

Bon Plus app to ease transactions

Bon Plus application serves as a specialised business application that connects suppliers with the hospitality sector, which comprises hotels, restaurants, cafeterias/catering and business bureaus (Horeca). Bon Plus emerges as one of the nascent firms that are served by the Programme for Omani Promising Startups (POPS) and supervised by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED). Bon Plus seeks to streamline communication and cooperation among business owners and suppliers, notably by providing options for managing orders and contracts.

SUNRISE - 05:36 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:12 AM
DHUHR - 12:18 PM
ASR - 03:41 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:56 PM
ISHA - 08:14 PM



P10

AL HARTHY TO START NURBURGRING RACE FROM PLACE 13



P13

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES BOOST TOURISM SECTOR IN AL SHARQIAH NORTH



P20

A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION FOR AGRICULTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE



RAO BAND WINS TROPHY OF INFANTRY

The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) Music Band won first place in the World Infantry and Military Discipline Competition held in Scotland, United Kingdom. The RAO band also won fifth place in Dumbarton contest on playing musical instruments. The contest saw the participation of 128 teams from different countries of the world. Col Ahmed bin Salim al Shukairi, Director of the RAO Music Band, said that Oman took the lead in the World Bagpipes and Drums Competition in Scotland, winning first place in the Infantry and Military Discipline event and fifth place in contest on playing musical instruments. **DETAILS ON P2**

Low pressure system expected from July 30 to August 2

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](#)

The Civil Aviation Authority’s National Multi-Hazards Early Warning Centre has announced that a low pressure weather condition is expected during July 30 to August 2.

The latest forecast and analyses from the centre indicate that the weather in the Sultanate of Oman will be affected by an extension of a low-pressure system in the Arabian Sea, starting from the evening of Tuesday (July 30), until Friday (August 2).

According to the weather forecast, it is expected that clouds will be advected over most of the governorates, with chances of isolated rain of varying intensity, occasionally thundershowers, leading to the flow of wadis and causing flash floods. Experts at the centre are monitoring the developments of the weather condition and urged public to follow the bulletins and reports issued by official sources.

Meanwhile, Shinas, Fahud and Qarn Alam touched 48 degrees Celsius on Sunday.

According to the general weather forecast, partly cloudy to cloudy skies are expected along the coast of Dhofar Governorate and adjoining mountains.

Israeli forces advance in Gaza, kill 66

CAIRO: Israeli forces sent tanks deeper into areas in the Gaza Strip’s south on Sunday as fighting raged, and Gaza health officials said Israeli military strikes had killed 66 Palestinians across the enclave in the past 24 hours.

Tanks pushed further into the three towns of Al Karara, Al Zanna and Bani Suhaila, in the east of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza, and medics said at least nine Palestinians were killed earlier on Sunday by Israeli military strikes in those areas.

Residents said fierce fighting could be heard in eastern areas of Khan Yunis where the army was operating. The new incursions caused thousands more families to leave their homes and head to overcrowded areas in Al Mawasi to the west, and north to Deir Al Balah.

Later on Sunday, two separate



Palestinian children play on the wreckage of a car parked near a building demolished by Israeli bombardment in Al Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip on Sunday. – AFP

Israeli air strikes on Khan Yunis killed at least 15 Palestinians, medics said.

One air strike on a tent area in Al Mawasi district killed five people including a four-month-old girl named Maria Abu

Ziada. Al Mawasi in western Khan Yunis is a humanitarian-designated area where the Israeli army has been ordering Palestinians from other places to go for survival.

SEE ALSO P6

Dhofar sees 22% surge in building permit applications

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, July 28

Dhofar Governorate is witnessing a significant increase in construction activities, driven by an urgent need to modernise infrastructure and accommodate a growing population.

A key indicator of this urban boom is the remarkable rise in building permit applications. In 2023, the Building Permits Department of Dhofar Municipality reported a 22-per cent increase in applications compared to the previous year, bringing the total to 3,043.

This surge underscores the accelerated pace of development and the heightened demand for new constructions in the governorate.

To meet this rising demand, the Building Permits Department has been actively enhancing its services and modernising its systems. These improvements aim to streamline the permit application process, making it more efficient and user-friendly. The department’s efforts are part of a broader strategy to support Dhofar’s urbanisation while maintaining high standards of quality and sustainability.

The department’s role extends beyond permit issuance. It involves strict oversight of architectural design

Dhofar’s urban expansion offers immense opportunities, but it also requires a balanced approach to ensure sustainable development for future generations

AHMED AL MAASHANI
Urban planning expert

quality and fostering innovative building solutions. Ensuring that new constructions meet global standards of quality and sustainability is paramount, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

The rapid urban development in Dhofar is not just about new buildings. It has broader implications for the governorate. The increase in construction activities is generating new employment opportunities across various sectors, driving economic growth. Enhanced infrastructure is also leading to better services for residents and improving the overall quality of life in the governorate.

TURN TO P2

Evidence of Paleolithic era settlement found in Natif Cave

SADAH: Acting in cooperation with the Directorate-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, the French mission named ‘Archaeology of the Arabian Seashores’ has been exploring the evolution of human life in the Omani coastline, where more than 400 sites were discovered, including the ‘Natif Cave’, considered one of the exceptional sites dating back to the late Paleolithic era (10,350–10,700) BC.

The ‘Natif Cave’ was discovered by the French team in 2013 as part of the ‘Arabian

Seashores Study Project’. The French mission excavated the site during different seasons between 2013 and 2016. It revisited the site in 2024 to complete its documentation.

During the archaeological excavations and studies, the French mission unearthed evidence of human settlements that existed 10,000 years at the ‘Natif Cave’ site, which housed sediments from the oldest fishing community in the Arabian Peninsula. This was further affirmed by discovery of fish and turtle remains inside adjoining



caves. Natif Cave finds included a piece of a rope, deemed the oldest rope ever discovered in the world, flint tools, beads and frankincense pebbles.

Ali bin Musallam al Mahri, Head of the Surveys and Archaeological Excavations Department at the Directorate of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, said that the mission gathered a lot of artefacts and came across a set of sharp arrowheads made of flint, bone remains and perforated sea shells that were used for decoration and jewellery.

TURN TO P2



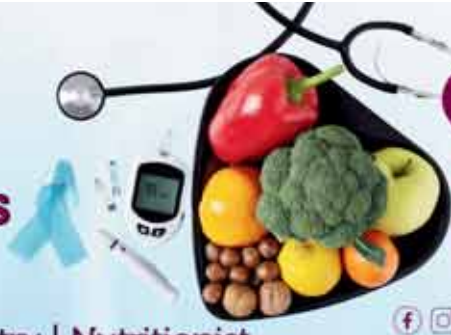


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ROP SETS
GUIDELINES FOR
SMALL VEHICLES,
TRAILERS
REGISTRATION



MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JULY 28

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has announced a set of comprehensive guidelines for the registration of small vehicles and trailers.

The guidelines have been issued in line with the Khareef season in Dhofar. These regulations aim to ensure safety and standardisation across the Sultanate of Oman, especially during this popular tourist period.

According to the new guidelines, trailers must be manufactured in a registered workshop and towed by a four-wheel drive vehicle appropriate for their weight. They must be registered with the General Directorate of Traffic, and an independent plate should be issued

following a successful technical inspection.

The specifications for different types of trailers are clearly outlined. For trailers with a brake system, the maximum weight is set at 2,000 kg, with a width of 2.5 metres and a height of 2.5 metres from the ground. The length should not exceed 5 metres from the beginning of the hump.

However, trailers without a brake system should weigh no more than 750 kg, with a width of 2 metres, a height of 2 metres, and a length of 3 metres.

These guidelines are part of the ROP's ongoing efforts to enhance road safety and ensure that all vehicles and trailers on Omani roads meet specific standards. By adhering to these regulations,

drivers can help maintain order and safety on the roads, reducing the risk of accidents caused by improperly manufactured or overburdened trailers.

The ROP has stated that these guidelines will be strictly enforced. Owners of trailers must ensure that their vehicles comply with the specified dimensions and weight limits.

Non-compliance could result in penalties or refusal of registration. The new guidelines are expected to streamline the registration process and ensure that all trailers on the road are safe and compliant with Omani traffic laws.

This move aligns with the broader objectives of the ROP to modernise traffic management and enhance public safety.

Oman Employment
Exhibition opens



The exhibition aims to showcase the latest and best employment opportunities and positions available

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 28

The Oman Employment Exhibition, the most significant employment event in the Sultanate of Oman, was inaugurated on Sunday under the patronage of Dr Muna bint Salim al Jardaniyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Vocational Training.

The exhibition is being held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre and brings together a large number of institutions from both the public and private sectors.

The exhibition aims to showcase the latest and best employment opportunities and positions available, contributing to the enhancement of job seekers' skills and personal relationships. It provides a valuable platform for organisations, institutions, and job seekers to connect, showcase their potential, and discuss challenges related to job searching in Oman.

As part of the exhibition, a panel discussion titled "The Future of HR Leadership — Leading Strategic Workforce Transformation" was held, moderated by Khaloud al

Alawi, General Manager of Hala FM Entertainment Network.

The session featured distinguished speakers including Abdullah bin Khalfan al Sheili, Chief Human Resources Officer at United Engineering Services, Mohammed bin Salem al Shizaawi, Vice President of Personnel Affairs and Support Services at Port of Sohar and Freezone, and Marwa al Kharousi, Senior Vice President of Human Resources and Administrative Affairs at Ominvest.

During the session, Khawla discussed how a positive work culture can encourage job seekers to acquire skills aligned with labour market needs, while Abdullah al Alawi shared insights on building a work environment that supports strategic HR transformation.

Additionally, Marwa addressed the alignment of training and development programmes with strategic HR goals, and Mohammed al Shizaawi concluded the discussion by exploring how HR leaders can benefit from emerging technologies.

The exhibition is expected to provide valuable employment opportunities.

Khareef plays a big role in
Dhofar's groundwater recharge

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

The arrival of Khareef season not only attracts tourists and benefits local businesses but also excites scientists, agriculturists, and meteorologists who analyse the data for future planning. This season's prolonged monsoon is particularly beneficial, significantly recharging groundwater and impacting agricultural research.

Water resources experts Dr Khalid al Mushaikhi and Dr Mahaad bin Mahaad al Shammas have done extensive work on Dhofar's water resources and suggest that the season hugely benefits Dhofar's groundwater recharge.

In his work, Dr Khalid al Mushaikhi has highlighted the importance of Khareef in groundwater recharge. "Continuous drizzling creates conditions for horizontal



During intense monsoon seasons, like this year's, the chances of evaporation are less leading to better groundwater accumulation

precipitation in the Salalah coastal plain aquifer," he explains.

During intense monsoon seasons, like this year's, the chances of evaporation are less leading to better groundwater accumulation.

"Unlike heavy rain, continuous drizzling charges the groundwater more effectively,

vertical precipitation during the monsoon. He suggests maintaining the forest cover and warns that the decline in these forests could negatively affect the aquifer's sustainability.

Dr Akram Ali, also a water resources expert, underscores the significance of Khareef in Dhofar's groundwater recharge. "A minimum of 15,680,000 litres of water is recharged annually from the monsoon," he noted.

Dr Akram explains that Salalah's arid climate transforms dramatically during Khareef, with the surrounding mountains playing a crucial role in precipitation control.

Salalah experiences about 30 rain days annually, with monsoon rains accounting for 70 per cent of the total rainfall on the Salalah Plain. Average annual rainfall on the plain is between 100 and 120 mm, while the mountainous areas receive between 230 and 450 mm.

DHOFAR SEES 22% SURGE IN BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATIONS

FROM PAGE 1

Furthermore, the construction boom contributes to diversifying income sources, strengthening the national economy and reducing reliance on traditional sectors. The rapid development is attracting investors, further stimulating private sector growth and fostering a dynamic business environment.

Despite these positive

developments, several challenges remain. Rapid urbanisation can put pressure on natural resources and existing infrastructure, necessitating careful management to ensure sustainability, say experts. It is also crucial to preserve Dhofar's architectural and cultural heritage amid the ongoing development, maintaining the unique character of the governorate.

The growing population

necessitates the expansion of essential services such as water, electricity and sanitation to meet increased demand.

Ahmed al Maashani, an urban planning expert, highlights the importance of sustainability amid this growth. "Dhofar's urban expansion offers immense opportunities, but it also requires a balanced approach to ensure sustainable development for future

generations."

As Dhofar continues to grow and develop, the governorate stands as a testament to the potential of strategic urban planning and the importance of balancing development with sustainability. This dynamic transformation not only enhances the quality of life for residents, but also positions Dhofar as a beacon of progress and innovation in the Sultanate of Oman.

Evidence of Paleolithic era found

FROM PAGE 1

The studies conducted by the mission affiliated to the French National Centre for Scientific Research focused on determining the age of geological deposits using various techniques including analysing the catalytic radiation of quartz and carbon isotopes

and analysing calcium deposits. Thus, the team managed to determine the time frame of the archaeological settlements, Al Mahri said.

The French mission led by Dr Vincent Charpentier, a French archaeologist from the Institute (INRAP), proved that the archaeological discoveries at the site date back to different historical periods.

— ONA

RAO BAND WINS FIRST PLACE IN SCOTLAND

EDINBURGH: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) Music Band won first place in the World Infantry and Military Discipline Competition held in Scotland, United Kingdom.

The RAO band also won fifth place in Dumbarton contest on playing musical instruments. The contest saw the participation of 128 teams from different countries of the world.

Col Ahmed bin Salim al

Shukairi, Director of the RAO Music Band, said that Oman took the lead in the World Bagpipes and Drums Competition in Scotland, winning first place in the Infantry and Military Discipline event and fifth place in contest on playing musical instruments.

"These results offer strong incentive for the RAO band in upcoming competitions towards the World Music Competition in



The contest saw the participation of 128 teams from different countries of the world. — ONA

Glasgow," he added.

Douglas MacAllister, Mayor of Glasgow, said: "This is the 25th anniversary of the World Music Competition in Scotland and we are proud to once again host this world-class musical event with bands from all over the world, including the Royal Army of Oman, contesting the trophy. We were very impressed with the RAO band's skills and outstanding performance."

— ONA



Dhofar Khareef season reveals transport, infra issues

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 28

Dhofar is experiencing a thriving tourist season, with large numbers of visitors from both within and outside Oman flocking to enjoy the stunning natural beauty and mild climate.

Salalah attracts the lion's share of these visitors. However, amidst this great influx, pressing challenges arise that require immediate attention to ensure a sustainable tourist experience.

Traffic congestion in Salalah frustrates visitors and diminishes their tourist experience.

During peak season, cars pile up on the streets, leading to delays in mobility and spoiling the pleasure of exploration.

This situation demands innovative solutions, including improving and expanding the road network, alongside enhancing the public

It is crucial to distribute events and tourist activities more evenly across the governorate to encourage visitors to explore the full diversity and beauty of Dhofar

transportation system.

Developing and expanding the road network should be a top priority, in addition to improving accommodation and transport facilities.

Long-term investment in infrastructure will ensure a comfortable and smooth tourist experience, enhancing Dhofar's capacity to host larger numbers of visitors.

Despite ongoing efforts, some areas in Dhofar still suffer from a lack of infrastructure. Hotels and tourist facilities are



Traffic congestion in Salalah frustrates visitors and diminishes their tourist experience

under increasing pressure, and visitors need more options for accommodation and transport. Rapid development of this infrastructure is necessary to meet the growing demand.

Public transport suffers from low uptake, exacerbating reliance on private cars and worsening traffic congestion. This situation requires a shift in prevailing culture through awareness

campaigns that encourage the use of mass transit and highlight its economic and environmental benefits.

High-quality and reasonably priced public transport services should be offered, with parking facilities provided at tourist sites to encourage visitors to use mass transit. This shift will ease pressure on the roads, reduce traffic congestion and promote the sustainability of the tourism sector.

Visitors tend to concentrate on Salalah, leading to the neglect of other areas in Dhofar. It is crucial to distribute events and tourist activities more evenly across the governorate to encourage visitors to explore the full diversity and beauty of Dhofar.

Equitably distributing entertainment and cultural events across various areas will attract visitors to new locations.

Designating specific zones for events and connecting them to the public transport network will facilitate access and enhance the diversity of tourist options.

Comprehensive tourism marketing for different areas should be a focus, with promotional campaigns highlighting natural beauty, cultural diversity and recreational activities.

This diverse marketing will attract a wide range of visitors and strengthen Dhofar's status as a global tourist destination.

The Governorate of Dhofar possesses unique tourism potential and requires concerted efforts and strategic thinking. By addressing current challenges and implementing the proposed solutions, Dhofar can maintain its allure and achieve sustainable development, becoming a preferred tourist destination globally.



Dhofar Holy Quran Forum honours a winner of the Holy Quran memorisation contest

HOLY QURAN FORUM HONOURS 300 MEMORISERS

SALALAH: The Directorate-General of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in Dhofar Governorate celebrated the conclusion of the sixth edition of the Dhofar Holy Quran Forum on Sunday at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, honouring 300 memorisers of the Quran.

The ceremony was graced by Salim bin Musallam Qatan, Vice-President of the State Council, and attended by Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, along with other officials.

Ahmed bin Ali al Busaidi, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in Dhofar, highlighted that this year's forum is the result of diligent efforts and an annual plan for the Holy Quran schools, which have grown to 18 across the governorate.

He noted a significant increase in enrolment, with 4,000 male and female students of various ages participating this year, marking a 33-per cent rise from the previous year.

The forum aims to motivate memorisers of the Holy Quran to continue their efforts and encourage different segments of society to engage in memorisation through distinguished educational and supervisory cadres, as well as diverse religious programmes in a stimulating environment.

Khawla bint Abdullah al Najjar, Head of the Women's Education and Guidance Centre at the Directorate-General of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in Dhofar, emphasised the importance of the programmes, particularly for female memorisers.

She highlighted the 'Tahadiu Quran' programme, which operates across the governorate's wilayats twice a week, focusing on different levels of memorisation, including 15, 20 and 25 parts, and the entire Quran.

The ceremony featured a visual presentation on the 'Pledge to Recite the Quran' programme, a theatrical performance, and a song about the virtue of the Quran, performed by students from the Quran schools under the supervision of the Directorate-General of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in Dhofar Governorate.

Asma bint Alawi al Dhabab, speaking about the forum's impact, noted that its programmes significantly encouraged memorisation through dedicated teachers who imparted the rules of memorisation, recitation and intonation. She expressed a commitment to continue teaching the Holy Quran, in line with the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): "The best of you is the one who learns the Quran and teaches it."

The forum, which began in September last year and concluded in May, aimed to prepare excellent memorisers, enhance their skills and provide them with Quranic sciences. It also sought to groom qualified memorisers to represent Oman in international competitions. The ceremony's sponsor honoured the Quran memorisers who participated in the forum's competition, as well as the organisers, participants and supporting companies. - **ONA**

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 28

No tour of Dhofar Governorate is complete without a visit to the historical town of Mirbat, with its picturesque waterfront dotted with crumbling, yet atmospheric, merchant homes, refurbished fort and verdant mountaintops overlooking the landscape.

The Wilayat of Mirbat, located about 74 kilometres from the city of Salalah, is situated in the plain of the Samhan Mountain and overlooks the coast of the Arabian Sea.

Mirbat is named after the horse stables (Marbat al Khayl), as it was famous in the 9th century AD for horse breeding and exporting them to various Arab and ports and cities, in addition to trading frankincense and various handicrafts.

The wilayat is known for its many natural tourist sites, historical landmarks and buildings with ancient architectural styles. The most notable is Mirbat Fort, one of the most important historical and archaeological landmarks in Dhofar. The fort, which overlooks the coast of the old Mirbat port, dates back to the 9th century AD.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) reopened Mirbat Fort to tourists after restoration and maintenance work.

This effort is part of its aim to turn forts and castles into historical attractions for both local and international visitors. The fort houses a permanent exhibition that includes various historical aspects of the fort, traditional crafts of the local community and displays on historical, geological, architectural, social and economic aspects, as well as marine life using modern technology.

'Sidow House' is another significant historical landmark with unique architectural design that embodies traditional Arab architecture.

The old Mirbat market, located near Mirbat Fort, is one of the oldest historical markets selling goods and merchandise imported from India, East Africa, and ports like Basra and Aden. These goods included dates, leather, fabrics, and various local products arriving through the old Mirbat port. Omani frankincense was the primary commodity in this market.

Mirbat is also famous for its beautiful beaches and bays, which are



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism reopened Mirbat Fort to tourists after restoration.

Mirbat's attractions are a major draw for khareef

major tourist attractions due to their beauty and rare marine resources. The area experiences active tourism throughout the year, especially on weekends, attracting visitors for fishing and coral reef viewing.

Samhan Mountain is a major tourist destination as one of the most important mountain ranges in the Dhofar Governorate, with its highest peak reaching 2,100 metres. The mountain is home to various types of natural plants, including acacia and frankincense trees. It is also known for its wildlife, including the Arabian leopard, Arabian gazelle, foxes, and the Nubian ibex.

At the summit of Samhan Mountain lies the 'Hyr' cave, one of the key tourist attractions due to its mountain location overlooking Mirbat.

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THE TIMELESS BEAUTY OF MISFAT AL ABRIYEEN

THE VILLAGE, NOW A HERITAGE SITE, FEATURES HOUSES BUILT FROM STONES AND SAROOJ, A TYPE OF BURNT CLAY. ROCKS WITH ANCIENT INSCRIPTIONS INDICATE EARLY HUMAN SETTLEMENT IN THE AREA



PHOTOS BY MOHAMMED AL MASHARI

ARWA AL HASHIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 28

Visiting Misfat Al Abriyeen village is an enchanting experience, with breathtaking views greeting you even before you arrive. The scenic mountain road to the village offers a panoramic view of Al Hamra, showcasing verdant farms and majestic mountains.

Upon reaching Misfat Al Abriyeen, you are welcomed by the charming old houses, each narrating its own unique story. For a genuine taste of the village's simple life, Harit al Misfah Inn is the perfect choice.

Harit al Misfah Inn is distinguished by its heritage-style façade, reflecting the rich Omani history and tradition. The inn preserves the ancestral heritage and the historical value of ancient houses. It features a reception hall and traditionally furnished rooms, with handmade beds crafted from Kendal wood. The upstairs restaurant offers a breathtaking view, ideal for appreciating the natural beauty and capturing memorable photos of the sprawling Misfah farms.

Said al Hatali, the owner of the inn, shared that its construction dates back 150 years, presenting challenges during restoration. Nonetheless, the inn emerged with an exceptional and unique appearance. Located in the heart of the village, in the archaeological Annur al-Hara square, it attracts numerous tourists. The inn's interior design, crafted by young Omanis, uses high-quality wood and showcases Omani identity.

The inn offers various activities for tourists, such as hiking on ancient mountain paths that ancestors used before the 1970s to reach freshwater pools and scenic camping spots overlooking the village farms. Nearby, Roghan Café offers a fabulous view, named after a Persian fort built

before Islam. The café provides a scenic view of the 'falajes', old houses, and castles, allowing visitors to enjoy the stunning Omani landscape while savouring their coffee.

Misfah, meaning "the place that avoids the wind," was settled long ago due to a water spring. Agricultural channels were then extended to irrigate the fields. Each family has a share of free water, with irrigation following a specific schedule to distribute 'falaj' water day and night to all families.

The village, now a heritage site, features houses built from stones and sarooj, a type of burnt clay. Rocks with ancient inscriptions indicate early human settlement in the area.

What sets the village apart is its mountain slope farming. In the past, lemons were a significant crop for Misfah, but a virus later destroyed the lemon trees. Consequently, villagers began extensively growing palm trees, oranges, mangoes, pomegranates, figs, olives, bananas, and other crops.

Walking through the old town, it might seem deserted initially, but you will soon hear children playing and see people tending to their plants. Some families have not abandoned their birthplace, maintaining their old habits and traditions in this harsh landscape, fostering a bond of harmony and affection. The people of Al Misfah live in harmony with its natural beauty and resources.

All this grandeur is hidden in the Wilayat of Al Hamra, known for its cultural and historical landmarks. It combines mountains, plains, water, and diverse trees, with houses on mountain slopes narrating Oman's illustrious past.

The wilayat is perfect for nature tourism enthusiasts, offering numerous caves like Al Hoota Cave and Al Kadan Cave, and many wadis that irrigate its lush farms and uniquely beautiful mountainous agricultural terraces.





Agriculture forum promotes innovation in food security

BALQEES ALORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 28

The Agricultural Forum in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, organised by the General Directorate of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, was inaugurated by Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South. Held at the Omani Women's Association in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, the two-day forum featured insightful presentations and exhibitions.

On the first day, Dr Masoud bin Suleiman al Azri presented “Investment in Food Security,” discussing the components of Oman's food production sector, performance indicators of the agricultural and fisheries sectors, the ministry's strategic programme (2021-2025), and investment opportunities in Al Sharqiyah South.

Ishaq bin Mohammed al Naabi presented “Agricultural



Held at the Omani Women's Association in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, the two-day forum featured insightful presentations and exhibitions

Operations,” focusing on quality and market requirements, such as colour consistency, size and absence of defects.

The second day included presentations on “Elements of Investment in Vital, Economic, Agricultural and Animal Sectors,” by Dr Abdullah al Alawi, covering food security

concepts, self-sufficiency and challenges in production. He also addressed policies aimed at increasing local and regional food production. Jumana al Rajhi discussed “The Role of the Development Bank in Empowering Agricultural Projects,” highlighting the bank's financing of agricultural and



service projects, seasonal loans and rural women's loans.

The forum's exhibition featured various innovative and educational displays. The use of artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things to detect and treat palm weevil with organic pesticides was showcased as a significant technological

advancement.

Oman PVC displayed products made from recycled palm fronds, including doors, windows, decorations and floors. A handicrafts section presented 84 products such as tissue boxes, baskets and environmentally friendly items, while the entrepreneurship area

focused on supporting small and medium enterprises through innovative and sustainable programmes.

The Environment Authority promoted the national initiative to plant 10 million trees, banning plastic bags and distributing environmentally friendly bags. The Food Security Department ensured the stability of basic food items during economic crises and climate conditions.

An educational section taught children about the importance of agriculture and the pests affecting it. The Agricultural Research Department specialised in examining soil and water salinity, agricultural propagation methods, field crop experiments, and hydroponics. The Development Bank Corner contributed to financing agricultural and service projects, seasonal projects, and featured the Omani Dates Corner.

More Omanis visiting Malaysia for healthcare, tourism

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

As many as 18,078 tourists from Oman visited Malaysia in 2023, with nearly 1.36 per cent of them being healthcare tourists, according to a tourism roadshow by the Malaysian Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) recently held in Muscat.

This increasing trend in the number of healthcare tourists visiting the South Asian country is due to frequent direct flights and the local authorities combining the concept of hospitality with healthcare, which has been attracting Omani tourists in large numbers.

According to representatives of MHTC from Kuala Lumpur, the rising number of tourists from Oman adds to the growing number of visitors seeking Malaysian medical care from



The rising number of tourists from Oman adds to the growing number of visitors seeking Malaysian medical care from around the world

around the world.

The concept of healthcare tourism has been gaining popularity worldwide, with many GCC guests preferring to receive medical treatment while on holiday. The availability of convenient direct flights to Kuala Lumpur offered by Oman Air and SalamAir further supports this trend.

Malaysian healthcare is accessible not only in terms of transportation, but also in terms of short waiting times for healthcare appointments.

“We receive a significant number of health tourists from Oman, as well as other GCC countries, in various medical facilities in the country. Patients from Australia, Bangladesh,

China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, the UK and the USA also seek healthcare services in Malaysia,” a tourism representative said.

The Malaysian Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) has 92 member hospitals that provide this service, and some of the hospitals where Omanis seek treatment include Prince Court Medical Center, Sunway, Alpha IVF, Subang Jaya Medical Center, KPJ Tawakkal, Pantai Hospital, TMC Fertility, KPJ Ampang Puteri Specialist Hospital, and Gleneagles Hospital in cities like Kuala Lumpur and Penang. Treatments are sought in various specialisations such as cardiology, fertility, oncology, orthopaedics, gastroenterology, ophthalmology, urology, neurology, aesthetics, dental care, health screening and premium wellness.

Cosmetics with excess MNM banned

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Oman has banned cosmetics and personal care products that contain Methyl N-Methylantranilate (MNM) above a certain percentage. This decision was made to protect public health and ensure the well-being of the people.

Many beauty products, decorative cosmetics, fine fragrances, shampoos, toilet soaps, and other toiletries use Methyl-N-methylantranilate as a fragrance ingredient.

However, various toxicological studies worldwide have shown that an increased percentage of Methyl-N-methylantranilate can have a harmful phototoxic effect on public health.

According to a statement by Sulayem bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of Consumer Protection Authority (CPA), quoting Article 1 of Decision No 579/2024, it is now prohibited to trade in cosmetics and



personal care products that contain higher levels of Methyl N-Methylantranilate than the allowed percentage.

The statement also specifies the maximum allowable percentages of MNM in different types of products.

Additionally, Article 2 states that anyone found violating this decision may face a fine of up to RO 1,000, which will double in case of a repeat offense. If the violation continues, a daily fine of up to RO 50 may be imposed, with a total not exceeding RO 2,000.

Article 3 declares that this decision will be published in the Official Gazette and will be effective from the day following its publication.

Batinah boosts infrastructure amidst weather challenges

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JULY 28

In response to recent severe weather conditions, Al Batinah North Governorate has intensified efforts to address the resulting damages and impacts on daily life.

Dr Falah bin Darwish al Balushi, Director of the Administrative Affairs Department, emphasised the challenges posed by these climatic events, notably the widespread flooding that washed away roads and disrupted traffic, rendering some infrastructure unusable.

The flooding also caused power outages and damaged water and sewage networks, significantly affecting daily life in the governorate.

The most affected regions were villages and low-lying areas near wadis, which experienced extensive flooding. Coastal and mountainous roads, not designed to withstand such harsh weather, were particularly hard hit. Dr Al Balushi stated that the current priority is to reopen roads and repair essential infrastructure swiftly.

Waleed bin Nasser al



These efforts include improving the road network using top engineering standards to ensure resilience against wadi floods and reduce erosion risks

Nabhani, Director of the Projects Department at Al Batinah North Municipality, outlined ongoing efforts to enhance the governorate's infrastructure to better withstand future weather emergencies.

These efforts include improving the road network using top engineering standards to ensure resilience against wadi floods and reduce erosion risks.

A sustainable water drainage system is also being developed to protect public and private properties. These improvement plans are being executed in collaboration with government and private entities to ensure comprehensive and effective protection.

Al Nabhani detailed the governorate's comprehensive crisis management and

emergency preparedness strategies. This includes upgrading road and water drainage networks to meet the latest technical standards and Omani road guidelines, thereby minimising infrastructure damage during severe weather. Ensuring uninterrupted traffic flow remains a key priority. Projects aimed at protecting wadi channels and

preventing encroachments are currently under study and implementation.

Dr Al Balushi added that there is ongoing coordination with relevant authorities on flood protection dams, with efforts to enhance the efficiency of existing dams for better rainwater and flood control. The governorate collaborates closely with the National Center for Emergency

Management to leverage their expertise and experience, further bolstering the governorate's preparedness for future weather-related emergencies.

Through these sustained and collaborative efforts, Al Batinah North Governorate is building a resilient infrastructure capable of withstanding severe weather conditions, ensuring the safety and well-being of its citizens.



DEADLY STRIKE AT GAZA SCHOOL, ROCKET KILLS 12 IN GOLAN

GAZA STRIP: The health ministry in Gaza said an Israeli strike on a school killed 30 people on Saturday, while a rocket fired from Lebanon killed 12 youngsters in the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights.

Israel’s military said Hizbullah fired the rocket from Lebanon, hitting a football pitch in the Druze town of Majdal Shams and killing the youngsters, who were between 10 and 20 years old. Another 18 youths were wounded in the attack, said the emergency services.

“Israel will not let this murderous attack go unanswered and Hizbullah will pay a heavy price for it, a price it has not paid before,” said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, according to a statement from his office.

Israelis forces and Hizbullah have traded cross-border fire since early October, following the attack by the Lebanese group’s ally Hamas on southern Israel which sparked the war in Gaza. Netanyahu later said he would hold a security cabinet meeting on his return to Israel from the United States.

The United Nations urged “maximum restraint”, in a joint statement from their special coordinator for Lebanon, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) chief Aroldo Lazaro.

Intensifying exchanges of fire “could ignite a wider conflagration that would engulf the entire region in a catastrophe beyond belief,” they said.

The US National Security



Palestinians inspect a destroyed mosque amid Israel-Hamas conflict in Deir Al Balah in the central Gaza Strip. – Reuters

Council condemned what it described as a “horrific attack”.

“Our support for Israel’s security is iron-clad and unwavering against all terrorist groups, including Hizbullah,” a spokesman said in a statement. The European Union’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell condemned the “bloodbath” and called for an independent investigation.

Hizbullah had earlier claimed several attacks on Israeli military sites after an air raid on southern Lebanon killed four of its fighters. But it denied it was responsible for the deadly strike on Majdal Shams.

“The Islamic Resistance has no connection to this incident,” it said, referring to its military wing.



Palestinians inspect the damage following an Israeli strike on the Khadija school housing displaced people in Deir al Balah, in the central Gaza Strip amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas group. – AFP

But Israeli military spokesman Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said in a statement early on Sunday: “The rocket fired by Hizbullah was a Falaq 1 Iranian rocket, carrying a 50-kg warhead. “This is a model that is owned exclusively by Hizbullah.”

At least 25,000 Israeli settlers live in the Golan Heights, along with at least 23,000 Druze remained on the land after Israel captured it.

Hours after the killings in Majdal Shams, a Lebanese security source said an Israeli drone fired two missiles at the village of Taraiyya in eastern Lebanon.

The strikes destroyed a hangar and home, without causing casualties, the source said on

Sunday. The latest strike on a school in Gaza came after a days-long military operation further south that killed around 170, said emergency services there.

The health ministry reported “30 martyrs and more than 100 wounded” in the strike on Khadija school in the central Deir el Balah area. Israel’s military said Palestinian fighters were using the compound as a “hiding place”.

The latest Gaza strike, which Israel said targeted “fighters”, was at least the eighth time since July 6 a school has been hit.

The strikes have killed more than 100 people, based on figures given by the health ministry and a hospital source.

With most of the Gaza Strip’s 2.4 million people displaced at least once during the war started by Hamas’s October 7 attack, many have sought refuge in school buildings including the one hit on Saturday.

Further south, in the Khan Yunis city area, around 170 people have been killed “and hundreds wounded” in an Israeli operation since Monday, Gaza’s civil defence agency said.

It issued the toll after the military warned of new operations in the Khan Yunis area, where troops had earlier recovered the bodies of five Israelis killed during the October 7 attack and held in Gaza since. Israel had warned on Monday that its forces would “forcefully operate” in the Khan Yunis area. — AFP

Khamenei grants Pezeshkian presidential powers

TEHRAN: Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei gave on Sunday his official endorsement of Masoud Pezeshkian as the Islamic republic’s ninth president, following snap elections.

In a message read by the director of Khamenei’s office, he said: “I endorse the vote (for) the wise, honest, popular and scholarly Mr Pezeshkian, and I am appointing him as the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran”.

The new president is due to be sworn in before parliament on Tuesday.

The endorsement ceremony was held in the capital Tehran in the presence of senior Iranian officials and foreign diplomats, and broadcast on state TV.

It took place as banks and most government offices were ordered shut nationwide on Sunday to tackle an extreme heatwave.

Following the event, acting president Mohammad Mokhber handed over official responsibilities to 69-year-old Pezeshkian.

Later on Sunday, Pezeshkian appointed Mohammad Reza Aref, 72, as his first vice president, according to an announcement carried by state TV. Aref has represented Tehran in parliament and served as first vice president and communications minister under Iran’s last president Mohammad Khatami, who held office from 1997 to 2005.

Pezeshkian, a heart surgeon and parliament member for the northwestern city of Tabriz since 2008, was Khatami’s health minister. — AFP

Philippines delays recovery of sunken tanker’s oil

MANILA: The Philippines postponed on Sunday the removal of fuel from a tanker that sank in Manila Bay, with fears of an environmental catastrophe growing as leaking oil reached shore for the first time.

The siphoning of the 1.4 million litres of industrial fuel oil from the vessel’s hold was pushed back to Tuesday at the earliest so divers could seal nine leaking valves first, Philippine Coast Guard spokesman Rear Admiral Armando Balilo told reporters.

The tanker sank in bad weather off Manila early on Thursday, killing one crew member and leaving the Philippines facing the possibility of its worst oil spill ever.

“An order was given to seal the valves first before the start of the siphoning operations in order to

prevent further leakages,” Balilo said on Sunday.

“The weather remains bad out there but they have a target to finish this (sealing the valves) by tomorrow.”

Balilo later said the coast guard had found “small patches” of oil on the coast of the municipality of Bulakan, on the bay’s north shore near Manila.

The contaminated shoreline was on the edge of a reclamation project for a future international airport, he said.

Balilo said the coast guard was also investigating a report by the environmental group Greenpeace that a “thick layer of oil” was coating the sea on Sunday about four kilometres off the coast of Hagonoy municipality, near Bulakan.



Coast guard personnel load the skimmers to be used in the oil spill response, at a port in Limay, Bataan. – AFP

The coast guard has warned that it would be an “environmental catastrophe” if the entire cargo were to leak.

It has also called for the

suspension of fishing in Manila Bay to prevent people “eating contaminated fish”.

The Philippines has struggled to contain serious oil spills in the

past. It took months to clean up after a tanker carrying 800,000 litres of industrial fuel oil sank off the central island of Mindoro last year, contaminating its waters and beaches and devastating the fishing and tourism industries.

Another tanker sank off the central island of Guimaras in 2006, spilling tens of thousands of gallons of oil that destroyed a marine reserve, ruined local fishing grounds and covered stretches of coastline in black sludge

The coast guard and a private salvage operator are also working to offload an unspecified amount of diesel from another tanker that sank at the mouth of Manila Bay, a coast guard statement said.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

SHANGHAI

Central China landslide kills 12

A landslide caused by flooding in central China’s Hunan province destroyed a guesthouse and killed 12 people, state media reported.

Official broadcaster CCTV said it had “been initially confirmed that 18 people were buried”. Twelve bodies and six injured survivors had been recovered by Sunday evening, the official Xinhua news agency said. One person had been missing before the 12th body was found.



The landslide was caused by flash flooding on a mountain, which destroyed the guesthouse, according to CCTV. More than 240 emergency personnel had been sent to the scene. — AFP

SYDNEY

Immigration, national security ministers replaced

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese replaced the government ministers responsible for immigration and national security, overhauling the scandal-plagued portfolios. Australia’s Department of Home Affairs has been under pressure since it was forced to release more than 100 immigration detainees — many convicted of assault, kidnapping and murder — in the wake of a landmark court ruling.

Albanese has sought to draw



a line under the politically damaging saga, dumping Home Affairs Minister Clare O’Neil and Immigration Minister Andrew Giles and moving them into new portfolios. — AFP

DHAKA

Bangladesh students vow to resume protests

A Bangladeshi student group has vowed to resume protests that sparked a lethal police crackdown and nationwide unrest unless several of their leaders are released from custody.

Last week’s violence killed at least 205 people in one of the biggest upheavals of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s 15-year tenure.

Army patrols and a nationwide curfew remain in place more than a week after they were imposed, and a police dragnet has scooped up



thousands of protesters including at least half a dozen student leaders.

Members of Students Against Discrimination, whose campaign against civil service job quotas precipitated the unrest. — AFP



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In brief

■ MOSCOW



RUSSIA CLAIMS 2 NEW VILLAGES IN DONETSK REGION

Russia said its forces had captured two villages in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine, as they push towards the city of Pokrovsk, northwest of the regional capital. The Russian defence ministry said troops had taken control of the neighbouring villages of Progres and Yevgenivka, a few kilometres apart. On Saturday, Russia claimed the nearby village of Lozuvatske, one of nearly a dozen it says it has captured in the Donetsk region this month. The Kremlin has recently centred its offensive capabilities on the region, which it claimed to have annexed months after launching its war in Ukraine in February 2022. — AFP

■ ADDIS ABABA



19 PEOPLE KILLED AS BOAT CAPSIZES IN ETHIOPIA

At least 19 people drowned when their boat sank in a river in Ethiopia's northern Amhara region on Saturday, the region's official media said. "Seven people including a child were saved in difficult circumstances," the Amhara Media Corporation (AMC) added, quoting a local administrator. The boat was taking passengers across the Tekeze River, which runs along Ethiopia's border with Eritrea before it crosses into Sudan at the point where the three countries meet. Twenty six people were estimated to have been on board at the time of the accident at around noon on Saturday, officials said. — AFP

■ BENGHAZI



LIBYAN COURT JAILS 12 OFFICIALS OVER DEADLY FLOODS

A Libyan court has jailed 12 officials in connection with the collapse of a series of dams in Derna last year that killed thousands of the city's residents, the Attorney General said. The officials, who were responsible for managing the country's dams, were sentenced to between 9 and 27 years in prison by the Court of Appeal in Derna. Four officials were acquitted. Derna, a coastal city with a population of 125,000, was devastated last September by massive floods caused by Storm Daniel. Thousands were killed and thousands more were missing as a result of the floods that burst dams, swept away buildings and destroyed entire neighbourhoods. — Reuters

■ LOW TANKER OVER WILDFIRE



An air tanker flies low over a wildfire burning on the edge of the Cariboo region city of Williams Lake, British Columbia, Canada. — Reuters

HARRIS CAMPAIGN RAISES \$200 MILLION IN A WEEK

WASHINGTON: US Vice-President Kamala Harris's election campaign said on Sunday it has raised \$200 million and signed up 170,000 new volunteers in the week since she became the Democratic Party's presidential candidate.

President Joe Biden ended his reelection bid on Sunday last week and endorsed Harris for the November 5 vote against Republican former president Donald Trump.

"In the week since we got started, @KamalaHarris has raised \$200 million dollars. 66 per cent of that is from new donors. We've signed up 170,000 new volunteers," Harris' deputy campaign manager, Rob Flaherty, posted on X.

Polls over the past week, including one by Reuters/Ipsos, show Harris and Trump essentially tied, setting the stage for a close-fought campaign over the 100 days left until the election.

Trump's campaign said in early July it had raised \$331 million from April through June and had \$284.9 million in cash on hand.



US Vice-President Kamala Harris salutes upon arrival at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland. — Reuters

Harris has secured support from a majority of delegates to the Democratic National Convention, likely ensuring she will become the party's nominee for president next month.

"So our vice-president is the presumptive nominee. We will have the official vote on August 1," Democratic National Committee Chair Jaime Harrison told MSNBC on Sunday.

Biden withdrew from the race amid questions about his age and health following a faltering debate performance against Trump in late June. Biden pledged to remain in office as president until his term ends on January 20, 2025.

Harris' takeover has re-energised a campaign that had faltered badly amid Democrats' doubts about Biden's chances of defeating Trump or his ability to

continue to govern had he won.

Polls showed that Trump had built a lead over Biden, including in battleground states, after Biden's disastrous debate performance.

A *New York Times*/Siena College national poll published on Thursday found Harris has narrowed what had been a sizable Trump lead while Trump had a two percentage point lead over her in a *Wall Street Journal* poll published on Friday.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll published on July 23 showed a two-point lead for Harris.

Mitch Landrieu, a campaign co-chair, said on MSNBC that Harris "had one of the best weeks that we've seen in politics in the last 50 years".

"This is going to be a very close race," he said.

Vice-President Harris cast herself as the "underdog" in the presidential race and called her Republican opponent Donald Trump "just plain weird," while Trump painted Harris as "evil," "sick" and "unhinged" as the rivals exchanged barbs from afar on Saturday. — Reuters

Meloni signs economic pact in China, seeks new ties

BEIJING: Italy and China on Sunday signed a three-year pact for economic cooperation, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said after a meeting with Chinese Premier Li Qiang.

Meloni said during her state visit in Beijing that she aims to use the document to explore new opportunities for cooperation with China, but the exact contents of the text were not disclosed.

Meloni also spoke of wanting to make trade relations with China "fairer," the Italian news agency ANSA reported.

Last year, Italy's trade deficit with China grew to more than \$43 billion. She also criticised the imbalance in investment at an economic forum in Beijing on Sunday.

"Chinese investment in Italy accounts for about a third of Italian investment in China," she said, adding that she would like to see this gap narrow.

Meloni landed in the Chinese capital on Saturday and is due to meet Chinese leader Xi Jinping for talks on Monday. Relations between Italy and China have recently been marred by disagreements, after Meloni told China that Italy was withdrawing from China's major infrastructure project, the Belt and Road Initiative, with which Beijing seeks to strengthen its economic ties with participating countries.

Italy had been the only country in the Group of Seven major industrial democratic powers to join the geopolitical project, in 2019, in a decision made by the previous government in Rome.

Italy said it was withdrawing as economic hopes associated with membership had not been fulfilled. Meloni, who sees Chinese investment as a way to spur Italy's anaemic economic growth, met Xi and China's top legislator, Zhao Leji, third in the leadership hierarchy. She also attended an Italy-China business forum, to which companies including Italian tyre-maker Pirelli, energy group ENI, defence group Leonardo, and several Italian luxury fashion groups such as Dolce & Gabbana were invited. — dpa

Survey: More than half of people in UK feel poorer than 5 years ago

LONDON: More than half (53 per cent) of people in the United Kingdom feel poorer now than they did five years ago, research has found. Six in 10 (59 per cent) people stated that they would expect the new government to prioritise introducing measures to materially enhance their personal financial well-being.

Two thirds (67 per cent) of households believe that ways to make driving more affordable should be looked at, according to a survey of 6,000 people across the UK for Compare the Market.

Just over two fifths (42 per cent) of drivers feel less able to afford motor insurance

More than half (54 per cent) of people surveyed believe reductions in mortgage costs should be a priority

compared with five years ago.

In order to cover motor insurance costs, some people said they have cut back on holidays (27 per cent), eating out (25 per cent) and groceries (18 per cent).

The research was carried out by Censuswide in March — before the general election took place.

Despite recent dips in energy prices, six in 10 (61 per cent) people surveyed did

not feel confident that energy bills would be lower over the next year.

More than half (54 per cent) of people surveyed believe reductions in mortgage costs should be a priority.

Guy Anker, director at Compare the Market, said: "There's no doubt that the cost of living over the last few years has been incredibly tough for so many households around the UK, with over half feeling poorer today than they did five years ago.

"While it is recognised that events beyond any government's control have significantly added to the

difficulty in supporting households financially, it is nonetheless clear from our research that people want to see the new government actively do more to make them feel better off.

"However, while government action can help, we also encourage everyone to take proactive steps to help positively manage their finances."

Mr Anker added: "Comparing products before purchase or renewal and also regularly setting out a budget throughout the year are two of the best ways to help save money and make the right choices for your specific needs." — dpa

Reading critically is becoming a crucial skill



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

THE Internet is full of supposed facts - The world is flat, climate change is not real, aliens are taking over the world and much more.

Most of this is passed off in very authentic sounding language and in formats which look very professional and believable.

This makes it very difficult to differentiate between fact and reality but it is very important for everybody to have the ability to do so.

Fake news is often news that is false and misleading, often leading to tragic consequences. There are many examples around the world of people who have been duped into parting with their money or property by people who use convincing messages.

Even students often fall prey to admission agents who supposedly offer admission to prestigious universities without the required credentials — at a cost, of course.

How could people, especially youngsters who have made the Internet their home, protect themselves from such sophisticated fraud? Education is the key.

An article in Bloomsbury, a leading publication house, identifies three important ways in which reading critically could safeguard young adults from succumbing to false narratives.

The first is to recognise that all news comes with a certain bias. It is thus important to dig deeper into the authors, their intentions and their background. One may accept or reject ideas, but it is important to first understand where the writer is coming from.

It is also imperative to realise that extreme and emotional content online often gets the most likes and comments, which in turn gets the necessary revenue for the person posting.

So the content and language is often made to look attractive — but not necessarily true. This is most true today when online platforms are the single source of news, entertainment and scholarship for most youngsters.

The more one reads, the easier it becomes to understand the purpose and strategies used in a text. The text could be just a single post or tweet, but it comes within a context which is important to understand. This is where training and practice comes in handy.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS NEED TO INTRODUCE CRITICAL READING IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND CHILDREN NEED TO BE TRAINED VERY EARLY ON TO READ BY ASKING QUESTIONS AND TALKING ABOUT WHAT THEY HAVE READ

Educational institutions need to introduce critical reading very early in the school curriculum. This is because the Internet is the single source of information today and children need to be trained very early on to read by asking questions and talking about what they have read.

Healthy discussion with children is crucial in making them face the challenges they will face in their future.

Of course, setting the right example is equally important. Parents and family, as well as educationists and the community should all be equally aware and trained in the pitfalls of falling for the wrong kind of news.

Only then will youngsters understand and follow by example.

Asking simple questions like where a news item came from, how reliable the source is, what kind of evidence is backing up the news and could the evidence itself be trusted are all questions that should be automatically asked while reading.

Once this becomes a habit, it will be easy to stay aware of the information around us. The result is definitely worth this effort.

Spacecraft to swing by Earth, Moon on path to Jupiter

JULIETTE COLLEN

A spacecraft launched last year will slingshot back around Earth and the Moon next month in a high-stakes, world-first manoeuvre as it pinballs its way through the Solar System to Jupiter.

The European Space Agency’s Juice probe blasted off in April 2023 on a mission to discover whether Jupiter’s icy moons Ganymede, Callisto, and Europa are capable of hosting extra-terrestrial life in their vast, hidden oceans. The uncrewed six-tonne spacecraft is currently 10 million kilometres from Earth. But it will fly back past the Moon then Earth on August 19-20, using their gravity boosts to save fuel on its winding, eight-year odyssey to Jupiter.

Staff at the ESA’s space operations centre in Darmstadt, Germany began preparing for the complicated manoeuvre this week.

Juice is expected to arrive at Jupiter’s system in July 2031. It will take the scenic route. Nasa’s Europa Clipper spacecraft is scheduled to launch this October yet beat Juice to Jupiter’s moons by a year. Juice is taking the long way round in part because the Ariane 5 rocket used to launch the mission was not powerful enough for a straight shot to Jupiter, which is roughly 800 million kilometres away.

Without an enormous rocket, sending Juice straight to Jupiter would require 60 tonnes of onboard propellant — and Juice has just three tonnes, according to the ESA. “The only solution is to use gravitational assists,” Arnaud Boutonnet, the ESA’s head of analysis for the mission, said.

By flying close to planets, spacecrafts can take advantage of their gravitational pull, which can change its course, speed it up or slow it down.

Many other space missions have used planets for gravity boosts, but next month’s Earth-Moon flyby will be a “world first”, the ESA said.

It will be the first “double gravity assist manoeuvre” using boosts from two worlds in succession, the agency said.

Juice will cross 750 kilometres above the Moon on August 19, before shooting past our home planet the following day.

The probe will leave Earth at a speed of “3.3 kilometres a second — instead of three kilometres if we had not added the Moon”, Boutonnet said.

As Juice whizzes past Earth and the Moon, it will use the opportunity to snap photos and test out its many instruments. Down on Earth, some will be taking photos right back. Some lucky amateur sky gazers, armed with telescopes or powerful binoculars, may even be able to spot Juice as it passes over Southeast Asia. — AFP

Trump, Harris hone attack lines as US election 100-day mark arrives



Alex Wroblewski

The writer is an independent photojournalist

Donald Trump labelled Vice President Kamala Harris a “crazy liberal,” while she vowed to prevail over his “wild lies” as both laid out presidential campaign attack lines on Saturday with just 100 days left until election day.

After earlier addressing a bitcoin conference in Tennessee, Trump rallied supporters on Saturday evening in Minnesota, seeking to make the historically Democratic midwest state into a battleground.

“This November, the American people are going to reject Kamala Harris’s crazy liberal extremism in a massive landslide,” the Republican told the crowd assembled in a hockey arena.

He quickly took aim at several positions Harris took during her 2020 Democratic primary campaign, some of which she has since walked back, such as a desire to ban fracking or majorly overhaul the criminal justice system.

Calling Harris a “radical left lunatic,” Trump also hammered her and President Joe Biden’s record on illegal immigration, inflation and crime — all of which saw significant spikes during their term but have returned to historical averages in recent months.

In his 90-minute speech, the populist billionaire also repeated pledges to “have the largest deportation effort” in US history and end taxation of tips, while repeating unfounded allegations that his 2020 election loss had been “rigged.”

Meanwhile, Harris on Saturday held a fundraising event in Massachusetts with celebrity guests including singer-songwriter James Taylor and cellist Yoyo Ma.

“We are the underdogs in this race, but this is a people-powered campaign,” she told the crowd at the event, which her campaign said would net \$1.4 million.

“Donald Trump has been resorting to some wild lies about my record. And some of what he and his running mate are saying, well, it’s just plain weird,” she said.

The Harris campaign has adopted “weird” as a new catch-all for



describing Trump’s aggressive rhetoric.

His attacks, repeated on Saturday, include allegations that Harris wants to legalise killing newborn babies — a falsehood stemming from the vice president’s fervent support of abortion rights.

THE HARRIS CAMPAIGN HAS ADOPTED ‘WEIRD’ AS A NEW CATCH-ALL FOR DESCRIBING TRUMP’S AGGRESSIVE RHETORIC

Harris has made her advocacy on the issue central to her campaign against Trump, whose three conservative nominees to the Supreme Court helped overturn the national right to the procedure in 2022.

Trump on Saturday thanked all six conservative justices by name “for the wisdom and courage they showed on this long-term, very contentious issue.”

Harris, a former California prosecutor, also challenged Trump to a debate, after his campaign said this week he would not agree to keeping a September 10 televised face-off previously scheduled with Biden.

“I hope he reconsiders because we have a lot to talk about,” she said.

Trump, 78, is now the oldest major-party nominee in history and is scrambling to reorient an election against someone two decades his junior, having expected to face an

81-year-old incumbent Biden beset by concerns over infirmity.

On Saturday, he made his pitch to the cryptocurrency industry, one he previously called a “scam.”

Saying China or others could seize the reins on the fast-growing field, Trump’s appeal has been welcomed by crypto enthusiasts who feel they have been treated harshly by the Biden administration.

“If crypto is going to define the future, I want (it) to be mined, minted and made in the USA,” he said to cheers, calling for the United States to be “the crypto capital of the planet.”

Trump on Saturday also vowed a return to outdoor rallies two weeks after being wounded in an attempted assassination at a campaign event in Pennsylvania.

He has made the shooting a key part of his campaign pitch, telling supporters he “took a bullet for democracy.”

Harris, seeking to become the first female president in US history, is tasked with rapidly assembling a campaign against an opponent who has been in near permanent re-election mode since he became president in 2016.

Her late-starting White House bid has enjoyed early momentum. Polls that had shown Biden steadily slipping against Trump now show Harris in a practical tie.

She’s garnered support from Democratic heavyweights, including Biden himself and most recently Barack and Michelle Obama. — AFP

Enjoy recreation and staycation

It is the holiday season of course... and all are trying every possibility to beat the heat and enjoy summer break. This is the peak time for people to have a long refreshing break with family. A short break would always be needed to refresh our memories, recharge our body and stimulate our spirits. Though we are almost halfway to bid farewell to the holiday season.

As summer is always associated with tourism and travel, people's plans differ targeting different destinations all around the world where they can have good time and great moments with family, friends and loved ones. Generally, tourism and travelling or even touring around the country is a good practice that many people are experiencing nowadays. Perhaps, it is becoming a very common phenomenon and another way of promoting tourism indeed.

A very common observation is that many people prefer to spend their holiday overseas for a change! Although this could be a burdening expense for families, travelling during summer has become a necessity that should not be missed for them.

They prefer to be out of town to explore new cultures, places and traditions of other nations as well as meeting other people. Probably, some might wonder why those people do not spend their holiday and money in their home country instead!

If truth to be told, it all depends on finding and enjoying what really entertains people and attracts their interests. However, if all that is not found at the homeland, then what and where would those people spend their money and time?! Other than sightseeing destinations and historical landmarks, there is nothing else that can entice people's interest. As sometimes, unfortunately, some of those tourist attractions are not well-maintained and prepared to attract tourists and visitors as they should be.

Although Oman is very rich with unique historical tourist destinations and natural attractions, some of which



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AS SALALAH IS BECOMING A WORLDWIDE TOURIST DESTINATION DURING SUMMER, IT SHOULD BRING A REMARKABLY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE TO VISITORS

are one of a kind in the world. Yet, they are not given much attention and not much investment is spent to develop these destinations. Likewise, it is hardly to see new attractions developed or added to these areas.

What is required to make these places key tourist destinations is a little bit of thinking out of the box. Sometimes, only small ideas could change a place and make it a touristic hub not only for locals, but for others from outside the country too. When visiting a place, people always seek facilities and best opportunities for recreation and staycation.

As Salalah is becoming a trend and a worldwide tourist destination for hundreds of thousands of people during summer, it should bring a remarkably different experience to visitors. However, it is witnessing a slight improvement every year with almost same tourist attractions. Besides, there are many other attractive places which lack basic infrastructure facilities, which could make it a better attraction.

There is no doubt that many tourist attractions and landmarks in the Sultanate of Oman could be international destinations of choice for many people. This would have been guaranteed if those places had been developed to world-class and globally competitive standards. One just wonders what are the challenge that are coming in the development of some tourist landmarks and destinations in the country!

Is it that complicated and challenging mission to put more investments in tourism sector?! Perhaps the private sector could support in putting more efforts and investments if it is given an opportunity. Why not allow some specialised local or international corporates to invest on tourism, and they might come up with some worthy projects. Possibly they could bring more investments, tourists and business opportunities to the country. Local businessmen could also be given a chance to promote domestic tourism.

A TOWER-HEADED FAN



A spectator wears a hat with the model of Eiffel Tower during Paris 2024 Olympics Basketball Women's Group Phase (Group A) match between Spain vs China in Lille, Pierre Mauroy Stadium, Villeneuve-d'Ascq, France, on Saturday. – AFP

How the G20 could help eliminate hunger

The G20 is an unlikely champion of social justice. *Financial Times* journalist Alan Beattie, underscoring the group's lack of clear direction, once likened it to a "pantomime horse manned by a troupe of clowns." But Brazil's presidency offers an opportunity to change this perception.

With Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at the helm, the G20 is poised to become the launchpad for a landmark initiative to tackle hunger, poverty and extreme inequality. The Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty, which will be launched in November, aims to turn the tide in what has so far been a losing battle to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Partly modelled on Brazil's own "zero-hunger" campaign, perhaps the biggest human development success story of the twenty-first century, the Alliance aims to mobilise the financing and leadership needed to support the achievement of the SDGs. More than 100 countries have signalled their intention to join. But will it make a difference?

Founded in 1999, the G20 was conceived as a forum for industrialised and developing countries to discuss and coordinate policies to ensure financial stability, bridging the Global North-South divide. The grouping has plenty of political and economic muscle: its members account for more



Kevin Watkins

The writer is a former CEO of Save the Children UK, is a visiting professor at the Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa at the London School of Economics

PARTLY MODELLED ON BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT LUIZ INACIO LULA DA SILVA'S "ZERO-HUNGER" CAMPAIGN, THE INITIATIVE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO REVITALISE THE G20 AND PUT THE WORLD BACK ON TRACK TO ACHIEVE THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS BY 2030

than 80 per cent of the world's economic output and two-thirds of its population. What has been missing is a sense of strategic direction and shared purpose. The group reached the zenith of its influence in 2009, when then-UK prime minister Gordon Brown used its leaders' summit to broker a massive financial deal that staved off a global recession. Since then, it has steadily slid into irrelevance.

The G20's ever-expanding agenda is part of the problem. Beyond finance and banking, the group's dialogue now spans everything from artificial intelligence to cryptocurrencies, the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, climate change, and the SDGs. Yet it is hard to identify a single area in which the G20 has made a tangible difference. Its preferred currency is not actionable plans backed by political leadership, but anodyne communiqués that paper over political differences.

Brazil is now challenging this inertia. Even before assuming the G20 presidency, Lula announced the creation of a task force to develop innovative financing mechanisms through which the group could support underfunded national poverty-reduction programmes. Adroitly led by Brazilian officials, the resulting dialogue has spawned the Alliance.

Few countries are better equipped to lead a concerted drive to combat hunger than Brazil. During his first presidency from 2003 to 2010, Lula launched a massive campaign to eradicate poverty and hunger in Brazil, which included the Bolsa Familia cash-transfer programme, policies to support smallholder agriculture, a higher minimum wage and investment in basic healthcare. A national school programme provided more than 40 million children with nutritious meals. Critically, the National Council for Food Security provided coordinated leadership, cutting across ministerial silos and facilitating public participation. Over the decade following the launch of the "zero-hunger"

campaign, economic growth and redistributive government policies enabled nearly 30 million Brazilians to escape poverty. As the number of undernourished Brazilians fell from 19 million to three million, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN removed Brazil from its "world hunger map." Unfortunately, the gains were short-lived. Hunger and poverty increased dramatically as Jair Bolsonaro's right-wing administration cut social programmes. But the pendulum has now swung in the other direction. Shortly after taking office again in January 2023, Lula's new government launched its Brazil Without Hunger initiative, an ambitious effort to eradicate severe food insecurity within four

years. A similar level of ambition is now needed to achieve the SDGs. If current trends continue, around 600 million people will live in extreme poverty by the end of the decade — more than double the UN's target. Progress towards the eradication of hunger has gone into reverse. UN Secretary-General António Guterres has warned that without urgent action, the SDG agenda "will become an epitaph for a world that might have been." The G20's Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty could avert this outcome. In a recent report to the G20 presidency that I co-authored with Kathryn Nwajiaku-Dahou and Hetty Kovach, we outline strategies that could help replicate Lula's success in Brazil on a global scale. As a first step, the G20 could throw its weight behind efforts to increase international development financing for reducing hunger and poverty. We estimate current financing at just \$75 billion annually. Instead of endlessly debating the SDGs, the G20 could put in place reforms, recommended by its own special expert group, that would boost concessional lending by \$180 billion by using the multilateral development bank system more effectively.

@Project Syndicate, 2024



Few countries are better equipped to lead a concerted drive to combat hunger than Brazil.

sport

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OMAN TO TAKE ON SAUDI ARABIA IN GULF BASKETBALL OPENING

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 28

The Oman Under-18 National Youth Basketball Team kicks off its participation in the Gulf U18 Youth Championship today, with a match against the Saudi Arabia team. The tournament hosted by Kuwait from July 29 to August 3 at Kuwait Basketball Federation Hall in Sheikh Saad Abdullah Sports Complex.

The tournament will be played in a round-robin format, with the top two teams qualifying for the Asian Cup scheduled for September in Jordan.

Oman team held the final training session on Sunday at the tournament venue under the guidance of coach Zahir al Ayashi and his assistant Saif al Tobi, with the full participation of the national youth team members.

The preparation plan included a closed camp at the Nizwa Sports Complex, which was held from June 22 to July 20 with the attendance of all called players.

The camp included friendly matches during which the coaching staff was able to assess the players' performance and correct mistakes. Subsequently, an external camp was held in Kuwait to finalise preparations for the tournament.

The national team's delegation headed by Dr Ali bin Salam al Yaari, Vice



President of the Oman Basketball Federation, includes Muhammad bin Nasser al Hasani, Vice President of the Gulf Coordination Committee and Chairman of the tournament's technical committee.

Oman national team consists

of 12 players: Qasi al Amri, Qaisar al Balushi, Mishaal Qafqaf, Mahab al Hambasi, Akram al Rashidi, Mazin al Awaisi, Mohammad al Raisi, Al Walid al Maawali, Azad al Bahlawi, Azzan al Ajmi, Abdulrahman al Maamri, and Ahmed al Balushi.

Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of the Oman Basketball Association (OBA), said, "The Kuwait camp comes as part of the plan adopted by the technical staff to complete the team's readiness for the Gulf Youth Under-18 Championship. The association is keen to

ensure the team's participation in the championship, and the Kuwait camp is an incentive for the players and the staff to bring the team to the level that enables it to compete in the championship. We strive to achieve better results than previous participation".

River Plate soccer coach steps down

BUENOS AIRES: Martin Demichelis will step down as coach of River Plate after a year and a half in the position due to a series of poor results, the popular Argentine soccer club said on Saturday.

"As a result of a decision taken in agreement with the club's top authorities, Martin Demichelis has left his position as coach of the professional squad," Club Atletico River Plate said on social media platform X.

The club is one of Argentina's two most-popular soccer clubs and Boca Juniors' arch rivals.

The club said Demichelis, 43, will coach River for the last time on Sunday in the home game against Sarmiento de Junin in the country's top league, the Primera Division. Demichelis took over from Marcelo Gallardo in 2022, after Gallardo stepped down after nearly nine years in the role, during which he won the most titles in the club's history. River won three titles during Demichelis' 18 months in the role, in which the team played 86 games. In the current championship, River has won just one of five matches.

— Reuters



Martin Demichelis coach of River Plate

Al Harthy to start Nurburgring race from p13

NURBURGRING: Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Endurance Cup team OQ by Oman Racing will begin this afternoon's three-hour race at the Nurburgring in Germany from 13th in the Bronze class, after a tricky qualifying period for round three of the season earlier.

With an average best lap time of 1m56.382 seconds across this morning's three qualification runs, the No 30 BMW M4 GT3 of Ahmad al Harthy, Sam De Haan and Jens Klingmann has a big challenge in store with today's encounter but all three drivers are confident of an improved race.

Track time at the Nurburgring this week began with a brace of tests on Friday, July 26, with the OQ by Oman Racing entry 10th in the Bronze class during the rain-hit morning run and then seventh fastest in the dry afternoon period. The first 'official' practice session followed later in the day with the exclusive Bronze practice, where the No 30 car was less than 0.2 seconds shy of the top 10.

Following an official free practice on Saturday, July 27, the final opportunity to work on the car's set-up for both qualifying and the race came with pre-qualifying, which was actually another wet session. Al Harthy, De Haan and Klingmann ended



the period in the Bronze top 10 in the OQ, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel and BMW Oman supported entry.

Final qualifying this morning, Sunday, July 28, began with Klingmann taking the first of the three 15-minute sessions, on a partially damp track. After waiting until midway through before leaving pitlane, knowing the grip of the circuit would improve with a number of cars already circulating, he ended sixth fastest in Bronze with a time of 1m56.711 seconds.

For session two immediately after, Al Harthy strapped into the BM4 M4 and the vast majority of drivers waited in the pits again until close to the halfway point. Posting a time of 1m56.401 seconds on his first flying lap to be in the class top six, the session was red flagged in the final



minute and the session didn't resume — so Al Harthy had to settle for 11th in Bronze with his original lap.

De Haan took the third session, the start of which was delayed by half an hour due to barrier repairs from the red flag incident, and followed the same format of waiting in the pits for the first half of the period. Setting a time of 1m56.034 seconds on his first flyer, this was ultimately his best which placed De Haan 15th in class, but the team 13th in Bronze on the average best of the three sessions.

AHMAD AL HARTHY: "It was a very tricky session with a very damp track in Q1. Jens started in the mixed conditions, sector one was damp, everywhere else was dry, and it was very tough for him but

he did a great job. I was really happy with my performance in the car in quali two, and Sam did a good job in quali three as well. It's a long race this afternoon, we have work to do from P13 but I'm confident we have a strong race car and can come through well by the end of the three hours." The three-hour GTWCE Endurance Cup race at the Nurburgring gets underway at 15.00 local time today.

2024 GTWCE Endurance Cup Bronze Class Standings (after Rd2)
1st Jef Machiels / Louis Machiels / Andrea Bertolini, 57pts
2nd Jonathan Hui / Chris Froggatt / Eddie Cheever, 43pts
3rd Tommaso Mosca, 39pts
4th Alexey Nesov / Dylan Pereira / Max Hofer / Andrey Mukovoz, 38pts
5th Kobe Pauwels / Job Van Uitert / John De Wilde, 34pts
14th Ahmad al Harthy / Sam De Haan / Jens Klingmann, 9pts

Spurs sign South Korean teenager Yang from Gangwon



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur have signed South Korean winger Yang Min-Hyeok from K League 1 side Gangwon FC on a six-year deal, with the 18-year-old set to join in January, the Premier League club said on Sunday.

Having represented South Korea at Under-17 level, Yang scored eight goals and provided four assists in 25 appearances for Gangwon.

Spurs did not disclose the financial details of the deal. Yang is Tottenham's second signing of the close season following highly-rated 18-year-old Archie Gray from Leeds United. Yang will join countryman Son Heung-min, who captains Spurs and South Korea, at the North London club.

Tottenham begin their Premier League campaign at promoted Leicester City on August 19. — Reuters

JAPAN'S MIXED DOUBLES TEAM STUNNED, LUXEMBOURG VETERAN NI ADVANCES

Paris: Japan's world number two table tennis mixed doubles team, Hina Hayata and Tomokazu Harimoto, were upset by North Korea's Ri Jong Sik and Kim Kum Yong 4-1 in the first round at the Paris Olympics, losing the chance to retain the country's gold medal.

The 49-minute match at the South Paris Arena ended in a shocking defeat for the Japanese pair, who were considered top contenders for the title and challengers to the Chinese team.

"They are far trickier opponents than many others. We saw them previously at some other events and they performed far better today compared to that," Harimoto said of the North Koreans who will face Sweden in the quarter-finals.

China's top-ranked mixed doubles team, Wang Chuqin and Sun Yingsha, easily advanced with a 4-0 victory over Egypt, setting the stage for what they hope will be a gold medal sweep. They next face Taiwan in the last eight.

Luxembourg's Ni Xialian, 61, the oldest athlete to compete in table tennis, beat Turkiye's Sibel Altinkaya in the round of 64, continuing a record-breaking journey in her sixth Olympics. French fans, cheering loudly for everyone but especially their

home favourites, had a mixed day. Despite Alexis Lebrun and Yuan Jia Nan's efforts, they lost 4-2 to the higher-ranked Taiwan team of Chen Szu-Yu and Lin Yun-Ju in the mixed doubles.

But home advantage might have helped 19-year-old Frenchwoman Prithika Pavade on Saturday as she returned to her second Olympics and advanced to the round of 32 in the women's singles by beating Iranian Neda Shahsavari 4-1.

The North Korean team have made fewer international appearances over the past three years compared to other players, leaving them as something of a mystery to their rivals.

Their tightly contested match with Japan saw the North Korea pair gaining momentum from the onset and maintaining a high level of play throughout the second half.

Despite the setback, Hayata and Harimoto will continue to compete in more events at the Paris Games.

"Anything could happen. I hope to play better in the singles and team events," Harimoto added.

Their elimination is a blow to Japan's medal hopes and a boost for their rivals, including the dominant Chinese team.

—Reuters



Tomokazu Harimoto and Hina Hayata (L) in action. — Reuters

Xie makes golden debut, Korean 1-2 in women's pistol

CHATEAURoux, France: Xie Yu of China struck gold in a dream Olympic debut in the men's 10 metre air pistol and Oh Ye-jin led a South Korean 1-2 in the women's event on Sunday.

After China won the 10 metre air rifle mixed team event on Saturday, Xie (240.9) mined another gold from the Chateauroux Shooting Centre, beating Italian Federico Nilo Maldini (240) who took the silver medal.

Paolo Monna (218.6) claimed bronze with clear daylight between the top three and rest

of the field.

"If I hadn't won, this may have been my biggest regret," Xie told reporters.

"It is very difficult to be selected for China for the Olympics, so to be able to stand here today, on this higher stage, is very significant for me."

Xie carried a wafer-thin cushion of 0.4 going into the final shot after Maldini had reduced the gap in the elimination section.

The Italian lost his momentum at the last minute, however, and stood gazing at the floor after

signing off with a modest 9.5.

Xie scored 10 to seal the gold and flashed a shy smile as his teammates in bright red-and-white erupted in the stands.

"We both made some silly mistakes but we have no regrets whatsoever," Maldini said, referring to compatriot Monna.

"I had good vibes since the beginning of the final," Monna said. "It's certainly emotional and a very rare one because we are friends."

"This is the first time we're on the podium together and it is the most important one."

Similar camaraderie prevailed in the women's competition where a 19-year-old Oh beat roommate Kim Ye-ji to the gold and Manu Bhaker won India's first medal in the Paris Games.

Oh tallied 243.2 to set an Olympic record and Kim 241.3.

"I still cannot believe I'm wearing a gold medal on my neck right now, but maybe if time goes by, I will believe I have a gold medal," said Oh, who burst into tears after winning the gold.

"This medal is very heavy, by the way."

Kim said she had no issues finishing behind a shooter she guided early in her career.

"She's like my sister...When she won the gold, I was extra happy," she said.

Bhaker (221.7) settled for the bronze but became the first Indian woman shooter to win an Olympic medal.

"I have three more events to go and I hope India finishes strong in this Olympics and win as many medals as possible not just in shooting but also in other sports," she told reporters.

— Reuters

Australia's De Minaur withdraws from singles



PARIS: Australia's Alex de Minaur has withdrawn from the men's singles at the Paris Olympics as he continues to recover from a hip injury that cut short his Wimbledon campaign, the world number six said on Sunday.

De Minaur pulled out of his Wimbledon quarter-final against Novak Djokovic this month after sustaining a cartilage tear in his hip in the fourth round.

"Tried my best to be ready for the singles but body needs a bit more time," he said on Instagram.

The 25-year-old, who was set to play Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff on Sunday, will be replaced by Portugal's 81st-ranked Francisco Cabral.

De Minaur will take part in the doubles alongside Alexei Popyrin. They will meet fourth-seeded US pair Austin Krajicek and Rajeev Ram. — Reuters



(L-R) Silver Yeji Kim, gold Ye Jin Oh, and bronze Manu Bhaker. — Reuters



Xie Yu of China during men's 10 metre air pistol

Khatri set for dream debut in men's Trap event

ADIL AL BALUSHI
PARIS, JULY 28

Oman's shooter Said al Khatri commences Oman's sporting delegation participation at the 33rd edition of summer Olympic Games Paris 2024 today. The representative of Oman national shooting team will take place in the preliminary qualification day one of Men's Trap event at Châteauroux Shooting Center on Monday.

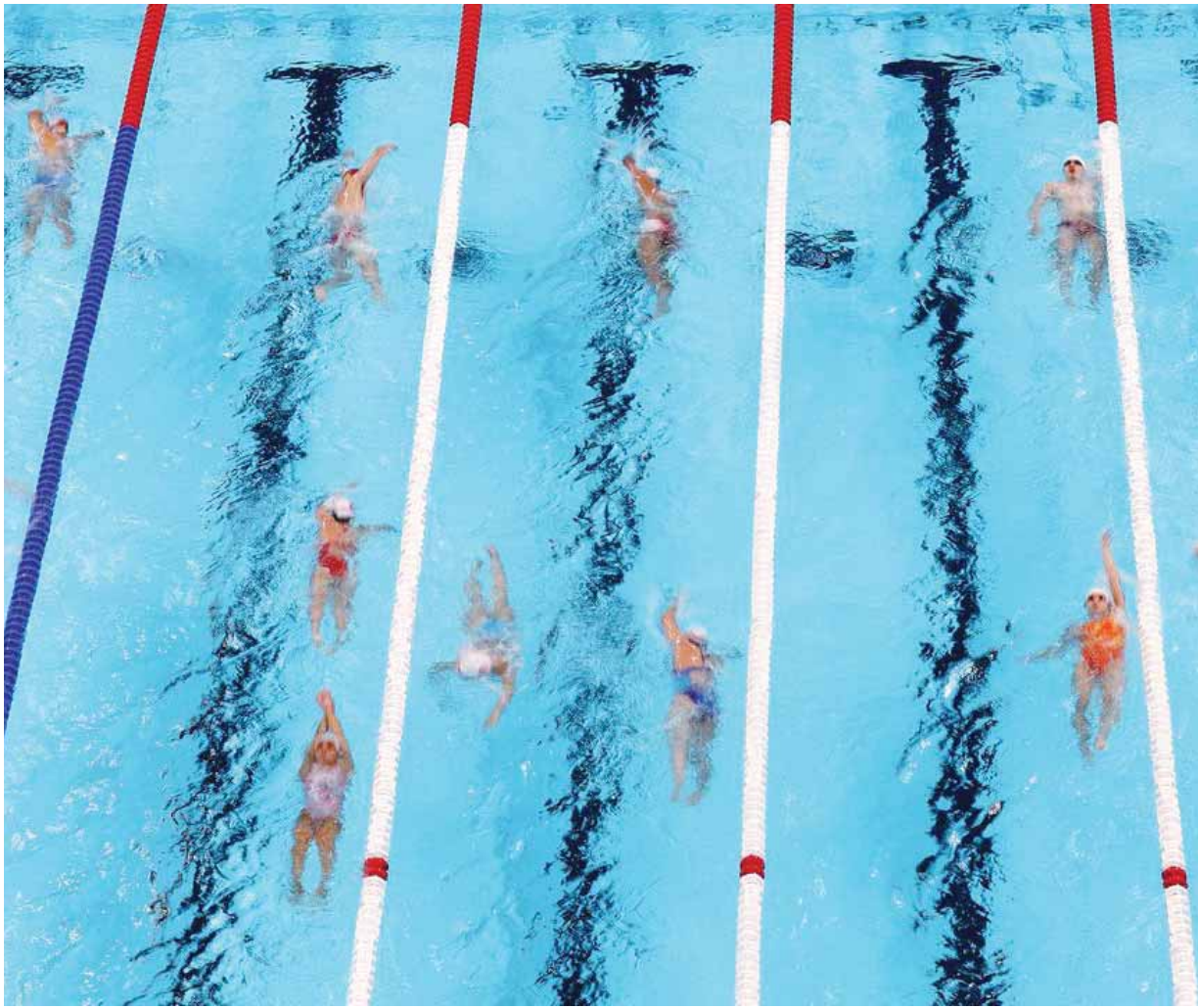
Al Khatri will compete in group six beside some world ranking shooters across the world including Chinese shooter Qi Ying, Brol Carenas Jean from Guam, Shooter Guerrero Sebastian from France, Fernandez Alberto from Spain and Lorenzo Eduardo from Dominican Republic.

The qualifying rounds will begin today and will run for two days. At the end of the preliminaries on Tuesday, six shooters will advance to finals.

On the first day, the shooters will begin with 75 targets in the initial round and it will be divided into three rounds of 25 targets each. On the second day on Tuesday, 50 targets will be in total and will be divided into two rounds of 25 targets each. The top six shooters will advance to the finals where the winners of the gold, silver, and bronze medalists will be determined.

Al Khatri completed his official training session on Sunday under the watchful eye of Italian coach Luca Marini. He completed some positive training sessions in the couple days ago ahead of the competitions begin at the Châteauroux Shooting Center. He arrived earlier in France to train alongside other international shooters.

Additionally, he participated in an external training camp in Italy for several days prior the Olympics start. This overseas



camp combined with the short training period in Châteauroux assist the Omani shooter to get more confidence, adapt to the competition environment and become familiar with the weapons and varying weather conditions at the venue. This will raise his chances of achieving good scores in the qualifying rounds.

The head coach of shooting team, Luca Marini, said that the qualifying competitions will feature attendance of many shooters from various countries. "It is expected to be tough competition as everyone aims to secure a spot in the next stage.

Al Khatri will eye from his first Olympic debut to break personal records beside improving his world ranking and earn additional points to enhance his international and regional presence in various

championships. Attending in Olympic is a significant opportunity for the shooter to gain valuable technical skills and experience.

It is the largest event that brings together shooters from around the world to compete for medals on world-class ranges meeting international standards.

This participation will provide Al Khatri with more responsibility and confidence to compete in upcoming regional, continental and international championships," he added.

TECHNICAL LEADERS MEETING FOR ATHLETICS

The technical meeting for athletics competitions take place tomorrow. The national athletics coach, Fahad bin Khalfan al Mashaykhi, will attend the meeting representing

Oman's national athletics team as the athletes Ali al Balushi and Mazoon al Alawi will participate in the 100 metre event.

The meeting is expected to cover various technical details about the athletics competitions including the schedules for athletes' training and official training details.

Also, the announcement of all final lists for the different competitions, including the 100-metre race heats.

The athletes will be divided into several heats to compete in the preliminary rounds followed by progression to the final stages of the competition.

Female runner Mazoon al Alawi, who is making her third appearance in Olympics, will participate in the preliminary rounds while runner youngster athlete Ali al Balushi, who is



making his Olympics debut, will compete in the second stage after the preliminary rounds as he already secured his place in the Olympics through his ranking in the 100 metre race as recognised by the World Athletics.

SWIMMER ISSA GEARS UP

Swimmer Issa al Adawi, who is making his second attendance in Olympics after Tokyo Olympics in 2020, is under way in his intensive daily training at La Defense Arena in Paris.

Issa will compete on Tuesday in the 100 metre freestyle event and the competition will begin at 1:15 pm (Oman time).

The Omani swimmer will eye to deliver a positive performance in his second Olympic appearance and achieve new records.

AL ZUBAIR MEETS SPORTS

DELEGATION

Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), met the members of the sports delegation which is representing Oman at Paris 2024 Olympic Games on Saturday. The Chairman of OOC congratulated all the athletes on their qualification and attendance in the most prestigious sporting event in the world.

He urged them to gain the maximum technical benefit from this significant Olympic participation and to achieve the highest possible technical gains. He also encouraged them to double their efforts and deliver high-level performances to honour Oman and raise the country's flag high in this major sporting event.

OOC chairman met Oman's ambassador in Paris

Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of (OOC) and head of Oman's delegation to Paris 2024 Olympics met with Ambassador Ahmed bin Mohammed al Oraimi at the Oman's Embassy headquarter in Paris.

The meeting was attended by members of the official delegation and several officials from the Oman's embassy in France. Al Zubair praised all the facilities and services provided by the Ambassador and the members of the Oman's embassy in Paris over the past months ensuring the successful participation of Oman's delegation in this major Olympic event.

The ambassador expressed his happiness with Oman's participation in Paris 2024 Olympic Games. He delivered his best wishes for the sports delegation with his hopes to achieve advanced results in this significant global sporting event.

Nadal makes majestic return to Roland Garros for Spain

PARIS: Spain's Rafa Nadal made a triumphant return to Roland Garros on Sunday to blast his way into the second round of the Olympic tennis tournament, and set up a blockbuster clash with nemesis Novak Djokovic of Serbia.

That the Nadal-Djokovic clash will not determine gold was the only slip in the Olympic script as the Spaniard found a second wind on a Roland Garros stage on which he has built his legend, to beat Hungarian Marton Fucsovics 6-1 4-6 6-4.

As Nadal fired a forehand winner on his third match point the crowd roared and stood as one to hail the Spaniard who has thrilled them for two decades.

For sure there have been better performances from Nadal on this showcourt, but few more warmly welcomed.

In the women's draw, Chinese sixth seed Qinwen Zheng made a mockery of former French Open

runner-up Sara Errani's clay credentials, pummelling the Italian 6-0 6-0 to advance.

Greece's Maria Sakkari also wasted no time dispatching Danka Kovinic, smashing the Montenegrin 6-0 6-1.

US flagbearer Coco Gauff will light up the evening session on Sunday when she takes on Australian Ajla Tomljanovic, while reigning Olympic champion Alexander Zverev of Germany closes Day Two's play against Spaniard Jaume Munar.

But the day belonged to Nadal as the 2008 Olympic champion kept alive dreams of a golden sunset to his glorious career.

NADAL'S BACKYARD

Such was the atmosphere in Nadal's professional backyard, it seemed not beyond the realms of possibility that even members of Fucsovics's household may have been rooting for the 38-year-old.



Spain's Rafael Nadal in action. – AFP

The years have not diminished Parisians' love for the man who first stormed the French capital 19 years ago, before maintaining an unprecedented stranglehold on Court Phillippe Chatrier for the better part of two decades.

Fourteen of his 22 Grand Slam titles came at Roland Garros during that period as Nadal established himself as the undisputed king of clay.

The long hair and pirate pants are long gone but the slingshot forehand is as potent as ever and the Spaniard wielded it with terrifying efficiency to wrap up the first set before Fucsovics could really settle.

It was bad enough that the Hungarian was fighting a man who had won 112 of his previous 116 matches at Roland Garros, but he was also fighting a nostalgic centre court crowd and, seemingly, destiny.

Some brutal baseline bashing saw Fucsovics haul himself back into the contest as Nadal's range faltered, but the Spaniard broke in the fifth game of the third and final set, before sprinting to the finish.

Earlier, ninth seed Barbora Krejcikova recovered from a slow start to grind her way past Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo 4-6 6-0 7-6(3).

"It feels great because I didn't really play well here (before today)," said the Czech, who had not won a singles match at Roland Garros since 2021.

Men's sixth seed Casper Ruud swept aside Japan's Daniel Taro 7-5 6-1 while another Japanese, Kei Nishikori, was ousted by Britain's up-and-coming Jack Draper 6-1 6-4.

"You're playing for something more than just yourself here," Norwegian Ruud said.

— Reuters





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Transition to low-carbon economy requires \$3 trillion funding



Rich economies have mobilised a record \$116 billion in climate finance for developing countries in 2022.

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that the global transition to a low-carbon economy requires \$3 trillion in new capital annually until 2050, figures that far exceed current annual funding levels.

Yellen stressed that zero-carbon emission targets remain a top priority for US President Joe Biden's administration, and that this will require leadership beyond America's borders.

While attending the G20 finance leaders' meeting in Brazil, she stressed that ignoring the issue of climate change and the loss of nature and biodiversity is not only bad environmental policy, but also economic policy.

Rich economies have mobilised a record \$116 billion in climate finance for developing countries in 2022, with 40 per cent of that funding coming from multilateral development banks.

Yellen confirmed that banks including the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank are setting new targets.

She saw that financing needs are the greatest economic opportunity of the 21st century, and can be used to support more sustainable growth, including in investment-hungry countries. — **ONA**

Archaeological sites boost tourism sector in Al Sharqiyah North

IBRA: Last year, the occupancy rate of hotel rooms in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate ranged between 60 and 90 per cent during the tourist season from October to March.

This high occupancy was observed across 47 tourist facilities, comprising 1,044 hotel rooms distributed throughout the governorate's wilayats.

Mohammed bin Saif al Riyami, Head of the Tourism Development Department at the Department of Heritage and Tourism in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, confirmed that preparations are underway for the upcoming winter tourist season to attract both local and international tourists.

The governorate boasts a variety of accommodations, including 10 hotels, 10 tourist camps, 9 guest houses, 12 green lodges, two rest houses and 4 hotel apartment buildings.

Al Riyami highlighted the governorate's numerous tourist attractions such as Rimal Al Sharqiya and valleys, known for their abundant water, as well as the oases and sulfur springs in the Wilayat of Dima W'attayeen, and the waterfalls of 'Hawar' in the Wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid.

Additionally, tourists can explore ancient mountain trails, castles, forts, popular markets, and archaeological neighbourhoods like the villages of Al Manzafah and Al Qanater in the Wilayat of Ibra, which offer classic car tours.

Al Riyami also noted that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is working to transform some of the governorate's 25 registered archaeological sites into tourist attractions.

These sites reflect the cultural depth and historical richness of the governorate. Various initiatives are being implemented to invest in these sites for tourism



Preparations are underway for the upcoming winter tourist season to attract both local and international tourists.



The MoHT collaborates with other authorities to preserve these archaeological sites and uncover their treasures.

and trade purposes.

Khamis bin Salem al Maskari, Assistant Director of the Department of Heritage and Tourism in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, emphasised key archaeological sites like Al Khashaba, Al Ghareen and Al Salili in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, and Shanna in the Wilayat of Al Qabil.

He added that Al Maysar and Samad are among the oldest sites where archaeological excavations have been carried out, dating back to the third millennium BC through the Iron Age to the

Islamic periods.

Al Maskari explained that the ministry collaborates with other authorities to preserve these archaeological sites and uncover their treasures.

International and local universities are conducting surveys and excavations to discover more about these sites. Regarding preservation steps, Al Maskari detailed the process: post-discovery documentation through scientific reports, publication in the Omani Studies Journal, and the development of warning and alert regulations about the site's ownership by

THE GOVERNORATE BOASTS A VARIETY OF ACCOMMODATIONS, INCLUDING 10 HOTELS, 10 TOURIST CAMPS, 9 GUEST HOUSES, 12 GREEN LODGES, TWO REST HOUSES AND 4 HOTEL APARTMENT BUILDINGS

the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

Measures are also taken to prevent tampering and encroachment, inventory discoveries, maintain and number artefacts, determine their age and historical value, and preserve them in designated places. Some sites even have programmes or applications detailing their content.

Additionally, three-dimensional drawings of sites and their contents are created, and meetings with local communities and officials are held to highlight the importance of these sites.

Exhibitions are organised to introduce the community to the historical value of archaeological sites and the artefacts discovered therein. — **ONA**

Cooling US inflation bolsters September rate cut hopes

WASHINGTON: US prices increased moderately in June as the declining cost of goods tempered a rise in the cost of services, underscoring an improving inflation environment that could position the Federal Reserve to begin cutting interest rates in September.

The report from the Commerce Department on Friday also showed consumer spending slowed a bit last month.

Signs of easing price pressures and a cooling labour market could boost the confidence of Fed officials that inflation is moving towards the US central bank's 2 per cent target. The Fed will hold its next policy meeting on July 30-31.

"The key question now is whether the positive momentum we've seen over the last three months will be disrupted heading into the September meeting," said Olu Sonola, head of US economic research at Fitch Ratings.

"With one eye on recent labour market developments, the Fed is now likely to use the meeting next week to set the stage for a September rate cut."

The personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index nudged up 0.1 per cent last month after being unchanged in May, the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis reported.

The increase in PCE inflation was in line with economists' expectations. Goods prices dropped 0.2 per cent after falling 0.4 per cent in May. Prices for motor vehicles and parts declined 0.6 per cent.

Furnishings and durable household equipment prices dropped for a third straight month, but the cost of other long-lasting manufactured goods rebounded 1.8 per cent.

— **Reuters**



A man arranges produce at Best World Supermarket in the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood of Washington, DC. — **Reuters**

Improvements in Oman Business Platform to enhance business environment

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 28

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has announced the introduction of new improvements and facilitation measures for several services provided to investors and businessmen through the Oman Business Platform.

This initiative is part of the ministry's efforts to simplify, streamline and expedite business transactions by redeveloping procedures and reducing



These improvements aim to simplify business sector services related to commercial activities, saving time and effort for investors and business owners.

necessary requirements.

These improvements aim to simplify business sector services related to commercial activities, saving time and effort for investors and business owners.

This allows them to complete their transactions more quickly and efficiently, while also enhancing the business environment in Oman and attracting more local and foreign investments.

The improvements include services such as commercial registration, updating commercial registry

information, and transferring ownership of the commercial registry.

Additionally, enhancements have been made to licensing applications and the registration of companies under the Foreign Capital Investment Law.

These updates include streamlining procedures and reducing required conditions, which contribute to a better user experience and faster and more effective transaction processing.

Ultimately, this supports the investment environment in Oman and attracts additional

investments.

The ministry confirms its ongoing commitment to assessing and improving the services provided based on investors' feedback and needs, with the aim of providing an integrated and easy experience that supports economic growth and contributes to achieving sustainable development.

It is noteworthy that the number of transactions completed through the Oman Business Platform reached 487,300 during the first half of 2024.



CROWNE PLAZA MUSCAT OCEC
CELEBRATES SUCCESS AT CMO GLOBAL
OMAN ASIA LEADERSHIP AWARDS 2024

MUSCAT: Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC is delighted to announce its remarkable achievements at the prestigious CMO Global Oman Asia Leadership Awards 2024.

In a significant highlight, our General Manager, Manuel Levonian, has been honoured with the title of Oman's Best General Manager. This accolade recognises his exceptional leadership and substantial contributions to the hospitality industry. Additionally, our esteemed Chef Marc Woolf has been awarded Oman's Best Chef Award, celebrating his outstanding culinary expertise and commitment to delivering extraordinary dining experiences to our guests.

These distinguished awards are a testament to the hard work, dedication, and passion of the entire team at Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC. We are committed to providing unparalleled hospitality and exceptional service to all our guests.

We extend our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to our clients and colleagues for their trust and continued support. These accolades motivate us to strive for excellence and set new benchmarks in the hospitality industry.

National Finance recognised as best employer
for cultivating a resilient workforce

MUSCAT: A testament to its dedication to fostering a vibrant work culture where employees can develop their skills and grow both professionally and personally, National Finance, the leading finance company in the Sultanate of Oman was honoured with the prestigious 'Best Employer Brand' award at the Employer Branding Awards — Oman 2024 ceremony, held at Crowne Plaza Muscat.

The award was graciously accepted by Manal al Raisi, Head of Human Resource at National Finance, on behalf of the company, amidst a distinguished gathering of dignitaries and industry luminaries.

The Employer Branding Awards, hosted by Employer Branding Institute in collaboration with the World HRD Congress, celebrate organisations in the country that excel in employee engagement, talent acquisition, and management, consistently providing exceptional growth opportunities for their staff.

At the heart of National Finance's success is its resolute commitment to cultivating a robust workforce of skilled professionals who embody the company's excellence and expertise.

Commenting on the occasion, Tariq Suleiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance, said, "We are deeply honoured to receive the Best Employer Brand award, which recognises our dedication to enhancing the employee



experience at National Finance.

Our focus has always been on empowering our employees, nurturing and developing local talent, and ensuring their contributions are valued and acknowledged. We firmly believe that investing in our people is an investment in a brighter and more prosperous future for the Sultanate of Oman."

Achieving a remarkable Omanisation rate of 91.01%, National Finance has been persistently building a resilient Omani workforce, prioritising training initiatives so as to boost capabilities, improve workflows and elevate customer service standards.

Recognising the importance of

clear career progression pathways, the company offers a variety of skill development opportunities, including workshops, training programmes, and mentorship.

The company also provides sessions on personal advancement and mental health, making a lasting impact on employees.

Furthermore, National Finance is committed to maintaining a healthy work culture, ensuring employees to enjoy a balanced work-life dynamic and have access to resources and support at all times.

This comprehensive approach to employee satisfaction is designed to help National Finance's staff to achieve their full potential.

In cultivating a dynamic workforce, National Finance underscores its commitment to the nation's sustainability agenda, aligning with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Sustainability is a foundational pillar of the company's ethos, extending beyond environmental initiatives to encompass local talent development. By investing in continuous learning and professional advancement, National Finance not only enhances employee competences but also fortifies the national workforce, making sure they are well-prepared to face challenges and drive sustainable socio-economic progress within the country.

Bank Muscat Money Market
Fund registers robust
performance by end of Q2 2024

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat Money Market Fund, Oman's first money market fund, has accomplished a momentous milestone with its assets under management (AUM) crossing RO 155 million mark as on July 2, 2024, recording AUM growth of over 170 % during 2024.

The Fund continues to retain its top position as the largest open-ended mutual fund in Oman.

At the end of Q2 2024, the Fund registered strong performance with net annualised return of 5.35%.

The superior performance and growth in the Fund's AUM are a testimony of the continued patronage of its investors.

The Fund continues to generate attractive returns higher than the typical alternatives available for short to medium term investment with relatively lower risk.

Table 1

Period	Net (Annualized) Returns
1 month	5.35%
3 months	5.30%
6 months	5.25%
12 months	5.13%

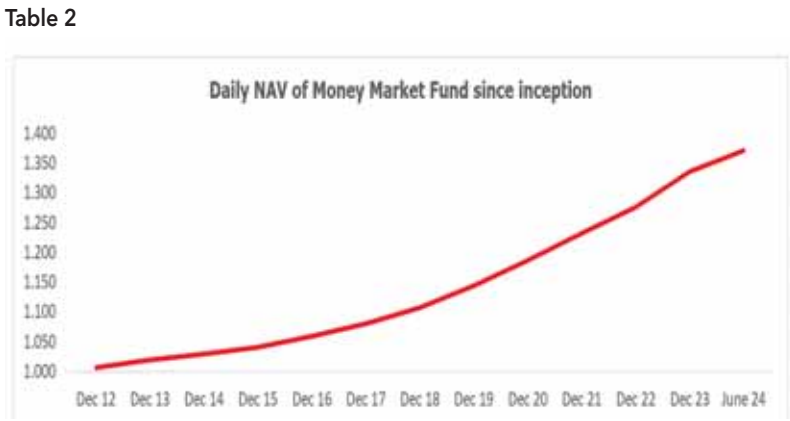
*Returns as on 30th June, 2024

investments quickly and conveniently. This ensures that Bank Muscat Money Market Fund investors have access to their funds as and when they need it.

Further, investors have the flexibility to withdraw their investments, fully or partially, together with the returns and the

Table 2 depicts the steady growth in the Fund's Net Asset Value (NAV) since its inception in June 2012.

Bank Muscat Money Market Fund predominately invests in deposits and fixed-income instruments of leading financial institutions in Oman and the GCC region and its investments



total redemption proceeds are credited back into investors' bank account within two business days from the date of submission of the redemption request.

are primarily held in Omani Rials and US Dollars.

Investors can track the performance of the Fund by referring to the Net Asset Value

(NAV) of the Fund which is published on a daily basis on Bank Muscat and Muscat Stock Exchange websites.

Furthermore, all investors receive a monthly factsheet detailing the Fund's performance.

Subscriptions and redemptions are available through Bank Muscat's Internet Banking and Mobile Banking (IBMB) platforms. Alternatively, physical forms can be downloaded from Bank Muscat's website www.bankmuscat.com.

Furthermore, for corporate investors the Fund provides the added facility of convenient sweep-in and sweep-out from their bank accounts with Bank Muscat, which enables transactions in the Fund (i.e. subscription or redemption), through an email instruction to the Fund's designated team.

Bank Muscat's Asset Management business has a proven track record of successful operations for almost 30 years, and today the business is the largest asset manager in Oman and one of the leading asset managers in the GCC region, with approximately \$3 billion of AUM.

It offers tailored investment solutions across various asset classes including equity, fixed income, real estate and private equity investments.

Ooredoo boosts businesses
with cost-saving Shahry
promotion for B2B customers

MUSCAT: Get more for less! Ooredoo has a special promotion for new, and existing B2B customers who want to transform their operations and save money by choosing one of the telco's value-packed and postpaid Shahry Business Digital plans.

New customers can, for a limited time, get up to four months free subscription for included data, roaming and calls over a contract period of one or two years!

The Shahry Business promotion includes one month free subscription every year for customers who choose Shahry Business Digital Plan 10, 15, 20, 25, and 30.

New customers who prefer the Shahry Business Digital Plan 50 or higher will get two whole months free subscription every year, so they can enjoy free data, calling, and roaming.

All contract periods will be for one or two years.

For existing customers, there is also the option to simply upgrade their current plan to enjoy this offer.

Said al Lawati, Director of Business Marketing & ICT Solutions at Ooredoo, said, "We are excited to be able to bring this great value promotional offer to businesses, as we understand



Said al Lawati
Director of Business Marketing & ICT Solutions at Ooredoo

we need to support small and medium enterprises in Oman in digitalising their operations.

In return, they can continue to create jobs, contribute to their local communities and collectively contribute to driving the digital transformation of the nation."

The time-limited offer on Shahry Business Digital plans runs for three months until October 12, 2024.

Ooredoo offers plans to cater every customer need, starting from just RO 10 per month and all the way up to RO 90 a month.

All plans include endless local data and unlimited closed user group minutes and data which can be used locally, in the GCC and worldwide.

Ooredoo also has an interest free device instalment feature for all business customers opting for Shahry Business Digital plans.



Badr Al Samaa Royal Hospital to be inaugurated today

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 28

Badr Al Samaa Royal Hospital (BRH), the flagship premium hospital of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, is all set to be inaugurated today, Monday July 29, 2024 by Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Organisation, who is also the chief guest of the event, in the presence of Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), who will be the guest of honour, and Dr Muhanna bin Nasser al Musalhi, Director-General of Private Health Institutions, MoH.

Abdul Latheef and Dr P A Mohammed, Managing Directors of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, Moiden Bilal and Firasath Hassan, Executive Directors of the Group, eminent dignitaries from private and government sector, top management of corporates and insurance companies, senior management of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, media personnel and many more will witness this historic feat in the private healthcare sector of the Sultanate of Oman.

Located in Al Ghubra, BRH is all set to deliver quality healthcare in a luxurious and serene healing environment and redefine the way premium healthcare has been offered to the people who require the same, according to the members of the management who were present at the press



Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals officials pose for a photo during the press conference held yesterday.

conference that announced the opening.

Speaking to the media personnel during the press conference, Abdul Latheef, Managing Director of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, shared the vision behind setting up this resource intensive project of the group.

He said, "It is the philosophy of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals to make differentiating strides in the private healthcare sector of the Sultanate of Oman and be a major contributor to the expectations set under the Vision 2040 and take the healthcare sector of Oman to the heights where no one would have to ever travel outside the country for advanced treatment.

"BRH is not just about its luxurious and classy infrastructure, but it is more about the world class technology and exceptional line up of doctors



BRH is all set to deliver quality healthcare in a luxurious, serene healing environment.

being housed in it. It is about the type of the complex procedures and surgeries we are going to do here. It is about the in-country value we are going to create.

"It is about the time and

money we will save for the patients who otherwise have to travel abroad. We are aiming at cutting down 30 per cent of the number of patients travelling abroad for the treatment."

Dr P A Mohammed, Managing Director of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, stated that Badr Al Samaa Royal Hospitals will house 7 centres of excellence in which technology will be at par with global standards and doctors will be the most qualified and experienced ones to ensure that majority of the complex and tertiary medical cases will be addressed within the country itself.

These centres of excellence will be Gastrointestinal Digestive Health, Surgical and Advanced Endoscopy, Minimal Access Surgery, Urology, Uro-Oncology and Andrology, Orthopaedics, Joint Replacements and Spine Surgeries, Mother and Child, and Emergency and Critical Care.

BRH will house many other specialities as-well.

He said, "We are proud to have many senior Omani consultants and prominent visiting doctors from India and many other countries to be a part of the clinical team of BRH."

On this occasion, speaking to the media, Moiden Bilal, Executive Director of Badr Al Samaa Royal Hospitals, said, "BRH is completed with a record time of one year by the exemplary efforts of the team working day-in and day-out and finally this state-of-the art premium hospital, ready in every sense, is all set to make a difference and be of much help to the deserving patients of the Sultanate of Oman."

He further added, "Owing to the vision of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, we are committed to bridge every gap in the private healthcare sector and

make every technology, facility and doctors available within Oman and be a major contributor to the growth of the country's healthcare sector."

Firasath Hassan, Executive Director of Badr Al Samaa Royal Hospitals, told media that BRH is inspired by 22 years of legacy of its parent group Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals.

"To make sure the patients get the best quality treatment, BRH has established policies and protocols of the patient care and quality inspired by the top healthcare accreditation bodies of the world, the Joint Commission International and the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS)."

He further added, "Along with line-up of the highly qualified and renowned doctors, unparalleled luxurious ambiance BRH is committed at ensuring fast and personalised services to give a feeling of comfort and relaxation to our patients."

Recently a brand identity unveiling ceremony of Badr Al Samaa Royal Hospital (BRH) was held under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Organisation.

The philosophy of BRHs logo stands on three elements, Care, Smile and Hope. Caring is at the heart of BRHs mission. It symbolises the compassionate and dedicated care provided to every patient. Smile reflects happy patients and their well-being, trust and satisfaction. Hope fuels patient journeys, providing strength, resilience and optimism.

US firm acquires drilling services contractor KCA Deutag for \$1.97 bn

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, JULY 28

Prominent US based drilling services provider Helmerich & Payne (H&P) has confirmed that it has acquired leading drilling services contractor KCA Deutag International Limited in a deal worth \$1.9725 billion.

The move will position Oklahoma-based H&P as one of the biggest onshore drilling operators globally, particularly in the Middle East, where KCA Deutag has enjoyed a substantive presence over the last several decades.

In the Sultanate of Oman, KCA Deutag has been operating for well over 60 years, providing drilling related services to a number of leading oil and gas producers, notably Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the country's biggest oil and gas company.

KCA Deutag has also invested in a local rig manufacturing and servicing entity as part of its contribution to in-country value (ICV) development in the domestic drilling services space.

Under the terms of the agreement, H&P will acquire Scotland-headquartered KCA Deutag International Limited for \$1.9725 billion in cash.



KCA Deutag has a well-established presence in the Sultanate of Oman.

The transaction is expected to close prior to calendar 2024 year end, subject to customary closing conditions and regulatory approvals, the two companies announced in a statement.

Established in 1920, H&P is a key player in the design, fabrication and operation of high-performance drilling rigs in conventional and unconventional plays around the world. H&P also develops and implements advanced automation, directional drilling and survey management technologies.

KCA Deutag, with over 135 years of experience, operates a global network spanning 26 countries. The company currently owns or operates a total of 167 drilling

rigs across the Middle East, Europe, Africa, Caspian Sea, Latina America and Canada, overseen by a workforce of around 11,000 people globally.

As the result of the acquisition, H&P is set to ramp up its presence in the Middle East in particular, which accounts for around 70 per cent of KCA Deutag's operating EBITDA in a calendar year.

H&P's rig count in the Middle East will soar from 11 to 88 presently, 71 of which are in Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait. "KCA Deutag's assets and operations will add resilient revenues, providing greater earnings visibility and cash flow generation.

"As a result, we expect to

generate sizeable incremental cash flows and are confident this transaction will deliver near- and long-term growth and value creation for H&P shareholders," said John Lindsay, President and CEO of H&P.

"Once completed, this transaction is expected to deliver multiple growth opportunities for our people and customers while facilitating value realisation for our investors," CEO of KCA Deutag, Joseph Elkhoury, added.

In Oman, KCA Deutag is currently executing drilling services contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

In 2022, the company said it had secured a 10-year contract from PDO for the provision of drilling services with four new locally-built, highly automated rigs.

The ten-year contract, valued at \$550 million, came with options to extend for a further two years. The high-tech rigs, constructed by Oman-based International Drilling Technology Co (IDTEC), majority owned by the KCA Deutag Group, are the first of their kind to be built locally. Since that announcement, KCA Deutag has won several other drilling services contracts in Oman.

Amouage introduces Wadi Dawkah frankincense oil at Harrods



Amouage created the Wadi Dawkah Omani Frankincense Essential Oil in collaboration with the exclusive ingredients partner dsm-firmenich.

MUSCAT: The Wadi Dawkah Omani Frankincense Essential Oil was initially revealed by Amouage, the Omani High Perfumery House, exclusively to industry professionals attending the World Perfumery Congress held in Geneva, Switzerland.

Now, the House unveiled the natural ingredient to a different and broader audience as part of Harrods' fragrance week for members of the press and key partners.

The historic yet visionary London luxury department store, known for its grandeur and home to the Salon de Parfums, always had the philosophy to curate an extensive and exclusive assortment of products from around the world.

It was the first time that Amouage provided a unique opportunity to experience the pure, raw natural ingredient: The Wadi Dawkah Omani Frankincense Essential Oil.

Offering a rare experience usually exclusive to perfume professionals, the audience was exposed to something unique in its purest form before it will be used by perfumers in their future and fine creations.

Amouage, known for creating some of the finest fragrances around the world, created the Wadi Dawkah Omani Frankincense Essential Oil in collaboration with the exclusive ingredients partner dsm-firmenich. The essential oil has a unique

olfactory profile that intends to inspire contemporary creations in fine perfumery, blending tradition and innovation and building bridges between heritage and posterity.

The collaboration in synchronicity between dsm-firmenich and Amouage aims to make the Wadi Dawkah Omani Frankincense Essential Oil available in Amouage creations while it also holds the promise of broader availability to other fine perfumery houses that share the House's values of excellence and authenticity.

The natural ingredient is one of the outcomes of a larger project that has fallen under the patronage of Amouage since the end of 2022: The Wadi Dawkah Unesco World Heritage Site.

A protected sanctuary, every day and for centuries, thousands of Boswellia sacra trees witness a new sunrise and shed a tear as they secrete the aromatic frankincense resin, the purest element of their wood.

From this resin, which is harvested by Omani employees of Amouage using a combination of ancient artisanal knowledge and innovative practices, the Wadi Dawkah Omani Frankincense Essential Oil is distilled.

The aim is to establish the essential oil distillation unit on the site, further creating job opportunities for Omani people while reducing carbon emissions from transportation.

Biofloc: A sustainable solution for modern aquaculture practices



DR MOHAMED
AL WAHAIBI

The author is a research assistant at the Centre of Excellence in Marine Biotechnology at Sultan Qaboos University

The constant growth of aquaculture activity demands maximising resources and spaces and minimising associated costs. Therefore, various technologies have been developed to fulfil such requirements. One of these recent technologies is “biofloc systems,” which improve the use of water resources and recycle the

nutrients found in the water by a community of heterotrophic bacteria. This technology has allowed aquaculture farms to reduce or eliminate water exchange while continuously recycling nutrients in the culture medium produced by microbial metabolism. The idea behind the biofloc system was developed under the same principle that regular waste water treatment plants have. In these plants, microbes naturally grow from animal waste, transforming it into less complex organic products that can be consumed by other organisms, such as fish, and then return to the food chain. More precisely, biofloc technology enhances beneficial bacteria growth in aquaculture systems through three main keys: First, adding access carbon through external carbon sources or elevating the carbon content of the feed as a food source for the beneficial microbes. Second, minimising or

eliminating water exchange to allow microbial growth. Lastly, increasing aeration will increase dissolved oxygen levels and encourage aerobic bacteria growth. Biofloc technology (BFT) is considered an efficient alternative system. Once carbon and nitrogen are well balanced in the biofloc system, ammonia in addition to organic nitrogenous waste will be converted into bacterial biomass. Therefore, by adding carbohydrates to the pond, heterotrophic bacteria growth is encouraged, and nitrogen uptake for the production of microbial proteins takes place. As with nitrogen, the microbial protein produced by these heterotrophic bacteria can serve as a supplemental source of nutrition for fish and shrimp. Adopting biofloc technologies can significantly enhance environmental control and biosecurity by reducing the risk of pathogen spread through limited water movement.

It also improves water quality maintenance, as bioflocs treat waste from feeding and provide nutrition through floc consumption, allowing the system to operate with low water exchange rates and develop a dense biofloc community. This community enhances the treatment of waste organic matter and nutrients. However, implementing biofloc technology comes with several challenges. There is an increased energy requirement for constant mixing and aeration, leading to higher energy costs. A start-up period is needed, and yields can be inconsistent across different seasons. Producers must manage biofloc ponds actively to prevent nitrite accumulation and maintain healthy alkalinity levels. Monitoring fish health is crucial as bioflocs can increase suspended solids, causing environmental stress for fish and shrimp. Alkalinity supplementation is also required.

Additionally, biofloc systems are sensitive to water temperature, pH, and dissolved oxygen levels. Multiple studies have shown that bottom-dwelling species like shrimp and tilapia are best suited for biofloc production. Fish in biofloc systems must be resistant to environmental challenges due to the constantly shifting bacterial load in the water, making it unsuitable for sensitive species. A key factor in designing a biofloc system is selecting species that can benefit nutritionally from consuming floc and tolerate high solids concentrations and poor water quality. Shrimp and tilapia, for example, have physiological adaptations that allow them to digest microbial protein in biofloc, making them ideal candidates. Nearly all biofloc systems are used to grow shrimp, tilapia, or carps. In contrast, species like channel catfish and hybrid striped bass are not suitable for biofloc systems

because they cannot tolerate high solids concentrations and lack the adaptations to filter solids from the water. In conclusion, biofloc technology addresses the growing demands of aquaculture by optimising resource use, reducing costs, and minimising water exchange. It leverages beneficial bacteria to recycle nutrients, transforming waste into consumable products for fish and shrimp. The system enhances environmental control and reduces feed costs while boosting growth and disease resistance in suitable species like shrimp and tilapia. Despite challenges such as increased energy needs and sensitivity to pond environmental conditions, biofloc systems are effective for bottom-dwelling species that can tolerate high solids concentrations. This makes biofloc technology a sustainable and efficient solution for modern aquaculture.

Opportunity Oman: Leading the charge in green metals



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The author is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economists, board adviser & business transformation mentor.

As the world pivots towards sustainable development, Oman is positioning itself at the forefront of the green metals industry. The Sultanate of Oman's strategic vision, coupled with its natural advantages, is setting the stage for a transformative leap in sustainable industrial development. This forward-looking approach not only aligns with global environmental goals but also promises to reshape Oman's economic landscape. Oman's Vision 2040, the country's ambitious roadmap for economic diversification and sustainable growth, places a strong emphasis on renewable energy and green hydrogen. This strategic shift is propelling the nation towards becoming a global hub for green metal production, particularly in steel, aluminium, and copper. The focus on green metals is not just an environmental imperative; it's a strategic move to future-proof Oman's industrial sector and capture emerging market opportunities. Oman's geographical position offers unparalleled advantages for the green metals industry. Situated at the crossroads of major shipping routes, Oman provides easy access to markets in Asia, Europe, and Africa.



Oman's abundant renewable energy resources, particularly solar and wind, provide a solid foundation for powering green metal production.

This strategic location significantly reduces transportation costs and time, enhancing the competitiveness of Omani green metals in the global market. According to recent data from the World Energy Council, Oman's strategic location gives it a competitive edge in energy trade and industrial development, positioning it as a potential leader in the green energy transition. Moreover, Oman's abundant renewable energy resources, particularly solar and wind, provide a solid foundation for powering green metal production. The country's vast desert areas offer ideal conditions for large-scale solar farms, while its long coastline presents opportunities for offshore wind energy development. This renewable energy potential is crucial for producing green hydrogen, a key component in the production of green steel and other metals. The availability of raw materials further strengthens Oman's position in the green metals sector. The country's rich mineral deposits, including iron ore, copper, and bauxite, provide a local source of essential inputs for metal production. This local availability not only

reduces dependence on imports but also enhances the overall competitiveness of Omani green metals in terms of pricing and supply chain resilience. Oman's commitment to developing a green hydrogen industry aligns perfectly with the needs of the green metals sector. Green hydrogen, produced using renewable energy, can revolutionise metal production by significantly reducing carbon emissions. The government's ambitious plans to become a major green hydrogen producer by 2040 will provide the green metals industry with a clean, sustainable reducing agent, further enhancing the eco-credentials of Omani metals. The global demand for green metals is skyrocketing, driven by industries and governments prioritising decarbonisation. A World Bank report projects that the demand for metals like aluminium, copper, and nickel could increase by up to 500% by 2050. This surge in demand presents a massive opportunity for Oman to establish itself as a key player in the global green metals market. Oman is already making significant strides in attracting major investments in the green metals sector. The \$3 billion

green steel complex in Duqm, spearheaded by Vulcan Green Steel (VGS), a subsidiary of the Jindal Steel Group, stands as a testament to the country's potential. This project, set to become one of the world's largest green steel facilities, will leverage advanced DRI-EAF technology and be powered entirely by renewable energy. The facility aims to produce steel with an impressively low carbon footprint of less than 0.6-0.7 tonnes of CO2 per tonne of crude steel, setting new benchmarks for sustainability in the industry. While highlighting the achievements of companies like Jindal and Vulcan Steel, it's important to note that Oman's green metals strategy extends beyond individual corporate successes. The government is actively creating an ecosystem that supports the entire value chain of green metal production. This includes investments in infrastructure, research and development, and human capital development. Oman's green metals revolution is being driven by a powerful synergy of key government entities. The Ministry of Commerce,

Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) is attracting global investors, while the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) is developing world-class infrastructure, particularly through the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD). The Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM) is ensuring a robust supply of renewable energy, crucial for green metal production. Complementing this, Hydrom is spearheading Oman's green hydrogen initiatives, creating opportunities across the entire value chain. This coordinated approach is positioning Oman as a leader in the global green metals market, offering opportunities for both international players and local businesses. By aligning investment promotion, infrastructure development, energy supply, and hydrogen production, Oman is creating a comprehensive ecosystem that promises to transform its industrial landscape and contribute significantly to the global green economy. Oman's green metals revolution offers vast opportunities not just for global players, but also for local conglomerates and SMEs.

This inclusive approach allows Omani businesses to engage in various aspects of the green economy, from engineering and construction to operations and services. By spreading benefits across the national economy, this strategy fosters sustainable growth and innovation in multiple sectors. This initiative goes beyond mere economic diversification; it positions Oman as a leader in sustainable industrial development. As global demand for low-carbon products rises, Oman's green metals gain a competitive edge, ensuring the long-term viability of its industrial sector and opening doors to international partnerships and technology transfer. The green metals industry is set to create a ripple effect throughout Oman's economy, stimulating growth in supporting sectors like renewable energy and logistics. This expansion promises to generate diverse job opportunities and drive innovation across the economy, solidifying Oman's position in the global sustainable industrial landscape. In conclusion, Oman's push towards becoming a green metals hub represents a forward-thinking approach to industrial development. By leveraging its natural advantages, strategic location, and commitment to sustainability, Oman is poised to play a crucial role in the global transition to a low-carbon economy. The green metals industry not only promises economic growth but also aligns perfectly with Oman's vision of a sustainable and diversified future. As the world races towards green industrialisation, Oman's proactive stance puts it in a prime position to lead this transformative wave, creating lasting economic and environmental benefits for generations to come.

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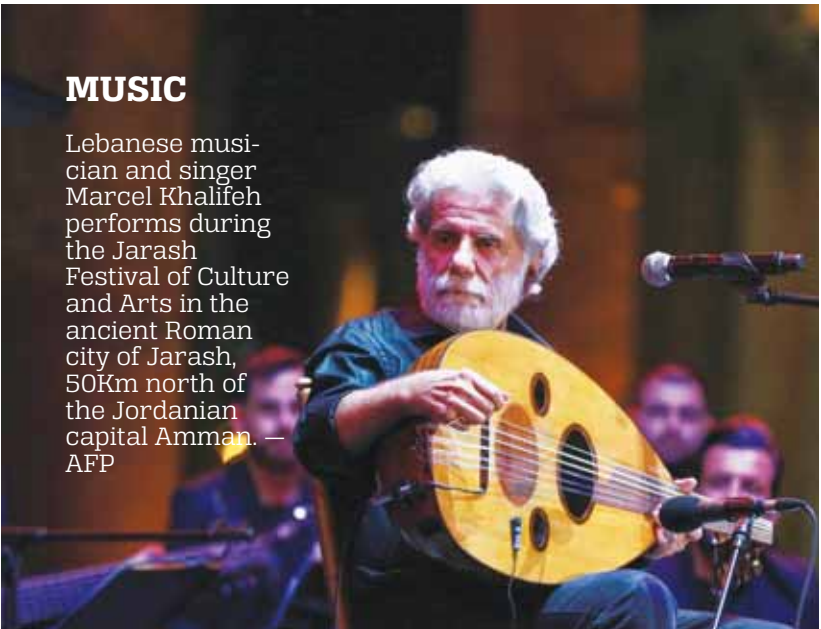
ENTERTAINMENT
Nigerian singer Burna Boy performs at the Sunny Hill Festival near Kosovo's capital Pristina. Thousands of festival-goers have been dancing taking over the capital of a Kosovo better known for war than for its parties. — AFP



FOOD
An employee prepares a doner with meat from a kebab skewer in a doner restaurant in the city centre of Dortmund, western Germany. — AFP



FASHION
A model presents a creation by Pascual Bravo University Institution at Colombiamoda during the Medellin Fashion Week in Medellin, Colombia. — AFP



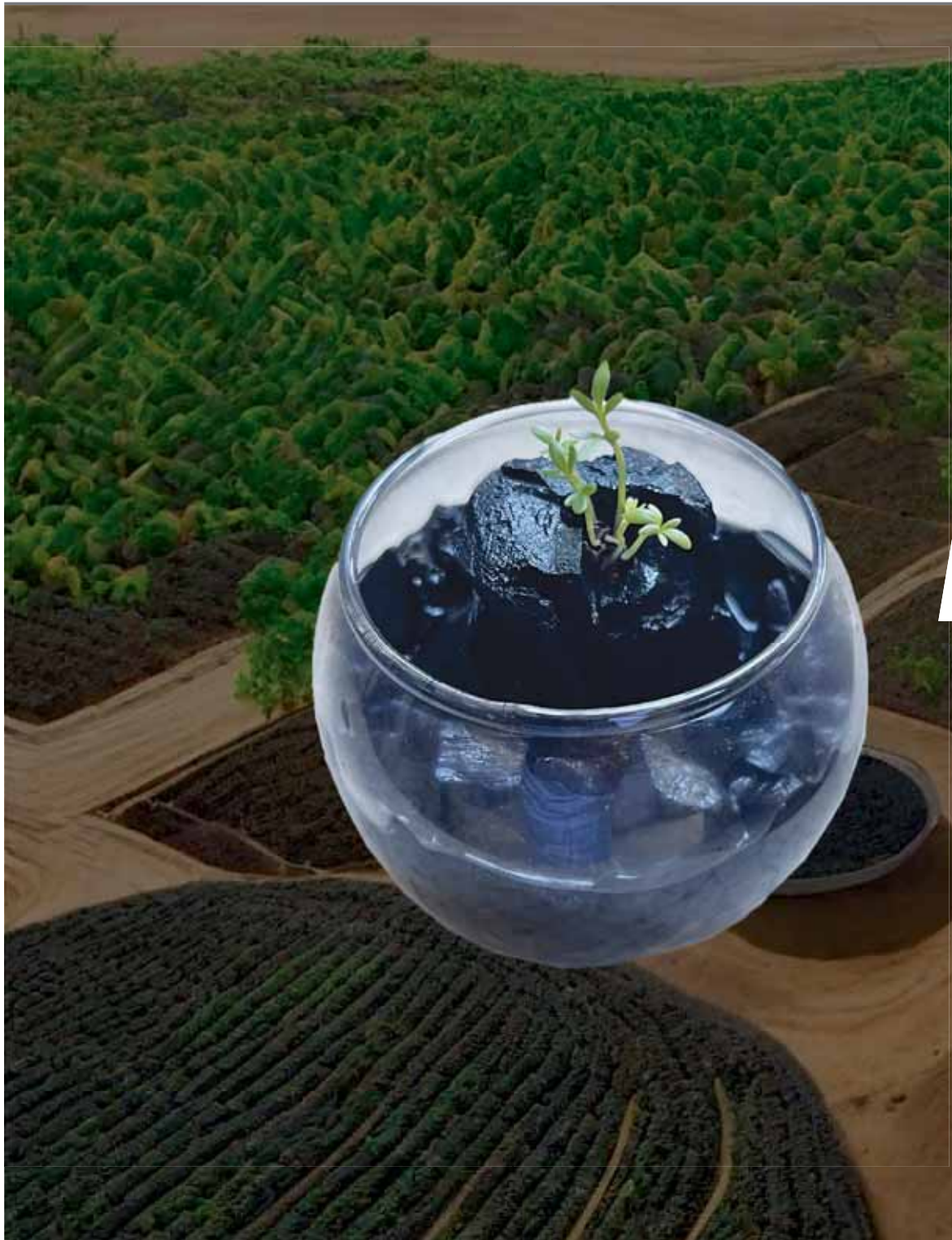
MUSIC
Lebanese musician and singer Marcel Khalifeh performs during the Jarash Festival of Culture and Arts in the ancient Roman city of Jarash, 50km north of the Jordanian capital Amman. — AFP



TRAVEL
Tourists visit the illuminated ancient Greek city of Ephesus at night near Selcuk. — AFP

art & life

MONDAY | JULY 29, 2024 | MUHARRAM 23 , 1446 AH OMAN OBSERVER www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om



BIOCHAR: A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION FOR AGRICULTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN OMAN

Oman has embraced biochar technology for sustainable agriculture and climate change mitigation. Ahmed bin Rashid bin Salim al Rabaiai leads research into biochar's benefits in soil health and carbon sequestration.... **P20**

MUSIC

Festival puts Kosovo on music map



AMID A SEA of denim shorts, selfies, sequins and thumping bass lines, the setting could easily be mistaken for Coachella or Glastonbury.

But the Sunny Hill festival in Pristina is helping turn Kosovo into a go-to destination during Europe's summer festival season, thanks in large part to its founder: Dua Lipa.

For years, Kosovo was associated with its bloody war against Serbia that pitted ethnic Albania insurgents against Serb forces in the late 1990s, leaving thousands dead and triggering a refugee crisis.

But the arrival of Lipa on the international pop scene has helped showcase Kosovo's other side — young, talented and full of ambition.

With more than 87 million followers on Instagram and more than 25 million albums sold, the British-born singer of Kosovo descent is one of the biggest pop stars in the world.

Alongside an endless tour schedule,

film roles and hosting a popular podcast, Lipa remains one of the most vocal promoters of all things Kosovo.

- VERY HAPPY -

Launched in 2018 with her father, the Sunny Hill festival she created has brought some of the biggest names to perform in this tiny corner of the Balkan.

Late on Thursday afternoon, as the first notes echoed from the main stage, a young crowd passed through the festival entrance, ever grateful to Lipa for bringing another star-studded line up to the capital Pristina.

"I'm very happy that she's promoting our country with these big, big artists and bringing them to our country," said Rita Ramadani, 19.

For its fifth edition, Sunny Hill boasts a roster of performers that rivals more established festivals. Headliners this year include British rap sensation Stormzy and the king of afrobeat, Burna Boy. Bebe Rexha — who is also of ethnic

Albanian origin — electrified the crowd as she sang her global hit "Me, Myself and I", while speaking Albanian with the audience in between songs.

Albania and Kosovo flags dotted the stages and were scattered across the audience during performances, where festival goers regularly hold two crossed hands in the sign of the Albanian eagle aloft.

This is a festival in Kosovo, after all.

"We are all very happy that this is happening right now and people from all the world got to hear about Kosovo, and about Sunny Hill. Thanks to Dua Lipa," said festival attendee Nita Krasniqi.

And while the festival attracts thousands of locals, music lovers from abroad are also making their way to Pristina.

"We're here because it's amazing music," said Michael Maguire, who travelled to the festival from Brussels with friends.

"Kosovo's an amazing country, full of young people, and very vibrant." — **AFP**

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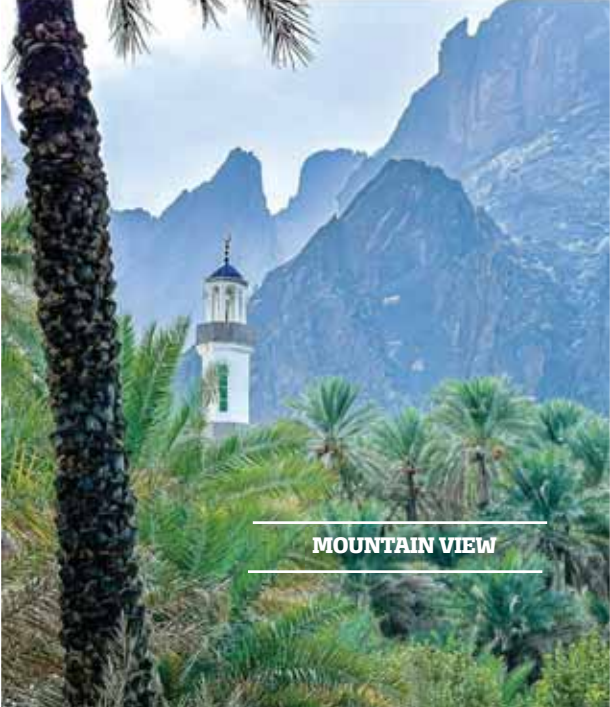


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'WINDMILL LOVE' SEES DUTCH ARTIST BECOME MILL OPERATOR

DUTCH ARTIST PEET WESSELS might not call it an obsession, but with over 100 images of windmills in her home, it's clear she's a big fan — her walls practically whirl with admiration.

Now Wessels, who rose to fame by painting windmills on the mill's used canvas sails, is taking it one step further.

She is training to become a real-life miller — someone who operates and maintains a windmill — joining a growing number of women in what was once seen as a man's world.

It was a blustery afternoon at De Heimolen, an ancient wheat mill in Rucphen-Bosschenhoofd near the southern Dutch city of Breda.

Perched some 10 metres (about 32 feet) on one of the four wings of the mill, built in 1866, Wessels tied canvas over the wooden slats.

She then scarpered down and ran around the structure to release a brake to set the creaking blades in motion.

"You cannot have a fear of heights if you want to be a miller," Wessels said, dressed in sturdy boots, jeans and a hoodie bearing the insignia of the Dutch Guild of Millers.

For almost two years now, Wessels, 59, has been following the ancient course on how to become a miller, joining some 2,000 others in the Netherlands, famous for its clogs, cheese and... windmills.

Wessels believes she is the only woman miller in the North Brabant province, a short hop from one of the country's most iconic windmill locations at the nearby Kinderdijk.

In all, there are some 200 woman

millers around the Netherlands, she added, mostly based around the central city of Utrecht.

Trainee millers learn mill mechanics — how to steer the massive blades without damaging them, safety around the rapidly moving parts and how to read the weather.

"It's a bit like being the captain of a sailing ship," said Wessels.

- 'RATHER IN A MILL' -

Asked about woman millers making waves in a role seen for centuries as traditionally male, Wessels did not think of herself as a pioneer.

"But I'd rather be in a mill than attending a fashion show," she laughed.

A chemical engineer by profession, Wessels said she was always interested in windmills and how they worked.

After stints as an engineer in the United States and Britain, she decided to start a new career as a painter in the late 1990s.

But sales dropped and after the credit crunch in 2008, Wessels knew she had to innovate "and do something different".

One day she was cycling past a windmill when she hit upon an idea.

"I told the miller I want to do something with mills and paint them, do you have something I could use?"

That's when the miller showed her the used canvas cloth used in the mill's wings — and so an idea was born.

"It was stinky and full of insects, so I had to scrub it clean first," she said.

Her chemical engineering background came in handy, helping her to find the right way to treat the canvas to

show both the painting and the cloths' natural ageing process.

"The cloth and the painting had to work together. It has to show the history of the cloth that's been on the mill sometimes for 20 years or longer," she said.

Wessels' painting of the mill also exactly matches the actual mill on which the canvas was used.

- 'NOT A FANATIC' -

Two of her favourites now hang in her kitchen: one work called "Dutch Skies" and another called "Dutch Landscape."

Both were painted on the canvas from the 1740 Overwaard 7 mill at Kinderdijk — which has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage site because of its 19 iconic mills.

Wessels has painted almost all of the Netherlands' famous windmills — including a mill called De Kat north of Amsterdam — the world's last remaining windmill using wind power to make paint pigment.

"Almost all the millers know me. I used to ask for old canvas, but now they phone me when they have some available," Wessels laughed.

Asked if she ever dreams of windmills, she quipped: "I'm not a fanatic. But training to become a miller is perhaps a step closer!" — AFP



LIFESTYLE

Night at the mewseum: Ancient Egypt exhibition welcomes cats

A QUEUE OF GLAMOROUS visitors stood outside Shanghai Museum twitching impatiently, tails flicking and whiskers quivering as they waited to be let in for the institution's inaugural ancient Egypt cat night.

Feline tickets for Saturday night's event sold out within days, as Shanghai's devoted pet owners seized the chance to share an educational experience with their animals — and share the photos on the mostly pedigree cats' personal social media accounts.

One pet owner said she had postponed a trip to Europe to ensure she could nab one of the 200 available tickets for her regal ginger "son".

Trump — named for his physical and psychological resemblance to the US presidential candidate — was dressed as a Chinese emperor, and blinked haughtily as journalists

flocked around him with cameras.

"I cannot imagine my life right now without a cat," his owner Amy said. "So I really can have the same feeling why Egyptian persons, they valued cats on such a level."

The number of pets in China has soared, reaching over 120 million in 2023, and cats are the most popular.

The trend is being driven largely by younger generations, many of whom see their "furred kids" as a cheaper substitute for human children, experts say.

Shanghai Museum is capitalising on that interest — Saturday's event, heralded as a first in China, is just one of 10 planned cat nights.

As the guests of honour filed in, perched on shoulders or peering out of handbags, they had their vaccination and insurance records checked before they were transferred into a fleet of specially designed kitten-eared prams.

Claire, who had dressed herself and her German Rex Tiedan in matching Egyptian costumes, said the exhibition showed "cats have always been humans' good friends".

"Now young people are under great pressure, cats help us relieve a lot of mental pressure... probably the same as in ancient times,"

she said.

Cats were considered sacred in ancient Egypt, and associated in particular with Bast, a goddess of fertility, birth and protection.

"In the modern world, kitties are a symbol of cuteness, which is very different from (ancient Egypt)," said a young woman named Feifei, clutching a resplendent white furball named Sticky Rice.

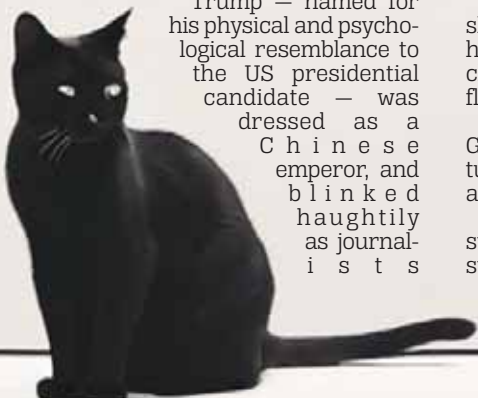
That cuteness has led to a surge in feline influencers and hopefuls.

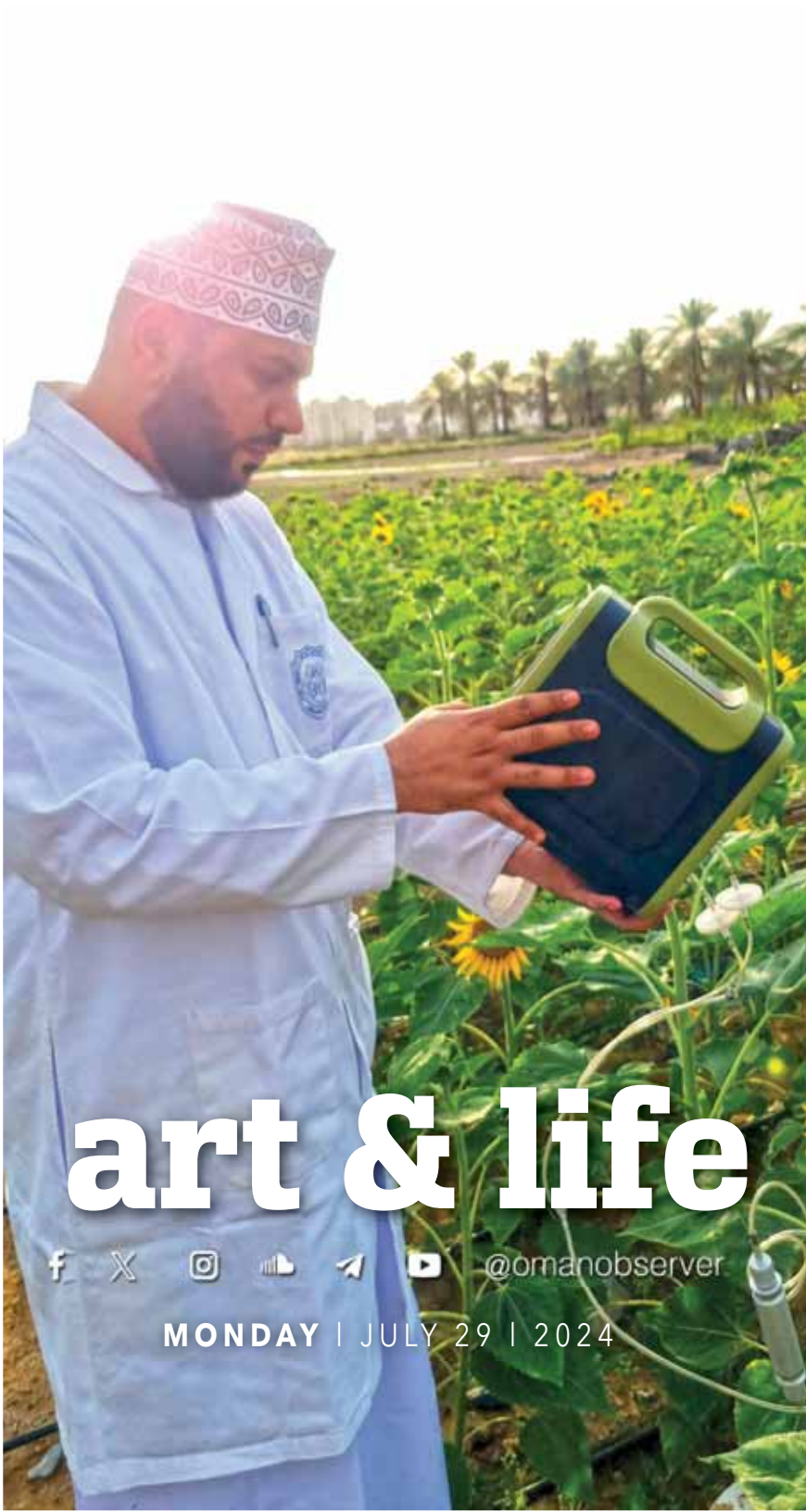
Many of the cats at the exhibition had their own social media accounts, and one or two appeared to have small teams helping produce content.

A section on Saqqara, a historic necropolis where archaeologists recently unearthed dozens of cat mummies and artefacts from a newly discovered tomb, was filled with confused meows as the star visitors were photographed next to a Bast statue.

"There are many ancestors of cats here, I wanted to bring (Sticky Rice) to have a look," said Feifei.

Like most of his fellow felines, Sticky Rice seemed largely unmoved by the historical experience. — AFP





BIOCHAR: A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION FOR AGRICULTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN OMAN

BY JOMAR MENDOZA

In recent years, the global focus on sustainability has catalysed the adoption of innovative technologies across industries to mitigate environmental impacts. Among these technologies, biochar has emerged as a promising solution in the agricultural sector. Biochar, a form of charcoal produced from organic materials, offers significant potential for enhancing soil health, increasing crop yields, and sequestering carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Oman, renowned for its commitment to sustainable development, has embraced biochar technology as a cornerstone of its efforts to advance sustainable agricultural practices and address climate change challenges.

Ahmed bin Rashid bin Salim al Rabaiai, a PhD candidate at Sultan Qaboos University, has been instrumental in advocating for biochar integration in Omani agriculture. His research efforts have focused on exploring the vast benefits of biochar in addressing degraded soils and rehabilitat-

ing saline lands in Oman. Working closely with his supervisors, Dr Daniel Menezes Blackburn and Dr Said al Ismaili, Ahmed's vision for biochar in agriculture revolves around enhancing soil properties to elevate fertility and productivity in Omani agricultural landscapes.

Reflecting on his motivations, Al Rabaiai shares, "My recognition of biochar's immense potential in ameliorating degraded lands and enhancing Omani soil fertility sparked my passion for sustainable waste management solutions through biochar production." He further adds, "Biochar represents a promising avenue for sustainable agriculture in Oman, offering a holistic approach to soil enhancement and climate change mitigation."

Setting biochar apart from traditional soil amendments are its unique attributes that offer a plethora of benefits for agricultural sustainability. With its superior surface area for enhanced water and nutrient retention, increased porosity promoting optimal aeration and root growth, and long-term stability for sustained soil health and fertility, biochar

emerges as a transformative solution within the realm of sustainable agriculture. Particularly in arid regions such as Oman, biochar's exceptional water retention capabilities play a pivotal role in reducing irrigation requirements, conserving vital water resources, and facilitating plant develop-

ments for local markets. NTZ Solutions, an industry pioneer in Oman's biochar sector, specialises in customised biochar formulations curated to align with Oman's Net Zero targets and sustainability goals across varied sectors. Their unwavering commitment to producing high-quality biochar under-



ment.

Oman's commitment to promoting biochar technology is exemplified through substantial investments in research, development initiatives, pilot projects, and educational programmes aimed at enlightening farmers on the advantages of biochar incorporation in agricultural systems. By fostering collaborations with global organisations, research institutions, and technology providers, Oman endeavours to optimise biochar utilisation, cater to its unique agricultural landscape, and maximise benefits for farmers and the environment.

Al Rabaiai underscores the pivotal role of biochar in carbon sequestration and its impact on climate change mitigation. He emphasises, "Biochar's ability to convert organic waste into stable carbon compounds stored within the soil aids in carbon offsetting efforts, curbing greenhouse gas emissions, and reducing atmospheric carbon concentrations."

Ahmed envisions a future where biochar plays a central role in climate change mitigation strategies, offering a sustainable solution to balance agricultural productivity and environmental stewardship.

Through strategic alliances with companies like NTZ Solutions, Oman ensures the quality and efficacy of tailored biochar prod-

ucts for local markets. NTZ Solutions, an industry pioneer in Oman's biochar sector, specialises in customised biochar formulations curated to align with Oman's Net Zero targets and sustainability goals across varied sectors. Their unwavering commitment to producing high-quality biochar under-

scores the significance of biochar in driving sustainable agriculture practices in Oman. The future outlook for biochar in Oman and the broader region is promising, underpinned by escalating awareness of environmental sustainability imperatives and the pressing need for carbon sequestration strategies. Biochar is poised to revolutionise agricultural practices, carve a path towards sustainability, and shape a greener, more resilient future.

Al Rabaiai summarises, "Biochar offers a pathway to supporting food security, economic development, and environmental stewardship in Oman's agricultural sector. Its versatility and effectiveness make it a valuable addition to sustainable agricultural practices, aligning with Oman's vision for a greener and more resilient future."

Oman's biochar revolution signifies a paradigm shift towards sustainable agricultural practices, aligning with global sustainability objectives and environmental stewardship. Researchers like Ahmed al Rabaiai, along with governmental and industrial collaborations, are propelling biochar into the spotlight as a catalyst for transforming agricultural landscapes, fostering sustainability, and combating climate change challenges.