoiding them be the better choice? It is plausible that Harris, if she wins in November and is re-elected in 2028, will preside over a massive restructuring of these programmes should the trust funds go bust on her watch, making it crucial to ask how she would approach such a task. The national debt is one of the most pressing issues facing the United States and, if left unchecked, could trigger a fiscal crisis in which the erosion of investor confidence precipitates a large increase in interest rates. This would lead to volatile equity markets and even higher interest payments for the federal government. Likewise, a ballooning deficit could lead to an abrupt rise in expected inflation, putting pressure on the US Federal Reserve to hike interest rates. Such a crisis could happen in the future, but the debt has been damaging the economy for decades. According to the CBO, each dollar increase in the federal deficit lowers private investment by roughly 33 cents. As a result, America has a smaller stock of capital, making workers less productive, lowering wages, and likely reducing participation in the workforce. Rising debt has thus been gradually and steadily eroding the foundations of prosperity. Beyond these direct harms, a growing deficit has opportunity costs.

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ART/LIFE



L I F E S T Y L E

Is AI the key to transforming healthcare in Oman? >20

FILM UPDATE



Indian National Award-Winning Actress Considers Oman for Next Film Location

BY KABEER YOUSUF

RENOWNED Indian actress and National Film Award recipient, Aparna Balamurali, has suggested that Oman could be the setting for her next film, captivated by the country's breathtaking landscapes and warm hospitality.

Is it Oman's rugged mountains that seamlessly blend into its vast sand dunes, the stunning turquoise waters that caress its shores, or the warm, welcoming spirit of the Omani people that drew her to this decision?

When asked, the FilmFare Award-winning actress smiled and said, "It's a combination of all these factors that makes Oman irresistible at first sight. The country's unique landscapes, from Musandam to Salalah, left a lasting impression on me during my two recent visits. While Oman's natural wonders are truly awe-inspiring, it's the warmth and kindness of its people that has stayed with me."

Speaking to the Observer at the Onam celebrations hosted by the Malayalam Wing of the Indian Social Club, Balamurali expressed admiration for Oman's efforts to preserve its environment and maintain pristine natural settings.

"What stood out to me as my family and I explored Oman was the country's commitment to environmental preservation. Here, you see nature at its best, untouched by the concrete jungles that dominate so many other places," she noted.

A prominent figure in Indian cinema, Aparna Balamurali is best known for her work in Malayalam and Tamil films, particularly those set against natural backdrops. Her latest film, Kishkinda Kandam, is currently enjoying a successful run in Omani theatres.

In addition to her National Film Award and FilmFare accolades, Balamurali has also been honoured with a SIIMA award. She first gained widespread recognition for her roles in Maheshinte Prathikaaram (2016), Sunday Holiday (2017), and Soorarai Pottru (2020), the latter of which earned her the National Film Award for Best Actress.

I N D U S T R Y H I G H L I G H T S

FASHION

Documentary film-maker, writer and multidisciplinary artist Ludwig Hurtado poses upon arrival for The BoF 500 Gala at the Shangri-La Hotel in Paris, on the sidelines of the Paris Fashion Week Spring-Summer 2025. — **AFP**



ART

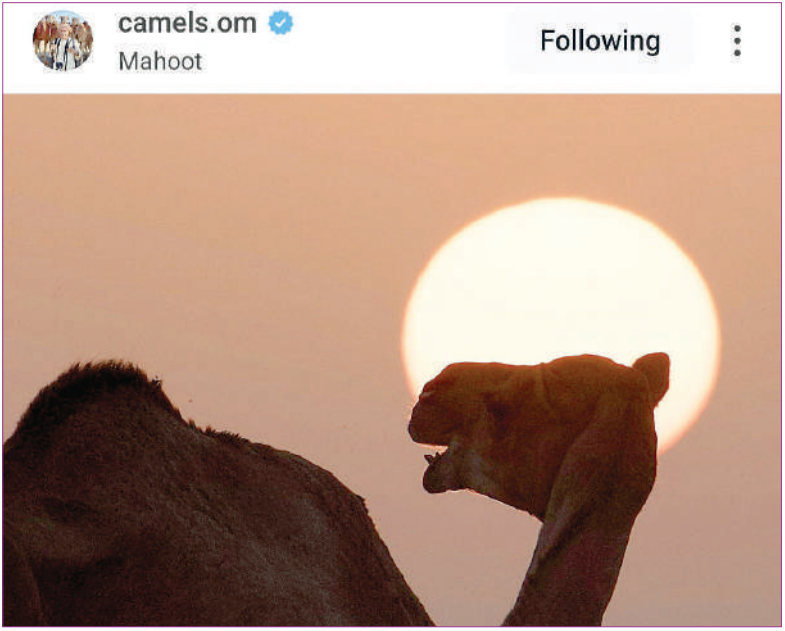
A graffiti artist paints a wall during the international graffiti festival "King Royal Pride 2024" in Jakarta. — **AFP**



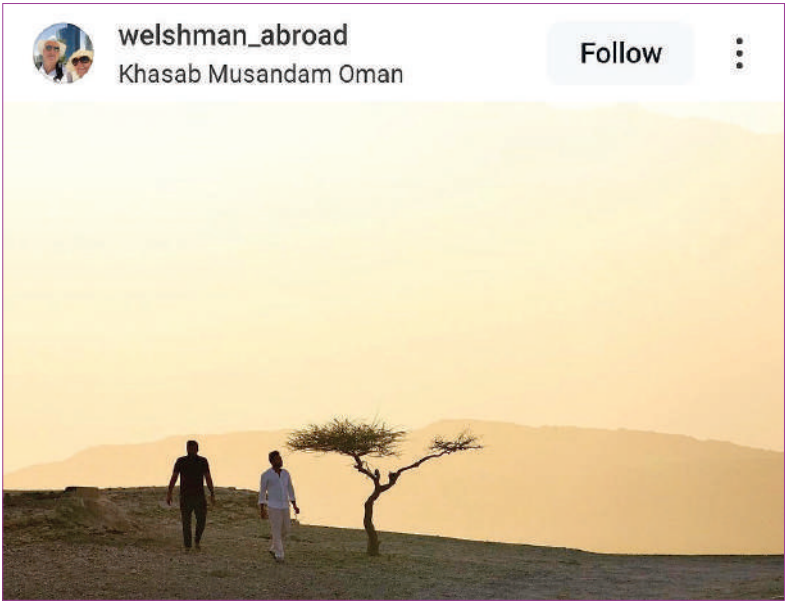
LIFESTYLE

Dancers pose before performing at the Five Mountains Folk Festival, started by farmers on the slopes of Mount Merapi Merbabu, in Magelang, Central Java. — **AFP**

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Headed Towards The Sun



Before the Night Comes

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. To participate, please follow us on Instagram, upload your photos, tag us, and use the hashtags #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.



France opens first museum for Sufi art

The first museum dedicated to Sufi art and culture has officially opened its doors in Chatou, a suburb near Paris. The Musée d'Art et de Culture Soufis MTO (MACS MTO) welcomed visitors on September 28 in a beautifully restored 19th-century mansion, situated opposite the historic Île des Impressionnistes. The museum's design was crafted by French scenographers Atelier Maciej Fiszler and architects Ducatillion Gimel. In addition to its permanent collection, the museum features a tranquil garden designed for individual meditation and group events. At the heart of MACS MTO lies the essence of Sufism, which has flourished since the seventh century. The museum aims to connect traditional Sufi principles with contemporary art and culture. Its permanent collection encompasses a wide range of objects, sculptures, textiles, calligraphy, manuscripts, and intricate ceramic and mirror mosaics, all imbued with spiritual

and symbolic significance. The inaugural exhibition, titled *Un Ciel Intérieur* (An Inner Sky), will present contemporary works from artists whose values resonate with Sufi teachings. This exhibition features seven international contemporary artists: Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, Seffa Klein, Bianca Bondi, Younes Rahmoun, Pinaree Sanpitak, Troy Makaza, and Chloé Quenum. Many of the works were commissioned specifically for the exhibition, inviting these artists to explore their inner worlds while highlighting the enduring nature of Sufism, transcending borders and generations. Alexandra Baudelot, Director of the Musée d'Art et de Culture Soufis MTO and curator of *Un Ciel Intérieur*, stated, "The museum creates a space for dialogue between audiences and artists, welcoming people of all faiths and backgrounds. Through the growth of our collection, diverse programs, and collaborations with contemporary artists and multidisciplinary thinkers, we look forward to fostering a deeper understanding and engagement with the rich cultural expressions of Sufism through discovery, culture, and scientific research."



Maggie Smith, British theatre and cinema legend

MAGGIE Smith, who died on Friday aged 89, was an Oscar-winning legend of stage and screen, renowned for playing wide repertoire of characters during a decades-spanning career and personifying a particular kind of English eccentricity.

For more than 60 years, on stage and on screen, she excelled in whatever she turned her hand to, winning a Tony, two Oscars, three Golden Globes and five Baftas.

She became best-known in recent decades for her portrayal of the kindly Professor McGonagall in the "Harry Potter" film franchise and the Dowager Countess in the hit television period drama series "Downton Abbey".

Smith became an international star in the 1960s and 1970s, when she won Oscars for best actress in "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" (1969) and "Travels with my Aunt" (1972).

She was one of Britain's most famous and beloved actors.

Her portrayal of the caustic Countess of Grantham, Lady Violet Crawley, in "Downton Abbey" (2010-2015), which was screened in over 100 countries, won her a new generation of admirers around the globe.

"It's ridiculous. I led a perfectly normal life until Downton Abbey," she told the British Film Institute in April 2017.

"I would go to theatres, I would go to galleries and things like that on my own. And now I can't."

Smith played the ruthless aristocrat in all six seasons of the show, created by screenwriter Julian Fellowes in 2010, winning a Golden Globe and three Emmy awards.

After initially declining to

participate in a big-screen adaptation of the series, the actress eventually agreed to appear in the film, which was a hit around the world in 2019.

Snooty schoolteacher -Born on December 28, 1934, the daughter of a secretary from Glasgow and an Oxford professor of pathology, Smith made her stage debut in 1952 with the Oxford University Dramatic Society.

A string of stage successes in London's West End and on Broadway followed, and she famously appeared opposite Laurence Olivier in 1959.

This led to her becoming a member of Olivier's celebrated 1960s National Theatre company, where she earned critical acclaim alongside her husband, the actor Robert Stephens.

By the end of the decade, Smith's film career had taken off.

She won the best actress Academy Award in 1969 for her unforgettable portrayal of a snooty, unorthodox Edinburgh schoolteacher in "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie".

She also picked up a best supporting actress award in 1978 for "California Suite" and, in all, won six Oscar nominations.

Smith's marriage to heavy-drinking Stephens, with whom she had two sons, had collapsed in 1973 and they divorced two years later.

She remarried shortly after to screenwriter Beverley Cross, who died in 1998.

Smith was made a Dame of the British Empire in recognition of her work in 1990 and, beside the top honours, won many other stage and screen awards in both Britain and the United States.

Energy and curiosity

Smith was widely considered a near-flawless actress, with the rare ability to make a cameo role a central feature of a film.

"(She) can capture in a single moment more than many actors can convey in an entire film," said acclaimed director Nicholas Hytner after working with her on "The Lady in the Van" (2015).

"She can be vulnerable, fierce, bleak and hilarious simultaneously, and she brings to the set each day the energy and curiosity of a young actor who's just started out," he added.

Smith left some people feeling overawed.

"It's true I don't tolerate fools but then they don't tolerate me, so I am spiky," she told The Guardian in 2014.

"Maybe that's why I'm quite good at playing spiky elderly ladies."

Perhaps the best example was 2001's "Gosford Park" -- also written by Fellowes -- in which Smith played the frightful Constance, Countess of Trentham, with aplomb.

She was credited with a dogged dedication to her craft.

She survived a breast cancer diagnosis in 2007 and filmed "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" two years later while enduring chemotherapy treatment.

"I was hairless. I had no problem getting the wig on -- I was like a boiled egg," she told The Times of the experience.

The actor also suffered from Graves disease, a manageable thyroid condition causing tiredness, weight loss and heart palpitations.

Smith is survived by her sons, actors Chris Larkin and Toby Stephens. —AFP

Is AI the key to transforming healthcare in Oman?

BY YERU EBUE

THE MINISTRY of Health recently organised the Oman Health Exhibition and Conference 2024, a three-day event held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. The conference brought together some of the most distinguished healthcare professionals and organisations in the country, offering an invaluable platform for networking and knowledge exchange on the latest industry trends and advancements.

A key highlight of the conference was a panel discussion led by Dr Abdullah al Mamari, co-founder of Future Health and a featured speaker. Dr Al Mamari shared insights on the future of healthcare investment in Oman, stating, “Our panel is focused on exploring how investment in the health sector will evolve, particularly within the growing Omani market.”

He further elaborated on the role of digital technology in shaping the future of healthcare in Oman, emphasising the potential of artificial intelligence and data analytics. “The primary focus of the Ministry of Health is on leveraging AI and data-driven decision-making, especially in the operational models of public and private hospitals. This approach will significantly enhance the quality and accessibility of healthcare services in Oman,” Dr Al Mamari explained.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has permeated various sectors, from finance to education, revolutionising how tasks are performed and improving efficiency. The healthcare sector is no exception, benefiting significantly from AI’s capabilities. By integrating AI into healthcare, medical professionals can automate time-consuming tasks, enhance diagnostic accuracy and personalise treatments, ultimately improving patient outcomes. As the healthcare industry faces challenges like workforce shortages and an overwhelming amount of data, AI offers solutions that can transform how care is delivered, making it more efficient and accessible.

One of the most notable real-life applications of AI in healthcare is its use in diagnostics. AI-powered tools, particularly in radiology, pathology and ophthalmology, have proven effective in image-based diagnostics. For instance, companies like Eko Health have developed algorithms that improve the detection of heart conditions during routine screenings. These tools can detect subtle abnormalities that might be overlooked by human doctors, significantly reducing undiagnosed cardiac issues by up to 30 per cent. Similarly, Butterfly Network’s portable ultrasound device, powered by AI, has democratised medical imaging, making it more accessible and affordable while increasing diagnostic accuracy in point-of-care settings.

Beyond diagnostics, AI has revolutionised the administrative aspects of healthcare. It automates routine tasks like documentation and appointment scheduling, freeing up valuable time for healthcare professionals to focus on patient care. Conversational AI platforms such as Abridge and Nuance transcribe medical conversations and structure them for easy reference, reducing the heavy administrative workload that often burdens clinicians. This ability to handle clerical tasks allows doctors and nurses to devote more attention to their patients, improving overall care delivery.

AI also plays a crucial role in advancing personalised medicine. By analysing vast datasets,

AI can tailor treatment plans to individual patients’ genetic profiles, lifestyles and medical histories. This approach has shown remarkable success in managing chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease.

According to research published in the New England Journal of Medicine, AI-driven personalised care plans have improved patient outcomes by up to 45 per cent. Additionally, AI is predicted to handle over 85 per cent of customer interactions in healthcare by 2025, allowing medical professionals to prioritise more complex cases and focus on patient-centric care.

Remote care and monitoring are further examples of AI’s potential in healthcare. AI-powered devices enable continuous patient monitoring, providing real-time alerts to healthcare providers, which is particularly valuable for managing chronic conditions outside hospital settings. These tools not only reduce the need for frequent hospital visits, but also empower patients to take a more active role in managing their health.

AI is also enhancing clinical decision support systems, giving healthcare providers real-time insights based on vast data sets. Glass Health, for example, integrates various data sources to provide a holistic view of a patient’s health, improving the accuracy of diagnoses and treatment plans. This integration of AI into clinical workflows ensures more informed decision-making, leading to better patient outcomes.

Despite the promise of development, key medical professionals in the country reminded that challenges accompany AI’s rapid advancement. These medical professionals also raised that there are certain concerns that cannot be taken for granted, including the lack of transparency in AI algorithms, potential biases in training data, and ethical issues surrounding patient privacy and consent. They also pointed out that reliance on AI may undermine the essential human element in healthcare, as the emotional and psychological support provided by healthcare professionals remains crucial for patient-centred care.

Medical professionals also raised that there are fears of job displacement due to AI automation, although healthcare professionals’ expertise and empathy cannot be fully replicated by machines. Thus, they must adapt to AI’s evolving role while maintaining the patient-provider relationship.

Lastly, they reminded us that while AI holds immense potential to improve healthcare, addressing its challenges through education, ethical guidelines and collaboration between professionals and developers is vital for maximising benefits while minimising risks.

Despite the promise of development brought along by artificial intelligence, key medical professionals in the country reminded that challenges accompany AI’s rapid advancement, pointing out that reliance on AI may undermine the essential

HUMAN ELEMENT

in healthcare, as the emotional and psychological support provided by healthcare professionals remains crucial for patient-centred care.

