

HM greets Uruguay President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Luis Lacalle Pou of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the President and the friendly people of Uruguay.

SUNRISE - 05:46 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:28 AM

DHUHR - 12:14 PM

ASR - 03:41 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:37 PM

ISHA - 07:50 PM



P15

FUEL MARKETERS
EXPAND EV CHARGING
NETWORK ACROSS
OMAN



P12

BRIGHTON
LEAVE IT LATE TO
BEAT MANCHESTER
UNITED 2-1



P20

THE BEST PLACES
TO CAMP
WITHIN THE
SULTANATE



MUSCAT

GOLD IMPORTS UP 41% IN 2024

The Sultanate of Oman's total gold imports by the end of May this year increased by 41 per cent to reach RO 176.59 million, compared to the same period in 2023, which recorded about RO 125.10 million. The total weight of gold imported by Oman by the end of May stood at around 8,443 kilogrammes, compared to 5,675 kilogrammes during the same period in 2023, according to data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

DETAILS ON P13

HM returns home



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned to the homeland on Saturday after a private visit to the friendly Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and the United Kingdom (UK). May Allah the Almighty bestow goodness and blessing upon His Majesty in his travel and return for He is All-Hearing, All-Answering. — ONA

50 Palestinians killed as talks resume in Cairo

GAZA CITY: At least 50 Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, according to the Gaza health authority.

Earlier, the WAFA Palestinian news agency reported at least 11 civilian deaths and an unspecified number of people injured in the southern city of Khan Yunis and in the Nuseirat area in central Gaza.

The reports come as efforts for a ceasefire continue in Cairo, with Hamas sending a delegation.

Israel has been waging war since October 2023, and the army reported ongoing heavy fighting in the south, centre and north of the Gaza Strip.

SEE P6

Four hikers washed away in Wadi Tanuf

NIZWA: Four people were killed after being washed away in Wadi Tanuf in the Wilayat of Nizwa.

The four dead were among a group of 16 mountain hikers who went missing, and some of them were swept away due to heavy rains.

One of the dead was an Omani citizen and the other three were of Arab nationalities. Another four people were found alive with light to severe injuries, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) said on Saturday.

The CDAA immediately responded to a report of the incident, but the rescue teams were unable to reach the site due to rough terrain and heavy rainfall.

The next morning the rescue teams managed to save some of the missing and provided them with medical care on the site.

First Lieutenant Ali bin Said al Farsi from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) called on citizens and residents to follow safety guidelines and check the weather updates before going for hiking on mountains, noting that hikers should record their location and share data via the (Nidaa) application to keep in touch with the CDAA's operations centre.

STAY AWAY FROM WADIS

In view of this incident, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority has said driving through overflowing wadis or playing near water bodies during adverse weather conditions is a crime punishable with imprisonment and other legal procedures.

It has been found that majority of the incidents and casualties during rains are caused due to reckless driving through wadis or absence of precautions or ignoring the authority's warnings.

"Crossing an overflowing wadi will invite legal action, and all are advised to follow the instructions issued by the authorities," a CDAA spokesperson told the Observer, adding that the CDAA is closely following up with the Oman Meteorology authorities and are well prepared to act accordingly.

He added that mountain hikers should be trained to carry out safety procedures, most importantly checking the weather conditions on mountain areas. Teams are also advised to register with the Nidaa application to be able to know the mountain track, Al Farsi added.

Khareef Dhofar Season sets a new benchmark this year

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 24

The Khareef Dhofar Season has long been a magnet for nature lovers, drawing thousands of visitors to its misty mountains and verdant plains. This year, the khareef has proven to be extraordinary, surpassing all expectations and emerging as the best season in nearly three decades. The remarkable climate conditions of this season have elevated it to a level not seen since 1996, solidifying its status as a truly exceptional event.

Harith al Saifi, a climate researcher specialising in Omani climate archives, recently shared his insights on this year's khareef via the platform "X" (formerly Twitter). According to Al Saifi, the 2024 khareef has outshone the 2022 season and has become the most outstanding khareef that Salalah has experienced in 28 years. "I have selected the best khareef seasons for the city of Salalah," Al Saifi stated, "and as of yesterday, the 2024 khareef has surpassed the 2022 season to become the

best since 1996."

Al Saifi noted that while there have been other strong khareef seasons, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, the 2024 season stands out for its exceptional characteristics. Although Al Saifi lacked complete daily data for the years 1995 and 1996, he acknowledged that these years were close in quality to the current season, underscoring the extraordinary nature of 2024's khareef.

This year, Dhofar has been bathed in dense fog and a continuous drizzle that has blanketed the mountainous regions and coastal plains. This has resulted in a rapid and dense growth of vegetation, transforming the landscape into a lush, green haven.

The ideal conditions have not only enhanced the natural beauty of the governorate, but have also had a positive impact on agriculture and livestock. Farmers and herders have reaped the benefits of abundant water and rich grazing lands, ensuring a fruitful season.

Tourism, a crucial sector for Dhofar,



Ain Athum waterfalls in Taqah are a major draw for khareef visitors.

has seen an unprecedented surge due to the exceptional khareef. Both local and international tourists have flocked to the governorate in large numbers, eager to experience the unique climate and breathtaking scenery. "We've never seen such a high demand for accommodations during the khareef season," said Ahmed al Maashani, a manager at one of Salalah's leading resorts. "This year has been a game-changer for the tourism industry, and we're already seeing the economic benefits across the board."

The influx of visitors has provided a significant boost to the local economy, with hotels, resorts and markets experiencing a spike in demand. Tourism experts predict that the financial benefits of this season will be felt long after the last mist has lifted. Salim bin Ali al Amri, a local shop owner, remarked, "The 2024 khareef season has brought more customers than we've had in years. It's not just the natural beauty but the sense of community and tradition that keeps bringing people back."

TURN TO P2



CDAA warns against driving through overflowing wadis



KABER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Driving through overflowing wadis or playing near water bodies during adverse weather conditions is a crime punishable by imprisonment and other legal measures, according to the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA).

The majority of accidents and casualties during rains have been attributed to reckless driving through wadis, failure to take necessary precautions, or disregarding warnings from authorities.

“Driving across an overflowing wadi, jeopardising the lives of oneself and others, will invite legal action. We strongly advise everyone to

follow the instructions issued by the authorities,” a CDAA spokesperson told the Observer.

The CDAA is closely monitoring weather conditions with Oman Meteorology and is prepared to respond accordingly. Intentionally risking lives during flash floods can result in punitive actions, including fines and vehicle retention, depending on the severity of the offense.

Numerous violations were reported during the recent rains, which claimed four lives in Wadi Tanuf, Wilayat of Nizwa.

The victims, part of a 16-member multinational hiking group, were swept away by sudden heavy rains.

Among the deceased were an Omani citizen and three Arab nationals. One injured person

remains in critical condition.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) confirmed that the injured were airlifted to Nizwa Hospital for emergency treatment.

The ROP and the CDAA, through social media updates, reported that they assisted people stranded in the rains and vehicles trapped in flash floods during the heavy downpour on Thursday and Friday, which disrupted life in the governorate and surrounding areas.

Officials swiftly responded, towing vehicles from the mud and managing traffic as many signals failed during the rains and subsequent floods.

According to the National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation to Climate Change for the Sultanate of Oman (2020-2040), urban expansion in Oman often fails to adequately consider the risks of flooding.

Floods have posed a serious threat to urban areas and infrastructure, including government and private properties, transportation systems, and power and water supplies. Oman has been implementing remedial measures whenever adverse weather conditions are forecast.

“Over the last two decades, we have been constructing new drainage systems, upgrading existing ones, elevating roads prone to flash floods, and building new check dams to mitigate the losses and damages caused by rains,” said a spokesperson from the Dams division.

Orientation meeting prepares students for study abroad

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, August 24

As the new academic year begins, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation organised an Orientation Meeting for International Scholarship Students. This annual event was crucial for guiding students through their upcoming educational journey abroad, offering them valuable insights into adapting to both academic and social environments in their host countries.

Studying abroad presents a significant opportunity for students to expand their knowledge and experience diverse cultures. However, the transition can be challenging, making the Orientation Meeting vital in preparing students for potential obstacles.

Hamad bin Khalfan al Harthi from the Scholarship Affairs Department emphasised the importance of the introductory session, which not only covers academic expectations, but also provides practical advice on daily life adjustments, cultural integration and time management.

This year, the scholarship programme supports 550 students in fields such as medicine, education and engineering.

Al Harthi noted that the meeting also addressed various

aspects of academic, societal, religious and legal concerns, preparing students and their guardians comprehensively.

Attendees, such as Sarah al Maamari, a scholarship student heading to the UK, found the session particularly beneficial. “The meeting clarified academic requirements and how to adjust to life in a new country, addressing all my questions about housing, studying and staying connected with my family,” she said.

Khalid al Balushi, who will be studying in the US, appreciated the sense of camaraderie. “Meeting other students going to the same country gave me confidence. The expert advice on cultural adaptation was extremely helpful,” he shared.

The experts also provided key advice on maximising the study abroad experience:

Good planning: Research the host country’s academic and social environment, understand local laws and prepare for daily life. Time management: Balance academic and social activities while ensuring time for rest and recreation.

Cultural openness: Embrace new cultures and avoid isolation. Engaging with international peers enriches the experience.

Maintaining family ties: Regular communication with family and friends can support students emotionally during their studies.

Khareef Dhofar Season sets a new benchmark

FROM P1

The impact of this extraordinary khareef extends beyond the natural and economic realms. The local community has embraced the season by organising a variety of cultural and heritage events, showcasing Dhofar’s rich traditions and fostering a deeper connection between

residents and visitors. These festivities have not only enriched the cultural fabric of the governorate, but have also highlighted the deep-rooted heritage that thrives alongside the natural wonders of Dhofar.

Reflecting on the environmental significance of this year’s khareef, Ahmed, an environmental researcher, commented, “The khareef is a powerful reminder of

the delicate balance between nature and human activity. It also serves as a case study for the importance of preserving such natural phenomena for future generations.”

The Khareef Dhofar Season 2024 will undoubtedly be remembered as a season of unparalleled beauty and significance.

It has not only set a new standard for what the khareef

season can offer, but also underscored the importance of environmental stewardship in maintaining the natural and cultural heritage of the governorate.

As the mists begin to clear, the memories of this extraordinary season will linger, inspiring future generations to appreciate and protect the unique wonders of Dhofar.



The Orientation Meeting was crucial for guiding students through their upcoming educational journey abroad

Omani watermelon thrives despite agricultural challenges in Dhank

DHANK: In Dhank, the Arabian watermelon, locally known as the ‘Omani watermelon,’ the cherished summer crop is renowned for its ability to withstand the region’s high temperatures and dry climate. This crop is widely cultivated across various wilayats of Al Dhahirah Governorate and is increasingly popular among consumers.

Eng Ahmed bin Mubarak al Badi, an agricultural expert at the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in Dhank, highlighted that the Omani watermelon available in local markets is a pure variety, free from any cross-pollination or genetic alterations.

This purity is maintained despite the proximity of other watermelon and gourd crops,



The Omani watermelon retains its green outer colour even when ripe, and has a less sweet taste compared to other types.

which sometimes leads to natural cross-pollination by insects and bees, resulting in hybrid varieties with differing genetic traits.

Al Badi noted that some imported watermelon varieties exhibit mixed characteristics due to natural cross-pollination, leading to differences in shape,

particularly from pests which are prevalent during the moderate weather period following winter.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, plays a crucial role in combating these pests and raising awareness to preserve the safety of this important crop.

Al Badi further explained that according to elder farmers and agricultural producers, the Arabian watermelon was once the most popular variety in local markets.

However, with the introduction of new crop seeds and the subsequent agricultural development, other types of red watermelon and cantaloupe have gained popularity due to their sweeter taste and higher consumer demand. — ONA

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Dermatology conference urges better skin care and global collaboration

SALALAH: The 8th Oman International Dermatology Conference and Exhibition concluded on Saturday with key recommendations aimed at advancing skin care through modern diagnostic and treatment technologies. The conference emphasised the importance of strengthening cooperation between the public and private sectors by adhering to global treatment protocols and fostering communication with dermatology associations across the GCC and worldwide.

A significant focus was placed on developing a unified national protocol for the most common skin diseases, informed by the latest international guidelines. The conference stressed the need for continuous education and training through workshops and seminars for dermatologists, family doctors, general practitioners, and other specialists.

Attendees were urged to prioritise the acquisition of cutting-edge medical equipment and biological treatments for severe skin conditions such as psoriasis, atopic eczema, and urticaria.

The conference also underscored the importance of safe practices in both surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures and highlighted the need for ongoing vigilance and collaboration with infectious disease specialists concerning the monkeypox virus. Additionally, innovative uses of



Speakers at the Oman International Dermatology Conference and Exhibition

The conference featured numerous lectures on specialised topics, including advancements in the treatment of skin diseases, skin cancers, pharmaceutical developments, and local cases of genetic skin conditions

laser technology were discussed as a critical area of focus.

The event, organised by the Omani Dermatology Association in collaboration with the Directorate General of Health Services in Dhofar Governorate, brought together a wide range of medical professionals, including dermatologists, plastic surgeons,

allergists, immunologists, paediatricians, pharmacists, interns, and medical students from Oman and abroad.

A partnership and scientific cooperation agreement was signed between the Omani Dermatology Association and the Saudi Society of Dermatology and Dermatologic Surgery.

This agreement, signed by Dr Aisha bint Abdullah al Ali, President of the Omani Dermatology Association, and Dr Ruwa al Harthy, Vice-President of the Saudi Society of Dermatology and Dermatologic Surgery, aims to facilitate the exchange of expertise and participation in scientific events between the two organisations.

The conference featured numerous lectures on specialised topics, including advancements in the treatment of skin diseases, skin cancers, pharmaceutical developments, and local cases of

genetic skin conditions.

Other areas of focus included skin manifestations of internal diseases, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, the role of gut microbiota in skin health, controversies in cosmetic dermatology, and paediatric skin diseases.

The two-day conference brought together a diverse range of medical professionals, including dermatologists, family doctors, general practitioners, plastic surgeons, allergists, immunologists, paediatricians, pharmacists, interns, and medical students.

Dr Faiza bint Ahmed al Rai, conference chairwoman, in her opening remarks, emphasised that such scientific conferences and medical workshops are instrumental in enhancing the efficiency and quality of healthcare professionals.

— ONA



REVIVING STORYTELLING DURING DHOFAR KHAREEF

During the Dhofar Khareef Season, something special awaits children in Salalah's South Saadah. In a distinctly local style, a storyteller captivates large groups of children with his engaging tales, creating a powerful connection between generations. This traditional leisure activity, now fading, is being beautifully revived – a sight that brings joy to Dr Nisma Haris, a Salalah physician and columnist, who has shared this photograph.

Mobile laboratory ensures food safety during Khareef

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 24

Since the start of the 2024 Khareef Dhofar Season, Dhofar Municipality has been rigorously implementing the second edition of its mobile laboratory initiative, designed to ensure food safety across the governorate.

The deployment of the mobile lab has marked the Municipality's efforts to ensure that citizens, residents, and the influx of visitors receive safe and healthy food.

The mobile laboratory, has proved to be instrumental in reaching a wide array of locations to conduct essential inspections. This year's efforts have expanded significantly, covering a diverse range of food establishments, including cafes serving coffee, tea and similar beverages. These inspections aim to guarantee that all consumables meet the stringent safety standards set by the municipality.

The initiative is a continuation of Dhofar Municipality's commitment to public health, bolstered by the addition of cutting-edge technologies and equipment to the mobile laboratory.

This enhancement has allowed the municipality to carry out more detailed and

The mobile laboratory, has proved to be instrumental in reaching a wide array of locations to conduct essential inspections

accurate inspections, ensuring that food products in the governorate are of the highest quality. The laboratory operates during official evening hours, providing specialised teams with the necessary time and resources to conduct thorough testing and analyses.

The Khareef Dhofar Season, a peak tourist period in Dhofar, attracts a large number of visitors from within Oman and abroad. The influx of tourists adds an extra layer of responsibility for local authorities to maintain high standards of food safety.

Dhofar Municipality has risen to this challenge, ensuring that every food outlet, from large restaurants to small cafes, undergoes rigorous scrutiny.

Officials from the Dhofar Municipality have highlighted the significance of this ongoing project as part of a broader strategy to enhance public services and build trust in the municipality's regulatory measures.

Entrepreneurial cafés flourish at tourist spots during Khareef Dhofar Season

SALALAH: Cafes in various locations in Salalah are offering exciting opportunities for young entrepreneurs who are keen to enter the food and beverage sector with innovative ideas and distinctive services tailored to the needs of an ever-growing market.

With the increasing demand for hot and cold beverages, as well as snacks at cafes across popular tourist spots during the Khareef Dhofar Season in Dhofar Governorate, café owners are competing to attract a diverse clientele of locals and tourists.

They are striving to offer creative menus, exceptional service, and attractive offers to build customer loyalty, gain trust, and establish a solid reputation that keeps patrons returning throughout the year.

Mohammed bin Abdullah Batmira, a café owner, highlighted the significance of the F&B sector, particularly in cafes that serve as essential stops for visitors and tourists. He emphasised the importance of high-quality service, attentive presentation, and the careful packaging of products. Batmira noted that these elements not only enhance the visitor experience but also contribute to the growth of the sector during the season and beyond.

He also acknowledged the support provided by various entities, including the Ministry of Labour's temporary permits



Café owners are competing to attract a diverse clientele of locals and tourists offering creative menus



initiative, which helps organise work, and Dhofar Municipality's assistance to entrepreneurs by offering opportunities for mobile carts, designing 500 kiosks for restaurants and cafes, and launching a mobile food testing laboratory to ensure the safety and quality of products.

Addressing the challenges faced by café owners, Batmira mentioned the rising cost of ingredients and the increasing wages of skilled workers, both of which drive up operating expenses.

Another café owner, Haitham bin Mohammed al Jaadi, echoed the sentiment that cafes are vital to both the economy and tourism in Dhofar, particularly during the Khareef Dhofar Season.

He pointed out that the sector

faces competition due to the proliferation of similar businesses and the scarcity of local suppliers for necessary materials.

Mazin bin Said Saeedan, another café proprietor, shared that his business focuses on offering Omani and international meals with a modern twist, along with fresh drinks and diverse coffee selections.

Support from Dhofar Municipality and the Department of Small and Medium Enterprises Development in Dhofar has led to a surge in demand for cafes and mobile restaurants, especially during this year's Khareef Dhofar Season. On the consumer side, Talib bin Ali al Mahrouqi, a regular café-goer, underscored the economic and touristic value of cafés and restaurants. He

points that many cafes are not only popular for their modern offerings but also for their rich history and traditional meals, making them appealing to tourists. Al Mahrouqi noted the growing number of Omani youth entering the sector, particularly during the Khareef Dhofar Season.

Karim bin Rashid al Hudaifi, another customer, emphasised that cafes and restaurants are vital economic tourist destinations, offering a range of local and international snacks and drinks.

He praised the creativity and innovation in traditional Omani cuisine, which merges flavours from the past with modern twists, creating unique dishes that reflect Oman's cultural and historical richness.

— ONA



Dhofar Municipality's mobile food safety lab



THE SCHOOL ENROLMENT DILEMMA

SIHAM AL SAIDI

IN TODAY’S competitive educational field, private schools are implementing increasingly sophisticated marketing strategies to attract new students during admission. With the beginning of the academic year, these efforts are particularly visible and exaggerated which can be annoying.

Schools are launching extensive campaigns, from eye catching boards to engaging social media posts, all of them aimed at showcasing their facilities, academic excellence and extracurricular offerings.

Ahmed al Balushi, Director of the Licensing Department of Private Schools in Al Batinah, North Governorate, says, “We closely monitor private schools’ compliance with advertising and marketing regulations to ensure the credibility of their marketing campaigns. These campaigns often highlight curricula, programmes, facilities and services offered by the schools. We believe that marketing of a school depends on the students’ achievements and the quality of educational outcomes, which the school must work to gain parents’ satisfaction.”

For a better understanding of these strategies and effects, we spoke with several parents and school administrators.

Asma Saif, a mother of two, expressed mixed feelings about the intense marketing efforts. “While I appreciate knowing what a school has to offer, I sometimes feel overwhelmed by over advertising. It makes me wonder if the focus is on the quality of education or just getting more students.”

Ali Saif, owner of a well-known private school, shared his perspective on the necessity of these campaigns.

“In today’s competitive market, schools need to stay competitive. Parents have many and various options, and we need to communicate our strengths effectively. Marketing helps us highlight what makes our school unique, whether it’s our advanced curriculum, impressive facilities, or diverse extracurricular programme. We need to speak loud to be visible for others to know about our unique institution.”

Laila Hassan, another parent, believes that the real test of a school’s value lies beyond marketing.

“My priority is the quality of education and how my children are progressing. I prefer to rely on other parents’ experiences and the school’s reputation rather than flashy and faked ads. To me, what happens during the school year matters more than any campaign.”

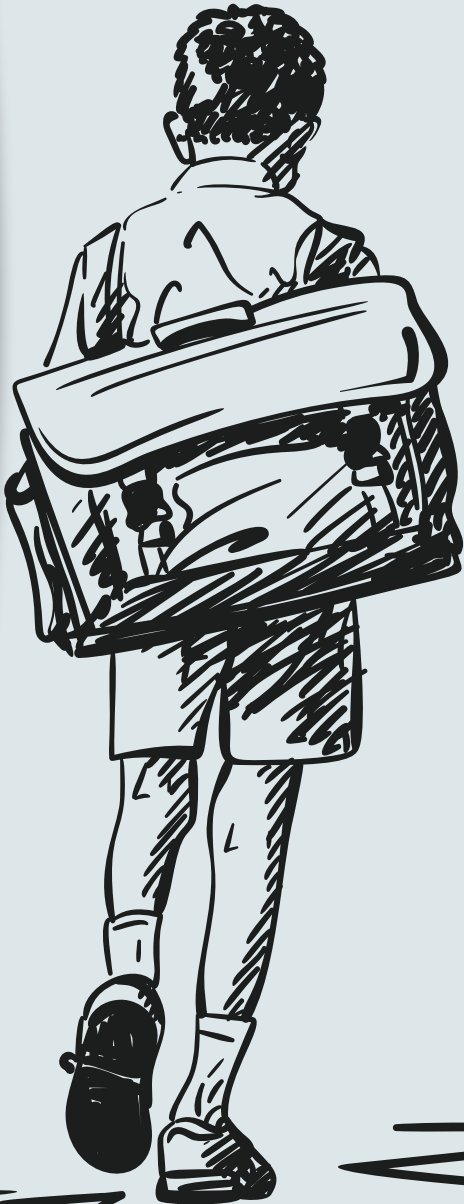
Dr Haifa Ali, a principal of another leading private school, commented, “While marketing is important, the foundation of a school’s success is its academic outcomes and the satisfaction of its students and parents. We focus on maintaining high standards throughout the year. Our best marketing tool is the success stories of our students. We are working hard to keep connected to all parents to ensure their satisfaction of the achievement and the performance of teachers. That is the real and true marketing target for us.”

The debate between seasonal marketing and performance quality continues among both parents and educators.

Many argue that while well-crafted campaigns can indeed support enrolment in the short term, they must be supported by tangible, year-round results to sustain the school’s reputation in the long term.

As Asma mentioned, “A school’s true value becomes apparent not in its advertisements, but in the everyday experiences and achievements of its students.” For parents, the decision may come down to whether they prioritise the promises made in these campaigns or the ongoing performance and outcomes the school can deliver. As the new school year begins, this question remains at the forefront for many.”

SOPHISTICATED MARKETING TACTICS
REGULATORY OVERSIGHT ON ADVERTISING
MARKETING VS MERIT
CONCERNS ABOUT MARKETING VS EDUCATION QUALITY
EMPHASIS ON ACADEMIC OUTCOMES, STUDENT SATISFACTION





The Sri Lankan government has announced visa-free entry for citizens including Oman with effect from October 1

Omanis eligible for visa-free entry to Lanka

MUSCAT: The Sri Lankan government has announced visa-free entry for citizens of 35 countries, including the Sultanate of Oman, according to a statement from the Sultanate of Oman's embassy in Colombo.

The new rule will come into effect from October 1, 2024, for six months, after which it will be reviewed.

It will offer the free issuance of 30-day tourist visas to citizens of the following countries: India, the UK, China, the US, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Australia, Denmark, Poland, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Nepal, Indonesia, Russia, and Thailand.

Other nations on the list are Malaysia, Japan, France, Canada, the Czech Republic, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Israel, Belarus, Iran, Sweden, South Korea, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, and New Zealand.

Under a visa-free system, travellers can enter a country without obtaining a visa beforehand, which will help avoid visa processes and visa fees.

It may be noted the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat recently hosted the Sri Lankan Roadshow under the theme of 'Serendib the Golden Island', promoting Sri Lankan Culture, Tourism, and Trade. The event was aimed at showcasing Sri Lanka as a premier travel destination to attract tourists during the summer vacation in Oman as well as to portray Sri Lankan vibrant culture and trade opportunities.

ISG International students shine in Cambridge GCE, IGCSE exams

MUSCAT: Students of ISG International showcased a stellar performance in the Cambridge Assessment International Education, June Series 2024 Examinations.

The school bagged a whopping 34 A* in the IGCSE Qualification batch of 2024. In the AS Level Examination, candidates from ISG International secured 7A* and 3 A Grades.

In the IGCSE Qualification Exam, Dakshita Sharma bagged A* in all subjects of her choice — Coordinated Sciences, Global Perspectives, French, English as First Language and Mathematics.

Akshay Praveen bagged 5 A* - Sciences, Global Perspectives, ICT and Mathematics. Nidhi Roshan bagged 5 A* - Coordinated Sciences, English as First Language, French and Mathematics. Zarifa Karim bagged 5 A* - Coordinated Sciences, French, ICT and Mathematics.

The school has scripted history with 12 ICE Awards with Distinction and 5 ICE Awards with Merit. In the AS and A Level Qualification examination the school bagged 7 A* s and 10 A Grades, which speaks aloud the unwavering commitment of the students and faculty of ISG International. Vaibhavi Ashok Shetty bagged A Grades all the subjects of her choice – Biology, Mathematics, English and Physics, in AS level.

Chitrangada Siddharth Chaturvedi, Simran Kawatra bagged 3 A*s in the A level.

In addition to these academic achievements, ISG International offers cutting-edge AI classes, further preparing students for the future. The school also earned 10 Top in Oman awards last year, 2023-24, reinforcing its position as a leader in education. The Management, Principal, Staff and students jointly expressed their delight and appreciation of the stupendous performance of the students and setting a mark in the annals of the history of the school.

MoE, MoHERI joint panel holds second meeting

MUSCAT: The joint committee between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation held its second meeting last week in the Nizwa Hall at the Ministry's General Diwan.

The committee was chaired by Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, and by Dr Bakhit bin Ahmed al Mahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Higher Education.

The meeting discussed aspects of joint cooperation and exchange of expertise and information in various aspects between the two ministries in the field of controls and conditions for accepting students in educational specialisations and educational qualification programmes, and the involvement of experts and curriculum specialists in the ministry in joint committees with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The meeting also addressed the creation of postgraduate programmes and studies that are compatible with the new curricula and study paths to prepare specialised teachers, and the extent of readiness for the outputs of the vocational and technical education path in coordination with educational institutions to accommodate these outputs to continue university studies in these specialisations according to priority. It also discussed the development of a description of the new study materials for the academic year 2024-2025 that are compatible with the offered study programmes, and participation in determining the elective materials for grades 9-12 that are compatible with the needs of higher education institutions and the labour market. The committee also reviewed the cooperation in implementing the 'Work Experience' and 'My Specialisation is My Profession' programmes.

The meeting also discussed the possibility of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation obtaining the Ministry of Education's needs for teachers and specialisations for the next 5 years; to develop appropriate plans to provide these needs and to establish lists of students benefiting from the specified study seats for the teaching jobs localisation programme, and other areas of joint cooperation between the two ministries.



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of Ministry of Social Development hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
327/2024	General maintenance work for daycare buildings in the General Directorate of Persons with Disabilities at Al Khoud	Companies specialized in the field of building contracting registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board at the fourth degree	Sunday 15-9-2024 02:00 PM	Sunday 6-10-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
328/2024	Supply and installation of waterproofing for the building of Al-Wafa Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities at the Wilayat of Bidbid	Companies specialized in the field of building contracting registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board at the fourth degree	Sunday 15-9-2024 02:00 PM	Sunday 6-10-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On **Sunday 25/8/2024**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om

Calls for light shades for buildings

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

Muscat Municipality has urged all apartment owners to use white and light shades when choosing the colours of the exterior walls, architectural protrusions, and fences of buildings.

According to architectural guidelines, the external use of light-coloured will help the heat reduction process due to its reflective quality and minimal absorption of heat. The guidelines state that shades of white are used in Oman to maintain a relationship between the context and the architecture. It may be noted that several travel writers and vloggers have always highlighted the skyline of Muscat, which is distinguished from neighbouring cities due to the absence of skyscrapers, and white or light-shaded buildings because it reflects the peace-loving nature of the city where different cultures live in harmony.



THE ROYAL GUARD OF OMAN

Tenders Advertisement

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

Tender Reference	Subject	Grade	Tender Document Value	Submission Date
04/2024	Maintenace in Al Zulfa Masjid at Seeb	III & above	R.O. 50/- non-refundable	14 th Oct 2024
05/2024	Maintenace in Al Husn Mess at Seeb	III & above	R.O. 60/- non-refundable	14 th Oct 2024
06/2024	Supply of Tyres for the year 2025	III & above	R.O. 25/- non-refundable	07 th Oct 2024

Specialized Companies registered with the Procurement and Contracts Directorate of the General Directorate of Finance, Royal Guard of Oman and the General Secretariat of Tender Board - Sultanate of Oman, can collect the tender document from the Tender Committee Secretariat, Royal Guard of Oman, Seeb during working hours from **Sunday 25th August to Thursday 05th September 2024**.

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

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

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



Truce talks resume as Israel pummels Gaza

CAIRO: Gaza ceasefire and captives negotiators discussed new compromise proposals in Cairo on Saturday, seeking to bridge gaps between Israel and Palestinians as the UN reported worsening humanitarian conditions, with malnutrition soaring and polio discovered.

Israeli military strikes in Gaza killed 50 people on Saturday, Palestinian health authorities said. Victims of hostilities over the past 48 hours remain lying on roads where fighting continues or trapped under rubble, the authorities said.

A Hamas delegation arrived on Saturday to be nearer at hand to review any proposals that emerge in the main talks between Israel and the mediating countries Egypt, Qatar and the United States, two Egyptian security sources said. Qatari Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani was expected to attend.

Months of on-off talks have so far failed to produce a breakthrough to end Israel's devastating military campaign in Gaza or free the remaining



Palestinians inspect damage in Hamad City, following an Israeli raid, in Khan Yunis. — Reuters

captives seized by Hamas in the group's October 7 attack. The Egyptian sources said the new proposals include compromises on outstanding points such as how to secure key areas and the return of people to north Gaza. However, there was no sign of any breakthrough on key sticking points, including Israel's insistence that it must retain control of the so-called Philadelphi Corridor, on the border between Gaza and Egypt. Hamas has accused Israel of going back on things it had previously agreed to in the talks. The group says the United States is not mediating in good faith. In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has locked horns with Israeli ceasefire negotiators over whether Israeli troops must remain all along the border between Gaza and Egypt, a person with knowledge of the talks said. A Palestinian official familiar with mediation efforts said it was too soon to predict the outcome of talks. — Reuters

Zelensky vows 'retribution' for Russia

KYIV: President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed more "retribution" against Russia on Ukrainian Independence Day on Saturday, as Kyiv and Moscow announced the exchange of 230 prisoners just over two weeks into Ukraine's surprise offensive on Kursk. Zelensky also signed a law banning the Russian-linked branch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and called the legislation a "liberation from Moscow's devils".

Kyiv marked its independence from the Soviet Union at a tense moment in the long war as it mounts a push into Russia and Moscow eyes more east Ukrainian towns. Zelensky published a video of him standing in a hilly, forested area filmed near from where Ukraine launched its shock incursion on August 6. "Russia was seeking one thing: to destroy us... Instead, today we celebrate the 33rd Independence Day of Ukraine and what the enemy brought to our land has now returned to its home," he said. The Ukrainian leader said Russia will "know what



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (R) and his wife Olena walk along an alley dedicated to the memory of the fallen warriors during the Independence Day of Ukraine in Kyiv. — AFP

retribution is" and called President Vladimir Putin a "man from Red Square who constantly threatens everyone with the red button," referring to nuclear war. Zelensky held official independence celebrations on Kyiv's Sofia Square, with Polish President Andrzej Duda and Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte. Kyiv said on Saturday that a Russian bombardment in the eastern city of Kostyantynivka had killed five people and

Ukraine has carried out evacuations from the hub of Pokrovsk amid fears it will fall. Both Kyiv and Moscow said they had returned 115 captive servicemen each in a deal brokered by the United Arab Emirates. "Another 115 of our defenders have returned home today. These are soldiers of the National Guard, the Armed Forces, the Navy, the State Border Guard Service," Zelensky said. He published photographs of men wrapped in

“Russia was seeking one thing: to destroy us... Instead, today we celebrate the 33rd Independence Day of Ukraine”
VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY
Ukrainian President

Ukrainian flags. Kyiv had said one of the aims of its Kursk operation was to gain more Russian captives to get back its men from Russia. There were widespread reports in Russia of young conscripts going missing in Kursk. Moscow said "115 Russian servicemen taken prisoner in the Kursk region have been returned from territories controlled by the Kyiv regime." It said the troops were currently in neighbouring Belarus and will be brought to Russia soon, releasing images of young-looking men near buses in a field. — AFP

German police hunt festival attack suspect

SOLINGEN: German police on Saturday hunted a man who stabbed three people to death and wounded eight others at a street festival in the city of Solingen, with a terror motive for the attack "not excluded". The knifeman went on a rampage in the western town of Solingen late on Friday, as thousands had gathered for the first night of a "Festival of Diversity", part of a series of events to mark the town's 650th anniversary. On Saturday, police announced they had detained a person as part of the probe, with a prosecutor later saying it was a 15-year-old who may have been in contact with the knifeman. "The author (of the attack) has not yet been identified," Markus Caspers, prosecutor of Duesseldorf that lies just west of Solingen, told a press conference. "We have not been able to identify a motive for now, but in view of all of the circumstances, we are working under the assumption that the initial suspicion of a terrorist motive cannot be excluded," Caspers said. The people killed were



Police patrol near the scene where at least three people were killed and several injured, in Solingen, western Germany. — AFP

men of 56 and 67 years of age and a 56-year-old woman, officials said. "The victims were completely unknown with no known ties between them, so based on this we're concluding that it could be a terror act," Caspers said, adding that "no other motive is evident at this time". Four of the wounded were in a "serious" condition, officials said, revising down an earlier estimate. "After analysing the first images, we're going on the principle that it was an attack targeted towards the neck," police chief Thorsten Fleiss told the press conference. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TERMINI IMERESE

Sicily prosecutor opens probe in yacht sinking

An Italian prosecutor has opened a manslaughter investigation into the deaths of British tech magnate Mike Lynch and six other people who were killed when a luxury yacht sank in stormy weather off Sicily. The head of the public prosecutor's office of Termini Imerese, Ambrogio Cartosio, said that while the yacht had been hit by a very sudden meteorological event, it was "plausible" that crimes of multiple manslaughter and causing a shipwreck through



negligence had been committed. So far the investigation was not aimed at any individual person. Fifteen people survived, including Lynch's wife and the yacht's captain. — Reuters

MONTPELLIER

Authorities open probe after blast in France

An explosion outside a synagogue in southern France wounded a police officer early on Saturday, in what authorities said was being treated as a potential terror attack. Security around sites was tightened following the early Saturday blast outside the Beth Yaacov synagogue in the seaside resort of La Grande Motte, near the city of Montpellier. A fire was also started at the entrance of the synagogue, but was quickly put out, with two



doors damaged, investigators said. President Emmanuel Macron called the incident "an act of terror". PM Gabriel Attal said prosecutors had been tasked with probing the incident. — AFP

SARAJEVO

Toll rises to 12 in Balkan migrant boat tragedy

The death toll from the sinking of a migrant boat on the Bosnia-Serbia border rose to 12 on Saturday after local residents found another body, the authorities said. The vessel, which was carrying 28 to 30 migrants, capsized in the Drina River in a bid to cross from Serbia to Bosnia, leaving a nine-month-old baby girl and her mother among the dead. "The body of the twelfth migrant, who died when the



boat overturned on the Drina River, was found today in the town of Tegare near Bratunac," the head of Bosnia's civil protection service Boris Trninic confirmed. — AFP

Harris promises ‘new way forward’



Katie Rogers

The writer is a White House correspondent for The New York Times



Reid J. Epstein

The writer is a New York Times reporter covering politics

Vice-President Kamala Harris used her acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention to present herself as a pragmatic leader who could unite all Americans behind a “new way forward,” painting her opponent, former President Donald Trump, as a dangerous and “unserious man” whose election would alter the foundation of American democracy.

With a steady voice and a straightforward gaze, Harris, a former prosecutor, presented the lengthiest and most serious case she has made against Trump as a presidential candidate.

At each turn of the nearly 40-minute address, Harris warned that the former president’s truculent behaviour belied a serious and substantive threat to Americans, whether they are seeking access to reproductive health care, concerned about the safety and stability of diplomatic relationships, or worried about the flow of immigrants across the nation’s southern border.

“With this election, our nation has a precious, fleeting opportunity to move past the bitterness, cynicism and divisive battles of the past,” she said. “A chance to chart a new way forward. Not as members of any one party or faction, but as Americans.”

Speaking to thousands of supporters at the United Center in Chicago, Harris acknowledged that her candidacy was not the one her party was expecting as little as a few weeks ago. But she told the crowd that she was “no stranger to unlikely journeys,” describing herself as the daughter of an Indian scientist whose dreams of a new life in the United States became the catalyst for Harris’ legal and political career. Her mother, she said wryly, taught her to “never do anything half-assed.”

Yet Harris did not try to sell her supporters on a presidency that would be wildly different from the one held for the past 3½ years by President Joe Biden, who, as a candidate, fought against a leftward drift in his party during the 2020 presidential race and later pulled Harris onto the ticket. Biden, 81, also promised to be a uniter at a time when the country was deeply divided and reeling from the coronavirus pandemic. He, too, had long-embraced a “middle out, bottom up” economic philosophy focused on protecting American technology advancements, curbing the rise of global competitors and retraining workers.

Harris promoted policies that would address housing affordability, ideas that amount to incremental change from those Biden has laid out. But what is different now is not the policies — it is the candidate, a 59-year old woman who took the stage to rapturous applause and vowed to push her party forward.

For weeks, Harris had approached the biggest speech of her political career knowing that she needed to reintroduce herself to Americans who may know her only as the vice-president who ascended to



Vice-President Kamala Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, arrives to speak on the fourth day of the Democratic National Convention at the United Center in Chicago. – NYT

the top of the ticket after Biden botched a debate and abandoned his candidacy.

The speech contained the most extensive remarks on foreign policy that Harris has delivered as the presidential nominee. She presented herself as a deliberate and forceful leader and a defender of traditional alliances, in contrast to Trump’s decisions and coddling of overseas autocrats, while declaring herself prepared to handle the crisis in the Gaza Strip that sapped Biden’s popularity.

The section of her speech dedicated to the war in Gaza generated one of the biggest applause lines of the night from the convention crowd — and served as a capstone to a week in which pro-Palestinian demonstrators marched near the United Center and a small group of delegates protested the war from inside the arena grounds. Harris denounced the attack on October 7 and said of Gaza since the attack, “The scale of suffering is heartbreaking.”

Harris and her advisers knew that she needed to

further define the threat posed by Trump, choosing to focus at length on Project 2025, a conservative policy agenda drafted by his allies. She warned that the policies could have a devastating effect on reproductive health, leading to a nationwide abortion ban and further restrictions to women’s health care.

The race remains uncomfortably close for Democrats, though in recent weeks Harris has gained ground with young people, Black voters and women, all groups that are crucial to the party’s success in November.

And with rousing speech after rousing speech at the convention this week, members of the Democratic Party made it clear that they were optimistic about her chances in the months ahead. And several party leaders, including former President Barack Obama, have hinted that Harris and her running mate, Gov. Tim Walz of Minnesota, will have help on the campaign trail.

Harris had approached the biggest speech of her political career knowing that she needed to reintroduce herself to Americans who may know her only as the vice president

Why AI often struggles with math



Steve Lohr

The author is a New York Times reporter, covering technology

In the school year that ended recently, one class of learners stood out as a seeming puzzle. They are hardworking, improving and remarkably articulate. But curiously, these learners — artificially intelligent chatbots — often struggle with math.

Chatbots such as Open AI’s ChatGPT can write poetry, summarise books and answer questions, often with human-level fluency. These systems can do math, based on what they have learned, but the results can vary and be wrong. They are fine-tuned for determining probabilities, not doing rules-based calculations. Likelihood is not accuracy, and language is more flexible, and forgiving, than math.

“The AI chatbots have difficulty with math because they were never designed to do it,” said Kristian Hammond, a computer science professor and artificial intelligence researcher at Northwestern University.

That, on the face of it, is a sharp break with computing’s past. Since the early computers appeared in the 1940s, a good summary definition of computing has been “math on steroids.” Computers have been tireless, fast, accurate calculating machines. Crunching numbers has long been what computers are really good at, far exceeding human performance.

Traditionally, computers have been programmed to follow step-by-step rules and

retrieve information in structured databases. They were powerful but brittle. So, past efforts at AI hit a wall.

Yet, more than a decade ago, a different approach broke through and began to deliver striking gains. The underlying technology, called a neural network, is loosely modelled on the human brain.

This kind of AI is not programmed with rigid rules, but learns by analysing vast amounts of data. It generates language, based on all the information it has absorbed, by predicting what word or phrase is most likely to come next — much as humans do.

The AI’s proficiency is getting better, but it remains a shortcoming.

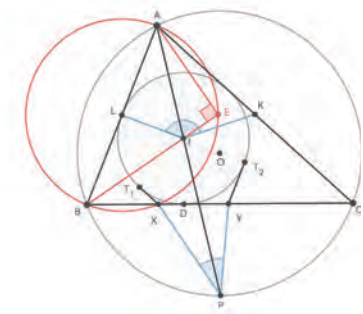
Speaking at a recent symposium, Kristen DiCerbo, chief learning officer of Khan Academy, an education non-profit that is experimenting with an AI chatbot tutor and teaching assistant, introduced the subject of math accuracy. “It is a problem, as many of you know,” DiCerbo told the educators.

A few months ago, Khan Academy made a significant change to its AI-powered tutor, called Khanmigo.

It sends many numerical problems to a calculator programme instead of asking the AI to solve the math. While waiting for the calculator programme to finish, students see the words “doing math” on their screens and a Khanmigo icon bobbing its head.

For more than a year, ChatGPT has used a

Let ABC be a triangle with $AB < AC < BC$. Let the incentre and incircle of ABC be I and ω , respectively. Let X be the point on line BC different from C such that AX is tangent to ω . Similarly, let Y be the point on line BC such that AY is tangent to ω . Let Z be the point on line BC such that AZ is tangent to ω . Let AF intersect the incircle ω again at P and Q . Let R and L be the midpoints of AC and AB , respectively. Prove that $\angle KPL = 180^\circ$.



AlphaGeometry 2 solved Problem 4 of the Olympiad in 19 seconds, after receiving the formalised statement of the problem in AlphaGeometry’s own language. – NYT

AI chatbots have stumbled with simple arithmetic and math word problems that require multiple steps to reach a solution, something recently documented by some technology reviewers

similar work around for some math problems. For tasks such as large-number division and multiplication, the chatbot summons help from a calculator programme.

Math is an “important ongoing area of research,” OpenAI said in a statement, and a field where its scientists have made steady progress. Its new version of GPT achieved nearly 64 per cent accuracy on a public database of thousands of problems requiring visual perception and mathematical reasoning, the company said. That is up from 58 per cent for the previous version.

The AI chatbots often excel when they have consumed vast quantities of relevant training data — textbooks, drills and standardised tests. The effect is that the chatbots have seen and analysed very similar, if not the same, questions before.

The large language models, LeCun has said, have little grasp of logic and lack common-sense reasoning. What’s needed, he insists, is a broader approach, which he calls “world modelling,” or systems that can learn how the world works much as humans do. And it may take a decade or so to achieve.

In the meantime, though, Meta is incorporating AI-powered smart assistant software in its social media services including Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, based on its large language model, LLaMA. The current models may be flawed, but they still do a lot.

When a parent is a psychopath



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

I RECENTLY came across a tweet in Arabic that translates to ‘In the psychiatric hospitals, we don’t receive patients, but their victims.’

My initial response was that of anger as such a statement reinforced negative beliefs and stigma against people with a mental health condition. I then realised it was probably referring to people who have personality disorders where part of the burden of the condition falls on people who interact with the patient such as his close friends, family members or co-workers.

People with personality disorders are often impulsive and have difficulty understanding emotions and tolerating distress which makes it hard for them to relate to others. Such conditions affect the person’s personal and social life.

While there are several types of personality disorders, the most commonly known to the public are the dissocial (also known as psychopath), the narcissist and the borderline. People with these disorders are more likely to cause trouble and grievance to those around them because of their lack of empathy and emotional consideration of others, their emotional instability and difficulties

with interpersonal relationships. In social media, the term ‘toxic people’ is often used to describe a person who has features of a personality disorder. Dealing with a person who has a personality disorder can be psychologically and emotionally draining.

Take for example the narcissistic mother who undermines her daughter’s efforts at school while posing in all school photos when the daughter gets a certificate while stating to the audience that she is a great mother who always encourages her children.

Or the psychopathic husband who is controlling and emotionally abusing, blaming his wife constantly and showing no remorse for his actions, or the teenager with borderline personality disorder who exhibits massive mood swings threatens self-harm, and displays impulsive behaviours when his demands are not met.

So how do you deal with a loved one who has a personality disorder? Start by acknowledging the problem and reading more about it.

You may need the help of a psychiatrist to confirm the diagnosis. Set boundaries by letting them know what behaviours are acceptable and what are not, and be consistent in enforcing these boundaries.

WHILE THERE ARE SEVERAL TYPES OF PERSONALITY DISORDERS THE MOST COMMONLY KNOWN TO THE PUBLIC ARE THE DISSOCIAL (ALSO KNOWN AS PSYCHOPATH), THE NARCISSIST AND THE BORDERLINE

Approach intense emotions and impulsive behaviours by being patient and empathetic. Encourage them to seek professional support as several types of therapy can help. At times, you may feel that you also need psychological support from support groups or a therapist.

Use non-confrontational and non-judgmental language such as ‘I’ statements to express your feelings and concerns would help you avoid triggering defensive reactions. Acknowledging and reinforcing simple acts of positive behaviours when they occur can help build trust and encourage more of these behaviours in the future.

Sometimes, progress may be slow and there may be setbacks along the way so it’s important to stay hopeful and persistent while also managing your expectations. When the situation becomes harmful to your well-being you need to step back or limit contact with the person until they seek treatment and begin to manage their condition more effectively.

Finally, remember that being compassionate while setting boundaries and seeking professional guidance, both for you and your loved one can help in navigating these challenges.

Experts meet as final global plastic treaty talks near

SARA HUSSEIN

With months until crunch talks on the world’s first binding treaty on plastic pollution, experts are meeting in Bangkok to discuss financing options and problematic plastics. The four-day gathering is a largely technical waypoint on the road to final negotiations in late November in South Korea’s Busan. There, countries are hoping to seal a potentially groundbreaking deal to tackle the gargantuan problem of plastic pollution.

The scale of the issue is almost unprecedented — microplastics have been found in the deepest ocean trenches, highest mountain peaks. Plastic production has doubled in 20 years and at current rates it could triple by 2060, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Yet over 90 per cent of plastic is not recycled, with much of it dumped in nature or buried in landfills. Negotiators have already met four times to discuss a deal that could include production caps, unified rules on recyclability, and even bans on certain plastics or chemical components. But significant gaps remain, including on whether the treaty will be adopted by consensus or a majority vote.

Other flashpoints include whether plastic production will be addressed, Eirik Lindebjerg, global plastics policy lead at WWF, said.

“Is it within the scope to talk about production, or does the value chain start after plastic products are made? And then if we can regulate production... is it with a cap, is it with a reduction target, what are the measures?” he said.

“That’s been a very contentious issue.”

Environmental groups have long argued that the treaty must include curbs on new plastic, a position backed by dozens of countries who call themselves the “high ambition coalition”.

They may now have a powerful ally in the form of the US, which has reportedly thrown its backing behind some production limits.

That shift has been welcomed by environmental groups, though Lindebjerg warned it was not yet clear if Washington would back mandatory caps or weaker voluntary limits. Just how binding the deal will be is another source of contention.

Some countries want measures like a unified timeline for phasing out certain plastics, while others back vaguer language that would let nations decide how and when to regulate. — AFP



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The Zionist deceitful diplomacy

WE are all now aware of the terrible deceit and lies perpetuated by America, the UK, and their Western allies telling us that Al Qaeda was in Iraq. Deceit and lies which they used to justify their invasion of that country causing the deaths of many hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis.

I never once believed these disgraceful lies.

I therefore find it difficult to understand why anyone should listen to let alone believe anything these same countries tell us about their desire to bring about peace in Palestine.

America and the UK and very likely other Western countries have supplied the Zionists with the weapons to carry out an act of genocide in the State of Palestine. And they continue to support the Zionists in murdering tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians.

Secretary Blinken’s statement on his recent return from the Zionist Colony in the State of Palestine was “The first is to reaffirm the commitment of the United States to Israel’s security, and that’s a commitment that we have put into practice virtually every day since October 7, including when Israel was attacked directly by Iran back in April.”

This isn’t just a policy statement, it is immoral and evil. The same adjectives apply to the invitation given by America for the Zionist criminal Netanyahu to deliver a speech to the United States Congress in July 2024.

So let us stop listening to the words of people we know who have ulterior motives and a history of telling lies about such important global issues.

Moreover, the assassination by the Zionists of one of the key peace negotiators, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, demonstrates once again the desire of the Zionists to sabotage any meaningful peace talks. The assassination of Haniyeh was a clear signal that they didn’t want peace. It is now not simply difficult to continue peace negotiations, it is futile.

I have studied the ideology of modern Zionism from its first conference in 1897 until the present day. Zionism is rooted in nationalism, extremism and imperialism. Zionists view compromise as a temporary measure — a tactic rather than a



A woman reacts after an Israeli strike on a school, housing displaced Palestinians, in the Rimal neighbourhood of central Gaza City, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas. – AFP

ANY NEGOTIATED PEACE THAT ALLOWS THE ZIONISTS TO CONTINUE TO OCCUPY THE STATE OF PALESTINE WILL EVENTUALLY LEAD TO A FAR WIDER CONFLICT

genuine pursuit of peace. Their stated aim is to occupy the whole of the State of Palestine.

For Zionists diplomacy is not a means to achieve peace but just one of their strategies to achieve their goal to ethnically cleanse the whole of the State of Palestine of its rightful owners. They engage in peace talks, not out of a genuine desire for a peaceful resolution but as a means to achieve their goals. Just like their former allies, the Nazis, the Zionists’ ultimate objective is not coexistence with the Palestinians but conquest. By engaging in such futile peace talks we are falling into the Zionist trap and emboldening them.

Having studied the events in World War Two and the mistakes made by that appeaser Neville Chamberlain on September 30, 1938 in Munich we know that when dealing with those who follow an evil ideology we can’t trust them.

Britain and France were keen to avoid an all-out war with Nazi Germany in 1938. Still, history

has shown that appeasement and compromise with expansionist powers do not lead to lasting peace but rather to further aggression and conflict.

If the British and French had listened to Winston Churchill who fully understood the evil nature of Nazism the Second World War and the death of 40 million people could have been avoided.

The peace talks with the Nazis in Munich were for Hitler an opportunity to buy time, regroup and strengthen their position for further aggression. The same is true for Netanyahu. We know that any agreement reached with the Zionists will be short-lived. Any peace will be temporary and as soon as circumstances allow, the Zionists will return to their aggression and pursue their expansionist policies to occupy the whole of the State of Palestine.

Giving the Zionists a seat at the peace negotiating table legitimises their ideology and their repulsive act of genocide.

Any negotiated peace that allows the Zionists to continue to occupy the State of Palestine will eventually lead to a far wider conflict. The delay by depending on non-military solutions could result in catastrophic consequences not just for the Palestinians but for the rest of the world. We should learn from history. As with Nazism, we must eradicate Zionism.

A poet sensitive to light...

The poet Carol Rumens tells a story as she writes in ‘The Emigree,’ of the complexities of migrant life that the ordinary person can probably never understand. From a collection by the poet entitled ‘Thinking of Skins,’ it offers a window to the confused thoughts of a migrant, on that journey that, but for the grace of Allah, we could all have taken, in another life, at another time, and in another place.

‘The Emigree’ speaks not of rights, but appears to have uniquely captured the uncertainties of migration, and I have integrated the poetry here to promote a colloquial understanding rather than a literary perspective. I have always been keen to present poetry in this way, and this work offers a rare opportunity to do so... ‘There once was a country...’ and the pause here speaks not only wistfully of home, but of reflection, but certainly tinged with regret. ‘I left it as a child but my memory of it is sunlight-clear for it seems I never saw it in that November which, I am told, comes to the mildest city.’

We understand the female child she was at the time didn’t want to leave her happy place behind. However, ‘The worst news I receive of it cannot break my original view, the bright, filled paperweight.’

The news is clearly of war or conflict from the home which is never identified, though she could easily be speaking of somewhere like the Sudan, where corruption is rife. ‘It may be at war,’ she wrote, and ‘it may be sick with tyrants, but I am branded by an impression of sunlight.’ So she still holds on tightly to all that was good in her old home, still longs for its light, maybe a metaphor for its once bright future.

‘The white streets of that city, the graceful slopes glow even clearer as time rolls its tanks and the frontiers rise between us, close like waves,’ has nothing to do with tanks or frontiers,



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‘THINKING OF SKINS’ OFFERS A WINDOW TO THE CONFUSED THOUGHTS OF A MIGRANT, ON THAT JOURNEY THAT, WE COULD ALL HAVE TAKEN, IN ANOTHER LIFE, AT ANOTHER TIME, AND IN ANOTHER PLACE

but the inexorability of time, and how ‘that child’s vocabulary I carried here like a hollow doll, opens and spills a grammar. Soon I shall have every coloured molecule of it,’ expresses clearly that every migrant has a need for the new language, and how proud she is to have mastered the new colourful vocabulary. However, she then finds that her former language, ‘It may by now be a lie, banned by the state but I can’t get it off my tongue.’ So she may have learned a new language, but her native language will live on, in her, and she so loves it, as ‘It tastes of sunlight.’

‘I have no passport, there’s no way back at all but my city comes to me in its own white plane. It lies down in front of me, docile as paper; I comb its hair and love its shining eyes. My city takes me dancing through the city of walls.’ So her former safe haven was perfect, but now she finds herself in a new city, probably in reality a new country, seeking a home, but being unwelcome. ‘They accuse me of absence, they circle me. They accuse me of being dark in their free city.’

And so, as she thinks of home, ‘My city hides behind me,’ she feels threatened by this new freedom, and in hearing, ‘They mutter death, and my shadow falls as evidence of sunlight,’ she feels unease in this new place, that she cannot yet call home, as there is no sunlight, no light. I don’t believe that the use of the word death means that she particularly feels threatened at this time, but maybe she feels the fate of every city, every country, is to be doomed to conflict and ruin.

I’m uncertain though whether Rumens is judgemental of societies, and their attitude to immigrants, but is trying to see displacement, and forced migration, through their eyes, rather than ours, which is most often the perspective. Interestingly, this poem was published in 1993, all of 31 years ago... As much as things change... they stay the same.

CELEBRATION MOOD!



A boy dressed as ‘Krishna’ breaks a dahi-handi (curd-pot) suspended in the air during celebrations ahead of Krishna Janmashtami festival, in Amritsar, India, on Saturday. – AFP

Kamala policy plans face new scrutiny

In a roundtable discussion at last week’s Democratic National Convention, presidential candidate Kamala Harris’ senior policy adviser Brian Nelson was peppered with questions about the policies at the heart of her campaign.

Will Harris try to revive the Iran nuclear deal? How will she pay for expanded child tax credits and her plans to help first-time home buyers? Again and again, he gave the same answer.

“I am not going to get ahead of the vice president,” Nelson said eight times during the 45-minute event.

When Harris accepted her party’s nomination on Thursday night, she laid out a series of muscular foreign policy principles - stand up to Russia and North Korea, and defend Israel’s right to self defence while also backing Palestinians’ right to self-determination.

She also promised a middle-class tax cut at home, an end to America’s housing shortage and a secure southern border. The speech delighted her Democratic supporters and was tougher than most observers had expected, but still more focused on broad principles than details.

Harris, 59, has not had much time to formulate detailed plans - she only became the Democratic candidate a month ago after President Joe Biden abandoned his failing reelection campaign under pressure from his own party.

Part of it is by design, too. The vice president and her aides have avoided offering up clear examples of where she may depart from Biden’s policies.



JARRETT RENSHAW

The writer is White House reporter for Reuters

HARRIS HAS NOT HAD MUCH TIME TO FORMULATE DETAILED PLANS - SHE ONLY BECAME THE DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE A MONTH AGO AFTER BIDEN ABANDONED HIS FAILING REELECTION CAMPAIGN UNDER PRESSURE FROM HIS OWN PARTY

Buoyed by a wave of enthusiasm, donations and much better polling numbers since Harris entered the race, her team is wary of providing enough detail that Republican candidate Donald Trump and his campaign find new ways to attack her. With particularly thorny issues like energy policy, Harris’ aides describe their deliberately vague approach as “strategically ambiguous.”

One campaign aide said that Harris will lay out more “value statements” than granular policy and “let voters connect the dots.”

Harris will face mounting pressure to flesh out her policies in the last 75 days of the campaign.

Chauncey McLean, founder of the super PAC known as Future Forward, the largest outside group backing Harris, said last week that voters are already asking questions: “What’s her plan? What’s she going to do? And specifically, what is she going to do to make my life better?”

A former California attorney general and US senator, Harris launched a White House bid four years ago but quickly fell out of contention for her party’s nomination. An uneven campaigner then, she changed her message and tactics on the fly with little effect.

This time, she has sought to portray herself as both an extension of the Biden administration and the face of a new generation. It has so far been

successful and she has made clear gains against Trump in polls, turning it back into a tight race.

When Harris rolled out an economic plan to fight grocery store price-gouging, Trump branded the effort as socialism despite similar efforts in 37 states. He called Harris “Comrade Kamala.”

On Thursday night, he attacked her speech at the Democratic convention. “No specific policies, ALL TALK, NO ACTION,” he said in a social media post.

The Harris campaign has said she no longer supports a ban on hydraulic fracking and

a single-payer health system, or Medicare for all, two positions she supported in her unsuccessful 2020 bid for president.

The final sprint to Election Day on November 5 includes at least one televised debate against Trump in September. She is expected also to sit for one-one-one national interviews where she will be pressed for more policy details. Campaign aides say she will cross the country with an emphasis on battleground states like Arizona, Georgia and Pennsylvania that will decide the election.

At the convention in Chicago last week, US Senate Majority

Leader Chuck Schumer summed up the sentiment of a party eager to put off policy discussions and focus more on defeating Trump.

Minutes before he addressed climate activists, Schumer was asked whether Harris needed to provide a more detailed climate agenda in the upcoming weeks.

“People should have a lot of faith. She’s going to be a great environmental president,” he said.

Some of the party faithful in Chicago, asked about Harris’ sparse policy platform, shrugged their shoulders. Others asked why the media was not holding Trump to the same standard. None of the two dozen attendees interviewed expressed any concern.

“Compared to the other guy, give me a break. He’s talking about electric boats and sharks and how he’s better looking. Give me a break,” said US Representative Jim Costa after attending an event at Chicago’s famed Second City comedy club hosted by moderate Democrats.

Tom Malinowski, a former New Jersey congressman, said voters on the fence were not going to be wondering which candidate had the more carefully nuanced position on such matters as carbon adjustment fees.

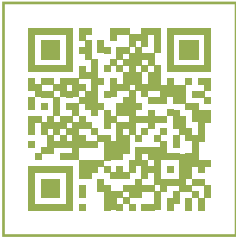
“What they do know, or should know, is that you’ve got one candidate who believes climate change is real and a threat, and that America can and should be leading the world to clean energy and another candidate who doesn’t give a damn,” he said.



Democratic presidential nominee and Vice President Kamala Harris waves from the stage at the United Center in Chicago, Illinois, US. – Reuters

sport

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U-17s excel in friendlies before Jordan Championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

The Oman Under-17 football team concluded their overseas camp on a successful note. The junior Red Warriors had played three friendly games in the external camp which lasted for ten days and all the games ended in victory for the national team.

Oman team finished their last warm-up game against Fenerbahce FC by a 3-1 win to register their third successive victory. The goals were scored by Ahmed al Omrani, Abdulaziz al Balushi and Al Waleed al Rashdi.

In the first preparatory match against Qatar's Al Ahli FC, Oman's boys thrashed Qatari team 5-0. It was the match where Ahmed al Omrani was the star as he netted three goals while Sulieman al Kharousi and



Abdullah al Saadi scored one goal for each. In the following second warm-up game, Oman team managed to earn a 7-3 triumph over FC Sher Bishkek. Osama al Maamari scored two goals while Ahmed al Omrani, Muath al Hinai, Firas al Saadi, Al Yazan al Balushi and Al Waleed al Rashdi etched their

names on the scoresheet by scoring one goal for each. The abroad camp will be followed by a comprehensive internal gathering prior to travelling to Jordan by month end. Amman city will host the 11th edition of the West Asian Championship which will take place from September 2 to 11.



The tournament will feature participation of nine teams which will be distributed into three groups. Oman U-17 team will play against Yemen and Saudi Arabia in Group B while Group A will comprise from the hosts Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon while Bahrain will secure slot against Syria and Palestine

teams in Group C.

Oman begins their group matches at the West Asian tournament with a match against defending champions Yemen on September 2 on the opening day and then meets Saudi Arabia on September 4.

The topper from each group will advance to the seminal

beside the best second-placed team among the three groups. Oman junior Red Warriors will eye to book a slot at 2025 AFC U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers. Oman team will compete against Tajikistan, Guam and host Singapore in Group J for the 2025 AFC U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers.

The national U-17 coaching staff worked very hard during the camp to provide equal chances for the team squad to participate in all the friendly matches to evaluate the performance of the players ahead of the first assignment in Jordan.

It is expected that coach Anwar and his assistant team will finalise the starting list in the coming domestic camp before the assignment of West Asian event by early next month.

Al Gharafa outplays Salalah Club in Gulf Basketball Cup showdown

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

Salalah Club lost their second match against Al Gharafa with a score of 51-31 in the first edition of the Fatima bint Mubarak Gulf Basketball Cup for Girls, being held in Abu Dhabi from August 22 to 26.

Al Gharafa started the game by scoring four points in the first minutes, prompting the Salalah Club players to attempt a comeback and reduce the gap. However, Al Gharafa managed to extend their lead by adding two more points from a fast break, doubling the score.

In the third minute, Buthaina al Maamari scored two points for Salalah Club, reducing the gap to 6-2 in favour of Al Gharafa. Mona al Sayed, a player from Al Gharafa, responded by scoring two more points, followed by Sama Jaber adding another two points, widening the gap for Al Gharafa. But Shams al Duha and Nour al Kharousi from Salalah quickly responded by scoring three points, making the score 10-5.

In the final moments of the first half, Nour al Kharousi surprised everyone by scoring a three-pointer, turning the score in favour of Salalah, 11-10. Then, Shams al Duha back to score two additional points, ending the first half with a score of 13-10 in favour of Salalah.

In the second quarter, Al Gharafa players started strong by scoring 8 quick points, extending their lead to 18-13. Salalah players attempted to come back and narrow the gap but missed several scoring opportunities. Yasmin Abdullah added another point for Al Gharafa.

The excitement continued in the second quarter with



In the final moments of the first half, Nour al Kharousi surprised everyone by scoring a three-pointer, turning the score in favour of Salalah, 11-10

Mona al Sayed scoring two more points from a fast break and another point from a foul. Zeina managed to narrow the gap for Salalah by scoring two points, ending the second quarter with Al Gharafa leading 27-15.

The third quarter saw clear dominance from Salalah Club, who tried to make a comeback. Nour al Kharousi scored a three-pointer in the third minute, followed by Shams al Duha scoring two more points, reducing the gap to 27-20 in favour of Al Gharafa. The competition intensified between the two teams as Al Gharafa added 6 points compared to 5 points for Salalah, ending the quarter with a score of 33-25 in favour of Al Gharafa.

In the fourth quarter, Mona al Sayed opened the scoring for Al Gharafa with three consecutive points, followed by Tala al Tawil, who added another three-pointer to extend Al Gharafa's lead.

Salalah players tried to narrow the gap through Rouba al Kalbani, who scored two points, making the score 39-26. Both teams continued to exchange attacks, with Salalah striving to get back into the game, but Al Gharafa maintained their dominance and showed strong defence, preventing Salalah from getting closer to the score. The match ended with a 51-31 victory for Al Gharafa.

TABLE OMAN PROFESSIONAL LEAGUE							
#	Club	W	D	L	Goals	+/-	Pts
1	Al-Seeb	2	2	0	0	4:1	3
2	Oman Club	2	2	0	0	3:1	2
2	Al-Khaboura SC	2	2	0	0	3:1	2
4	Al-Nahda	2	2	0	0	2:0	2
5	Al-Nasr	2	1	0	1	4:3	1
6	Sohar SC	2	1	0	1	4:4	0
7	Dhofar Club	0	0	0	0	0:0	0
8	Saham Club	1	0	0	1	1:2	-1
9	Sur SC	1	0	0	1	0:1	-1
10	Al-Shabab SC	2	0	0	2	1:3	-2
11	Ibri Club	2	0	0	2	1:4	-3
12	Al-Rustaq	2	0	0	2	0:3	-3

Excitement builds for Round 3 of Omantel Football League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

The third round of the Omantel Football League is set to be a thrilling encounters, with intense matches between rival teams. The competition for top positions is expected to intensify as teams vie for crucial points.

The second round saw a total of 10 goals, highlighting the attacking prowess and determination of the teams. With the teams continuously improving their performance, the third round promises more goals and surprises.

Al Nahda Club will host Al Shabab Club at the Al Buraimi Sports Complex in a much-anticipated match today. Al Shabab enters the game looking to secure their first points of the season after suffering defeats in both the first and second rounds, putting the team under great pressure to achieve a positive result.

On the other hand, Al Nahda is aiming to continue their winning streak after securing two consecutive victories, placing them at the top of the standings with 6 points, and they aspire to achieve a third consecutive win without dropping any points.

Sunday's matches conclude with a match between Al Seeb Club, which leads with 6 points by goal difference, and Sur Club, which is in ninth place, at Al Seeb Stadium. Seeb seeks to maintain and strengthen its lead

with a third win, while Sur hopes to achieve its first points in the league after losing in the second round and postponing its first match.

Monday will witness an anticipated match between Oman Club and Al Nasr Club at Seeb Stadium, where Oman Club seeks to achieve its third consecutive victory in the league, after a strong start that made it one of the most prominent competing teams.

Al Nasr, placed fifth, enters the match with high morale after its big win in the second round with four clean goals in the first half, and hopes to snatch the match points to get closer to the advanced positions.

On the same day, Sohar Club will host Ibri Club at the Sohar Sports Complex in a match expected to be highly competitive. Sohar, currently in sixth place, is looking to improve their performance after a heavy loss in the second round, while Ibri is aiming for their first win in the league after suffering two consecutive defeats.

The third round will conclude with a match between Saham and Al Rustaq at Al Rustaq Sports Complex, where both teams will be striving to improve their positions in the standings. Al Rustaq is at the bottom of the table after losing their first two matches, while Saham is looking to improve their standing after a loss and a postponed second match.

India's Dhawan calls time on cricket career



NEW DELHI: Flamboyant Indian batsman Shikhar Dhawan announced his retirement from cricket on Saturday, saying he wanted to focus on moving forward in his life. Dhawan, 38, last played a competitive game as captain of the Punjab Kings in this year's edition of the glitzy Indian Premier League T20 tournament.

"As I close this chapter of my cricketing journey, I carry with me countless memories and gratitude. Thank you for the love and support!" he said in a social media post.

"It's important to turn the page to move forward in life and that's why I am announcing my retirement from international and domestic cricket."

The left-hander scored 2,315

runs with seven centuries over 34 Tests.

He was prolific in ODIs, scoring 6,793 runs from 167 matches at an average of 44.11.

Dhawan represented four other teams in the IPL besides Punjab and he is the tournament's second-highest run-scorer after Virat Kohli.

His 6,769 IPL runs came across 221 innings at a strike rate of 127.14.

He last played for India in an ODI series against Bangladesh in December 2022.

"I am leaving with peace in my heart that I played so long for India," Dhawan said.

"I've told myself don't feel sad that you won't play for India anymore, but feel happy that you played for the country."

— AFP

MUSHFIQUR'S EPIC GIVES BANGLADESH LEAD OVER PAKISTAN IN FIRST TEST

RAWALPINDI: Mushfiqur Rahim recorded the highest individual score by a Bangladesh batter in Pakistan and helped push his team into the lead in the first Test in Rawalpindi on Saturday.

The 37-year-old was unbeaten on 173 for his 11th Test century, defying the bowling attack from Mehidy Hasan Miraz as Bangladesh reached 495-6 at tea.

The visitors are now 47 runs ahead of Pakistan's first innings total of 448-6 declared, and have an outside chance of capturing their first win over Pakistan.

Bangladesh have lost 12 of 13 Tests against Pakistan, with one draw.

Mushfiqur overtook the previous highest individual score of 119 by Javed Omar, scored in Peshawar in 2003, and was lucky to get a life on 150 when Babar Azam dropped him off Salman Agha at leg slip.

Mushfiqur has so far struck 20 boundaries and a six in a marathon eight-hour, 10-minute knock, setting a Bangladesh record of 163 for the unbroken seventh wicket with Miraz in all Test cricket.

The previous record of 145 was set by Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudullah Riyadh against New Zealand in Hamilton in 2010.

The Rawalpindi pitch continued to support batting as Bangladesh lost only Liton Das (56) in the two sessions, with Mushfiqur anchoring the batting.

He added 114 for the sixth wicket with Liton to lift Bangladesh.

Before Liton's dismissal, Pakistan thought they had Mushfiqur leg-before by pace bowler Mohammad



Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim (R) and Mehidy Hasan Miraz bump their fists. — AFP

Bangladesh team are now 47 runs ahead of Pakistan's first innings total of 448-6 declared, and have an outside chance of capturing their first win over Pakistan

Ali but umpire Richard Kettleborough's verdict was overturned on review when the replay showed the ball missing leg stump.

Mushfiqur, then on 59, went on to hit two boundaries off both Khurram Shahzad and Saim Ayub before reaching the three-figure mark.

Resuming at 316-5 Bangladesh lost Liton in the ninth over of the day when Naseem Shah's short

delivery caught an edge and wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan took an easy catch.

Liton added just four to his overnight score of 52, hitting eight boundaries and a six.

For Pakistan, Shahzad (2-81) and Naseem (2-92) were the pick of the bowlers.

The second and final Test will also be played in Rawalpindi, from August 30.

— AFP

Gauff, Swiatek, Sabalenka headline tough US Open field

NEW YORK: American Coco Gauff begins her US Open title defence on Arthur Ashe Stadium on Monday, headlining a wide open women's field that includes world number one Iga Swiatek and last year's runner-up Aryna Sabalenka.

Gauff plays France's Varvara Gracheva in the opening round and hopes to put a series of frustrating performances behind her — including early exits from Toronto and Cincinnati — to recapture the magic of her run to a maiden major title.

"I feel like it was a blessing in disguise I lost so early (in Cincinnati), because I was able to actually train, which I hadn't been able to," said Gauff, who competed in the Paris Games.

"I do my best results when I come off a training block. I was able to train for a good week and a half and obviously still have a couple more days to do that."

Gauff could meet Sabalenka in the semi-finals, with the Belarusian hungry for the trophy after coming close but never quite getting the title within her grasp.

She reached at least the semi-final stage of the tournament



USA's Coco Gauff



Iga Swiatek



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka

over the last three years and has learned lessons from tough defeats in New York.

"Those tough losses definitely motivated me a lot to hard work and to improve things which didn't work in the previous years," said Sabalenka.

After retaining her title in Australia, Sabalenka endured a rough mid-year stretch as she suffered a back injury and skipped Wimbledon with a shoulder injury.

She arrived in New York confident and fit, however,

after skipping the Olympics to focus on her health and winning the Cincinnati tune-up tournament.

"I was really happy with the level I played. It's not like it's weight out of my shoulder. It just little, like, happy moment before going to the US Open," said Sabalenka, who closes out on Monday night's programme on Louis Armstrong Stadium against Australian qualifier Priscilla Hon.

Poland's Swiatek hopes to add another title to a

memorable year, after she picked up her fifth major at the French Open and won in Qatar, Indian Wells, Madrid and Rome, as well.

She picked up bronze at the Paris Games and admitted that it has taken some adjustment going from the clay courts of Roland Garros to the hard courts of North America, as she lost to Sabalenka in the Cincinnati semi-final.

"It's been a really intense season, and after the Olympics, it hasn't been kind of, you know,

easy. So I feel the best when I'm just focused on practicing and grinding on the court," the 2022 winner told reporters.

"I'm just going to try to keep that mindset and that attitude."

She opens her campaign against lucky loser Kamilla Rakhimova on Tuesday on Ashe.

Contenders lurk around every corner in New York, as a gruelling year has left the title vulnerable for those hoping to capture a maiden major title.

Italian Jasmine Paolini

made a name for herself as a runner-up at Roland Garros and Wimbledon, while China's Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen is ready to make an impact after reaching her first major final in Australia.

"I don't want to let myself slip again. I really want to improve one more time in my mental side," said Zheng. "If I'm able to do that, I think I will really break through some wall that I have for myself."

The US Open begins on Monday. — Reuters



Joao Pedro celebrates scoring their second goal. – Reuters

BRIGHTON, England: Table toppers Brighton & Hove Albion beat Manchester United 2-1 on Saturday to stay perfect in the Premier League after Joao Pedro scored a late winner in the fifth minute of added time to give new manager Fabian Huerzeler a victory on his home debut.

Brighton striker Danny Welbeck scored the opener against his former club before Amad Diallo drew United level in the second half and the game looked destined for a draw until the dying minutes.

But Brighton's pressure paid off when Simon Adingra found space in the box and chipped the ball over United's defenders to an unmarked Pedro who headed home to give them their second win of the season.

"First I'm very happy for the win. I think this goal at the end shows how much we wanted to win the game, first game at home against a big team," Pedro said.

"I cannot feel better than today. I think the team did well."

Huerzeler, 31, has overseen two victories to keep Brighton provisionally top of the standings after two games.

United had the first opportunity to take the lead 10 minutes into the game when Diogo Dalot crossed the ball to the far post where Diallo failed to convert with a volley.

Brighton took the lead when Kaoru Mitoma received the ball on the left flank before his cross went through United's defence and into the six-yard box where Welbeck stuck out a leg to score his second goal of the season.

It was Welbeck's 100th career goal in club football and his sixth against United, the club he spent his formative years at and even won the Premier League title with in 2012-13.

Marcus Rashford responded instantly at the other end when he put the ball in the back of the net following a fine save from keeper Jason Steele, but

BRIGHTON LEAVE IT LATE TO BEAT MANCHESTER UNITED 2-1



“First I’m very happy for the win. I think this goal at the end shows how much we wanted to win the game, first game at home against a big team

JOAO PEDRO
Brazilian footballer

his celebrations were short-lived when the linesman's flag went up for offside.

Brighton nearly doubled their lead early in the second half when James Milner was played in by Pedro but his shot was cleared off the line by Dalot.

Diallo then drew United level at the hour mark when he was put through on goal and the 22-year-old cut inside his marker before shooting, with the ball being deflected past keeper Jason Steele and into the net.

United could have completed the comeback in the 69th minute when a sweeping move allowed them to carve Brighton apart and Alejandro Garnacho took a shot destined for the net.

But Joshua Zirkzee was sliding in for a cross that never came and he deflected the ball in on the goal line from an offside position, with VAR chalking off the goal. — Reuters



Jack Hinshelwood celebrates after Joao Pedro scores their second goal. – Reuters



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Gold imports up 41 pc in 2024

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's total gold imports by the end of May this year increased by 41 per cent to reach RO 176,591,960, compared to the same period in 2023, which recorded about RO 125,100,929.

The total weight of gold imported by the Sultanate of Oman by the end of May 2024 amounted to about 8,443 kilogrammes, compared to 5,675 kilogrammes in the same period in 2023, according to data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The UAE came in the list of countries exporting gold to Oman at the end of May 2024, with a value of RO 170,395,964, followed by Hong Kong with RO 3,173,485, followed by Turkiye with RO 1,420,125, Kingdom of Bahrain with RO 680,688, and Russia with RO 314,615.

The total value of the Sultanate of Oman's gold exports amounted to RO 14,690,377 at the end of May of this year, a decrease of 23 per cent compared to the same period in 2023, when the value of exports amounted to RO 18,990,962. The total weight of gold exported by the end of May



The total weight of gold imported by Oman by May 2024 amounted to about 8,443 kilogrammes.

of this year amounted to about 510 kg, compared to 924 kg by the end of May of 2023.

The US came at the forefront of countries importing gold from the Sultanate of Oman by the end of May 2024, with a value of RO 7,228,175, followed by the United Arab Emirates with RO 6,004,272, Hong Kong with RO 603,488, the Republic of India with RO 475,584, and the Kingdom of Bahrain with RO 203,601.

Iran came at the forefront of the countries to which gold was re-exported from the Sultanate of Oman by the end of May 2024, with a value of RO 41,594,815, followed by Turkiye with RO 3,833,541, the UAE with RO 3,346,732 and the US with RO 3,183,838. — ONA

BUSINESS REPORTER MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion announced that the number of industrial licence applications in Dhofar Governorate saw a significant increase during the first half of 2024, with 3,095 applications compared to 1,897 applications during the first half of 2023, marking a 63-per cent increase.

Additionally, 5,348 certificates of origin were issued in the first half of 2024 compared to 3,963 certificates during the same period in 2023, reflecting a 34.9-per cent increase.

Regarding commercial registrations in Dhofar Governorate, the number reached around 2,560 registrations during the first half of 2024, compared to 2,846 registrations during the same period in 2023, bringing the total number of registrations in the governorate to 73,520 by the end of the first half of 2024. The number of foreign investment registrations amounted to 253 during the



Regarding commercial registrations in Dhofar, the number reached around 2,560 registrations during the first half of 2024

first half of 2024 compared to 744 during the same period in 2023, bringing the total number of registrations to 11,480.

Meanwhile, the number of active licences in Dhofar Governorate reached approximately 127,399 by the end of the first half of 2024.

Increase in Industrial License Applications Mohammed bin Khalifa al Badhrani, Director-General of the Directorate General of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Dhofar Governorate, stated that the governorate witnessed an increase in industrial licence applications, with 1,676 new applications during the first half of 2024 compared to 1,184 applications during the same period in 2023.

Al Badhrani attributed this increase to the investment-friendly environment in Dhofar Governorate, as well as the facilities and incentives offered to investors.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in collaboration with relevant authorities, has enabled investors to use the latest smart applications to facilitate investment

procedures.

Al Badhrani added that the highest licensed commercial activities in Dhofar Governorate include the construction and contracting sector, export and import offices, along with a notable increase in licences for restaurants and cafes, vehicle mechanics and retail clothing stores.

Al Badhrani emphasised that the Directorate-General of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Dhofar Governorate is working to enhance the investment climate with the aim of empowering the private sector to attract foreign investments and highlight key investment opportunities in the governorate.

Among the most important current investment opportunities are the establishment of a sodium silicate manufacturing project in the Raysut area of Salalah, a steel plant in Salalah for the production of light structural steel billets, and a project for dolomite calcination units within the mining industry.

Sahil Hamran housing project awaits completion 18 years on

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 24



The Sahil Hamran housing project in Dhofar awaiting completion 18 years on.

For nearly two decades, the residents of Sahil Hamran in Dhofar Governorate have awaited the completion of a housing project that promised to transform their lives. Yet, despite the issuance of Royal Directives in 2006, the Citizen Housing Project in Sahil Hamran remains incomplete. This long-delayed project, which was intended to provide stable and dignified housing for the local community, has instead become a symbol of bureaucratic stagnation and unfulfilled promises.

During a recent visit by the *Observer*, the community's resilience and optimism were palpable, even in the face of such prolonged uncertainty. Locals welcomed the opportunity to voice their concerns, but also to share their enduring hope for a brighter future.

"We've been waiting for these homes for so long, and despite the delays, we still believe that one day, our children will live in a better environment," said Ahmed al Shahri, a local farmer who has lived in the area his entire life. "This project means a

lot to us, and we are hopeful that the authorities will eventually fulfil their promise."

The Sahil Hamran housing project was initiated with the hope of improving the living conditions of residents who have, for generations, relied on makeshift homes and tents that provide little protection against the harsh weather conditions of the region.

Despite the passage of more than 18 years, the project has made little progress. The relevant authorities have failed to offer a clear explanation or timeline for its completion, leaving the community in a state of frustration and uncertainty.

The project was designed to be a significant social initiative, offering not only permanent

housing, but also a sense of stability and security to a community that has long been marginalised. The residents of Sahil Hamran, many of whom have deep roots in the area as herders and farmers, have been eagerly awaiting the day when they can move into their new homes. However, the reality has been a series of delays and setbacks that have left the project in limbo.

One of the primary reasons for the delays has been the bureaucratic and procedural hurdles that have plagued the project from the beginning. Legal complications related to land ownership and other necessary approvals have stalled progress.



TENDER

Nama Shared Service invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
NSS/2024/002-4	IT Hardware and Software Support Services AMC	28 August 2024	3 September 2024	OMR 100/- (Plus VAT amount: 105 OMR)

- Interested party may purchase the tender through the company website (www.nama.om). Supplier user guide is available to be downloaded at the same page.
- Payment of the tender fees to be done online through the link available in website. The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 3.00 pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through I-supplier portal before 3.00 pm time of the Sultanate on Tuesday 3 September 2024.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers. Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered. The original hard copy of the bid bond should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception area.
- NSS is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



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The MG3 is designed to redefine the hatchback experience, offers a dynamic and agile exterior with features like a leopard-inspired hunting-eye headlamp and light-trailed taillamp, ensuring both aesthetics and safety.

UNLEASH THE THRILL OF DRIVING
WITH THE STYLISH AND FEATURE-
PACKED MG3 COMPACT SEDAN

MUSCAT: The MG3 is an exceptional compact sedan that exemplifies the blend of style, technology and performance. This model, designed to redefine the hatchback experience, offers a dynamic and agile exterior with features like a leopard-inspired hunting-eye headlamp and light-trailed taillamp, ensuring both aesthetics and safety.

Inside, the MG3 boasts a sophisticated cockpit equipped with a 7-inch virtual instrument cluster and a 10.25-inch infotainment touchscreen, compatible with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. With a focus on comfort and practicality, it provides ample interior space, 25 smart storage compartments and

generous boot space.

Performance is powered by a 1.5L petrol engine paired with an 8-gear i-CVT transmission, delivering 109 HP and 142 NM of torque, offering both economy and a fun driving experience. The MG3 is available in three trims – STD, COM and LUX, catering to diverse preferences and needs, each loaded with a range of features from advanced driver-assistance systems to luxurious interior elements.

Whether you're looking for reliability, advanced technology, or a thrilling drive, the MG3 is designed to meet all these needs, making it a standout option in the compact sedan market.



A key feature of the IPPEX service is its comprehensive tracking system, which allows customers to monitor their shipments in real-time.

OMAN POST ENSURES RELIABLE
DOORSTEP DELIVERY WITH INTL
PREMIUM EXPRESS SERVICE

MUSCAT: Oman Post, the national postal operator, offers the International Postal Premium Express Service (IPPEX); this premier solution is designed for customers seeking to send parcels and packages internationally, to over 220 destinations worldwide easily and reliably. The service guarantees efficient delivery of packages weighing up to 30 kg to the door of the recipient. Customers can anticipate receiving their parcels within 1 to 5 days.

A key feature of the IPPEX service is its comprehensive tracking system, which allows customers to monitor their shipments in real-time. Additionally, the service includes shipment insurance and in-house customs clearance, streamlining the

international delivery process and providing customers with peace of mind. To further encourage customers to utilise the IPPEX service, Oman Post is currently offering a special 25 per cent discount on all shipments made through this service until 10 September 2024. This promotion makes international shipping more accessible to customers.

As a leading member of the Universal Postal Union and part of the Asyad Group, Oman Post continues to blaze the trail in parcel service possibilities. Oman Post's IPPEX service is one of many offerings that fulfil the postal provider's mission of connecting people and businesses in Oman and beyond with efficient, convenient and trustworthy shipping solutions.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL WINS
'BEST MOBILE BANKING
APP OMAN 2024' AWARD

MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman's best bank, has once again affirmed its position as a leader in the digital banking landscape by winning the prestigious 'Best Mobile Banking App Oman 2024' award at the World Business Outlook Annual Awards 2024, held in Singapore. This accolade highlights the bank's relentless commitment to digital innovation and its strategic focus on delivering an unparalleled customer experience. The award serves as a testament to Sohar International's successful digital transformation strategy, which has significantly enhanced its mobile banking app, integrating cutting-edge technologies that offer customers seamless and efficient solutions tailored to their evolving needs. As a result, Sohar International has set new benchmarks in the industry, solidifying its leadership in the ever-evolving world of digital banking.

Commenting on this milestone, Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, stated: "Digital transformation at Sohar International is not merely an initiative but a cornerstone of our strategic vision, reflecting the global shift towards digital banking. As the financial landscape rapidly evolves, particularly within Oman, we are assertively positioning Sohar International as a leader and a game-changer, steering the future of digital banking in Oman. Our commitment to innovation goes beyond keeping pace with global digital trends — it's about redefining them. By continuously expanding the horizons of what banking can deliver, we remain steadfast in our pursuit of becoming a world-class Omani services company that helps customers, communities and people prosper and grow. This recognition not only highlights our unwavering dedication to digitalisation, but also underscores our alignment with Oman's national digital goals, further solidifying our role in contributing to a digitally inclusive society." Sohar International's strategic digital offerings extend beyond mobile banking, encompassing a



The award serves as a testament to Sohar International's successful digital transformation strategy.

comprehensive suite of services for both retail and corporate clients. As part of its ongoing commitment to innovation, Sohar International continues to set new standards in the banking industry, ensuring that its customers receive the highest level of service and support at every stage of their lives. Sajeel Bashiruddin, Chief Digital Officer at Sohar International, commented on the recognition, stating: "This accolade highlights our steadfast dedication to digital innovation and our customer-first approach. The integration of Sohar International's comprehensive digital ecosystem, which spans both financial and non-financial services, into our mobile banking app marks a significant milestone in Oman's banking sector. Designed to address the evolving needs of our customers, this enhancement provides unparalleled convenience

and efficiency for managing daily financial activities. Through the 'My Life' and 'My Goals' initiatives, users can seamlessly conduct their banking transactions and access non-banking services, such as booking air travel, reserving hotels, purchasing gift vouchers, and more. This innovation reflects our commitment to driving digital transformation and elevating the customer experience." In addition to winning the 'Best Mobile App Oman 2024' award, Sohar International was honoured as Oman's Best Bank by the Middle East Euromoney Awards for Excellence this year. The bank also secured multiple accolades at the Oman Banking and Finance Awards 2024, further cementing its status as a top-tier financial institution. Among its other prestigious recognitions, Sohar International was awarded the 'Highest Year-on-Year Growth in

Total Assets among GCC Banks' by Alam Al Iktisaad Awards and 'Most Innovative Digital Bank for Ecosystem Services – Oman 2023' by The Global Economics, UK.

As Oman's leading digital bank, Sohar International remains committed to pushing the boundaries of innovation in the financial sector. The bank's leadership is reflected in its continuous enhancement of digital touchpoints, offering cutting-edge solutions like AI-powered banking, advanced payment gateways and digital POS systems. These innovations are designed to meet the diverse needs of its customers, ensuring that Sohar International consistently delivers superior service and convenience. As the bank continues to introduce new digital solutions, it solidifies its position as a pioneer in the industry, dedicated to enhancing the banking experience for all its customers.

Indulge in the captivating luxury and prowess of the ES range by Lexus

MUSCAT: Discover the Lexus ES range and experience one of the top-selling saloons in the premium luxury category. The Lexus ES is an everyday luxury car unmatched in its tech frameworks, ultimate luxurious interiors and delivers an exhilarating city-life experience. Indulge in sublime comfort, spaciousness and distinctive performance output.

The Lexus ES speaks an impressive design language, spelling remarkable efficiency from every angle. From the headlights to the sleek profile, the Lexus charmer is available in three powertrain options, the ES250, ES350 and the hybrid ES300h.

The engine power

transmissions vary across trim levels. The ES consists of a 2.5L, 16-Valve, DOHC, VVT-iE that produces 204 Hp @ 6600 rpm and 24.8 Kg.M torque @ 4000-5000 rpm. The other variant is powered by a bigger 3.5L, 24-Valve V6, DOHC, VVT-iW delivering 298Hp @ 6500-6600 rpm and 36.3 Kg.M torque @ 4600 paired with Direct Shift 8-Speed Automatic Transmission. Choose from three driving modes ECO, Normal and Sport to match your journey.

The exceptional power of the ES300h, the hybrid, ceases the day with its auto charging capability through its electric engine simultaneously saving up the fuel during braking or decelerating. The hybrid is



The Lexus ES, with its impressive design language and remarkable efficiency, is available in three powertrain options: the ES250, ES350 and the hybrid ES300h.

equipped to save fuel meanwhile eliminating the need to plug in a power cord.

The exterior boasts the new design front grille blended with the Bi-LED headlamps. It makes

a powerful strike with a rear spoiler moonroof with tilt and slide, a unique power retractable outer rear view mirror with auto tilt-down on reverse mode. An added side protection moulding

and door handle garnish is available as part of the luxury chrome package.

The avant-garde interior fittings on the steering wheel don a 3-spoke leather & wood finesse with a wireless charging tray, head-up display, tri-zone air conditioning with driver, passenger & rear side wooden trims with ambient lighting and inner handle illumination, an interactive 12.3-inch touchscreen display.

Feel welcomed by adjusting the legroom to your comfort with its 8-way power adjustable front seats' cushion length and memory for the driver seat. Lexus introduced a comprehensive set of safety features for an enabling a

composed state of mind and make your journey pleasurable. Moreover, it offers advanced safety features such as the Electric Parking Brake w/Brake Hold, Auto Parking, Anti-Theft System, Auto Speed Sensing Door Lock Function, Child Restraint Seat Anchors on Rear, Pop-Up Hood, Tyre Pressure Warning System, Front and Rear Sonar-guided Parking Assistance System, Front Curtain Shield, Rear Airbags for both sides including knees, as well as an Adaptive Cruise Control option.

Lexus provides a bespoke experience to its customers. Delve into luxury and enhance your driving experience with your automobile adapted to the latest technologies.



Oman and Bulgaria to enhance energy cooperation

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

The Sultanate of Oman and Republic of Bulgaria are set to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen their bilateral energy relations within the next two months. This agreement was reached during a meeting on August 23, 2024, between Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Vladimir Malinov, Bulgaria's Minister of Energy in the capital city, Sofia.

According to a statement issued by Bulgaria's Ministry of Energy, the MoU aims to boost cooperation in areas such as oil and gas, hydrogen, renewable

energy production and storage, with the possibility of Oman investing in Bulgaria.

Malinov emphasised the importance of securing and diversifying energy supplies as a vital aspect of Bulgaria's national security. "Guaranteeing security and diversification of energy supply is an integral part of Bulgaria's national security. In this respect, one of the main goals facing our country is securing supplies of liquefied natural gas in the long term," he stated.

He highlighted the need for long-term liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies, mentioning that Bulgaria will soon begin commercial operations at the LNG terminal near



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi (right), Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Vladimir Malinov, Bulgaria's Minister of Energy.

Alexandroupolis, Greece. Al Aufi and Malinov discussed the prospect of Oman supplying LNG to Bulgaria to meet the demands of the upcoming winter season.

Oman expressed interest in Bulgaria's expertise in operating pumped storage hydro plants for renewable energy storage. Additionally, both countries explored potential collaboration in hydrogen energy, with Bulgaria positioning itself as a gateway for hydrogen producers and traders in Europe. "Bulgaria can be a gateway for producers and traders of hydrogen that can be realised in Europe," Malinov noted.

He also mentioned a

collaborative project with Greece to build a hydrogen interconnector, which has EU recognition as a Project of Common Interest, with Romania showing interest in joining. "We have already developed, together with Greece, a project to build an interconnector for hydrogen, which has also been granted the status of a Project of Common Interest to the EU. Romania is interested in joining the project as well," Malinov added.

The topics discussed will be formalised in the forthcoming memorandum, laying the foundation for enhanced bilateral relations between Oman and Bulgaria.



The report provides a comprehensive overview of the achievements under the 2021-2025 Digital Government Programme.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS DELIVERY OF DIGITAL GOVT INITIATIVES

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has unveiled its annual report for 2023, showcasing remarkable strides in the realm of digital transformation and government service optimisation. The report provides a comprehensive overview of the achievements under the 2021-2025 Digital Government Programme, focusing on the simplification of procedures and performance measurement.

One of the standout accomplishments of the year was the simplification of government services. The ministry successfully streamlined 578 services, surpassing the target of 517 services. Notably, 41 per cent of these services were simplified through initiatives led by Manjam Labs, which played a crucial role in this transformative process. Additionally, 207 services were digitalised in 2023, reflecting a significant shift towards more efficient, technology-driven service delivery.

The report also details the total number of recorded operations and licensing services, which stands at 2,869. This figure is an integral part of the executive plan for the Digital Government Transformation. Out of these, 1,731 services were identified as priority targets, representing 80 per cent of the total. Furthermore, 1,138 of these operations pertain to licensing, achieving 100 per cent of the priority targets set in the executive plan.

The ministry's annual report highlights the significant progress made towards achieving the objectives of the 2021-2025 Programme, reflecting a robust performance measurement framework. This framework is designed to track and evaluate the effectiveness of digital government initiatives, ensuring that strategic goals are met and that services are continuously improved to better serve the public.

The ministry's annual report not only marks a year of substantial achievement, but also sets a promising precedent for the future of digital governance in Oman. As the ministry continues to advance its digital transformation agenda, these efforts are expected to further streamline governmental processes and enhance the overall user experience for citizens.

Fuel marketers expand EV charging network across Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

Oman Oil Marketing Company SAOG (OOMCO), a subsidiary of OQ Group, has announced the successful installation of 12 EV charging stations at strategic locations around the Sultanate of Oman — part of an ongoing drive by fuel marketing companies, among other businesses, to accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles in the country.

The rollout of EV charging infrastructure complements a series of initiatives pursued by OOMCO, among other fuel marketing companies, in support of their respective decarbonisation strategies as well as the country's national e-mobility strategy.

"OOMCO is also moving steadily towards E-mobility and completed the installation of 12 fast chargers and connecting major routes in Oman highway to become the widest network of EV chargers in Oman," the company's chairman said in the Directors' Report for H1 2024.

Further, in a bid to reduce its carbon footprint associated with the use of fossil fuel linked electricity supply, as many as 12 fuel stations have now been powered by solar PV systems.

"OOMCO is continuing with its sustainability journey to reduce its carbon footprint as it produced 1893 MWh



An EV charging station in Muscat, one of many proliferating around the country.

cumulatively of electricity from solar sources in its 12 stations which was consumed at its stations and the remaining was feed to the grid which resulted in a recovery of 1325 tonnes of CO₂," the chairman stated.

Additionally, the company continues to roll out the installation of Vapour Recovery Units at its fuel stations. These units, designed to collect petrol vapour released during unloading and refuelling back into underground storage tank, help reduce emissions. As many as 25 fuel stations have so far been equipped with such units, contributing to emission reductions of 952 tonnes during the first half of this year.

In line with its strategy to expand its footprint locally and internationally, OOMCO

has seen its network grow to a total of 237 service stations as of June 2024.

The company has also launched five new service stations across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including its first station in Riyadh, taking its network strength in the Kingdom to 35 service stations to date. In Tanzania, the company operates 12 stations.

Shell Oman Marketing Company, another key player in the fuel marketing sector, said the company is making headway in the deployment of green mobility solutions, as well as the establishment of the first EV hub in Oman.

Walid Hadi, Chairman, stated: "During this quarter, the company is in final stages of negotiating strategic partnerships with key stakeholders for EV chargers' infrastructure and various aspects of the energy sector and its readiness for energy transition as well as for the widespread adoption of EV for mobility. In addition, Shell Oman is on track to deliver its first hydrogen service station in Oman and the Middle East by year-end."

"The station shall include various services including, and not limited to, on-site hydrogen fuel generation and fuelling facilities, Shell V-Power and other grades of fuel, non-fuel convenient retailing options as well as the first EV hub in Oman," Hadi added.

Sahil Hamran housing project: 18 years on, and still incomplete

FROM PAGE 13

In 2010, a tender was announced for the construction of 400 housing units as part of the project. However, when work finally began in 2011, it quickly became clear that the project was not progressing as planned. Some units were constructed, but they have since deteriorated significantly due to exposure to erosion, humidity, and the harsh climate of Dhofar.

Despite these challenges, many residents remain positive. "We know it's been a long road, but we are still here, still waiting," said Muna, a mother of three. "These homes will give our families the security we've always dreamed of, and we hope the government will see this project through to completion." The situation has been exacerbated by a lack of essential services within the planned housing complex. Residents were promised not only new homes, but also access to vital services such as electricity, water, healthcare and education. However, as the project remains incomplete, these services are still out of reach for many in the community.

The delays have had a profound impact on the residents of Sahil Hamran, many of whom feel abandoned by the authorities. The community has been left to endure difficult living conditions, with many families still relying on tents and

makeshift shelters that offer little protection against the elements. These temporary structures, which were intended to be a short-term solution, have now become a long-term reality for many in the community.

To achieve this, it is essential that the relevant authorities prioritise the project and address the bureaucratic challenges that have caused such significant delays. Clear communication and transparency are also crucial, with regular updates provided to the community to keep them informed of the project's progress.

Yahya bin Mahad al Maashani shared that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism had implemented security measures by assigning guards to the site some time ago. Recent updates suggest that a consultant is now working on the site, which has renewed optimism for the resumption of restoration efforts.

Al Maashani expressed hope that the work would soon be back on track, marking a significant step forward in preserving the site's historical and cultural value for future generations.

As the *Observer* concluded its visit, the sense of hope among the locals was undeniable. "We've waited this long, and we'll keep waiting if we have to," said Yahya al Maashani, a young resident. "We just want to see our community thrive."

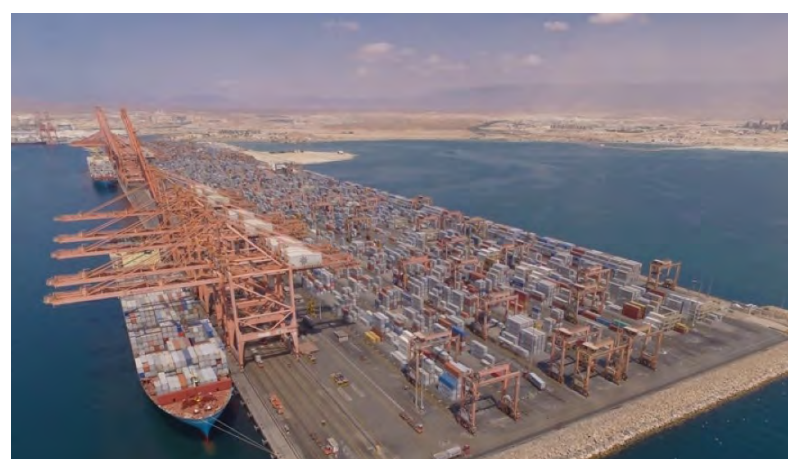
Oman-EU trade exchange valued at RO 878.4 million

MUSCAT: Trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and European countries reached RO 878,404,292 by the end of May 2024, compared to RO 802,204,770 during the same period in 2023, an increase of 9.5 per cent, according to preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total exports from the Sultanate of Oman to the European countries amounted

to 197,268,818 by the end of May 2024, with a total weight of 444,489,314 kg, an increase in value of 63.9 per cent compared to the end of May 2023, when the value of exports was RO 120,386,561, with a total weight of 269,416,977 kg.

The total imports of the Sultanate of Oman from European countries by the end of May 2024 amounted to RO 620,344,739 for a total weight of RO 845,710,927 kg, a decrease in value of 1.5



The total exports from the Sultanate of Oman to the European countries amounted to 197,268,818 by the end of May 2024.

per cent compared to the end of May 2023, when the total imports amounted to RO 630,055,390 for a total weight of 940,371,625 kg.

The total re-exports from the Sultanate of Oman to European countries by the end of May 2024 amounted to RO 60,790,735 for a total weight of 6,083,042 kg, an increase in value of 17.4 per cent compared to the end of May 2023, when the total re-exports amounted to RO 51,762,819. — ONA

Shaping the landscape of stablecoins, security tokens

The recent ruling in the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)’s lawsuit against Kraken, a large player in the cryptocurrency exchange landscape, marks a critical juncture in the ongoing regulatory debate surrounding digital assets. Founded in 2011 and headquartered in San Francisco, Kraken has grown to become one of the world’s largest exchanges, boasting millions of users globally and facilitating billions of dollars in trading volume.

Kraken’s prominence in the industry, coupled with its substantial market capitalisation, places it in a unique position to challenge the SEC’s regulatory assertions. The exchange’s chief legal officer’s interpretation of the ruling as a “significant win” shows Kraken’s determination to defend its business model and the broader crypto ecosystem. The court’s decision to allow the lawsuit to proceed, while seemingly a setback, actually reinforces the principle that tokens themselves are not inherently securities. This distinction, mirroring the



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landmark Ripple case, highlights the nuanced nature of applying existing securities laws to the digital asset space.

The outcome of this case could have far-reaching implications for the broader crypto industry. It may compel other exchanges to reevaluate their token listings and compliance procedures, potentially limiting investor access to certain digital assets. It could also set a precedent for future SEC enforcement actions against other platforms.

As the legal battle unfolds, market participants will be closely watching the developments, as the Kraken case could significantly shape the regulatory landscape for cryptocurrencies in the United States and beyond. The tension between innovation and regulation is at the forefront of this debate, and the Kraken lawsuit is a crucial battleground where the boundaries between the two will be drawn.

While the Kraken case highlights the regulatory challenges faced by cryptocurrency exchanges, Tether’s active collaboration with law enforcement agencies presents

a contrasting narrative. Tether’s proactive efforts in assisting authorities to recover illicit funds and combat financial crime demonstrate the potential for stablecoins to be a force for good within the evolving regulatory landscape.

Tether, founded in 2014 and headquartered in Hong Kong, is the company behind USDT, the world’s first and most widely used stablecoin. Designed to maintain a 1:1 peg with the US dollar, USDT provides stability and liquidity in the often volatile cryptocurrency market, making it a popular choice for traders and investors alike. With a current market capitalisation exceeding \$83 billion, Tether consistently ranks among the top cryptocurrencies globally. It boasts a massive user base estimated to be in the tens of millions, facilitating billions of dollars in transactions daily. Its dominance in the stablecoin market is undeniable, capturing a significant market share, although it faces competition from other stablecoins such as USD Coin (USDC), Binance USD (BUSD), and Dai.

Despite its success, Tether

has also been scrutinised for its transparency and the composition of its reserves backing USDT. Nevertheless, it remains a key player in the crypto ecosystem, enabling seamless movement of value between the traditional financial system and the world of blockchain technology.

This is probably one of the reasons why Tether’s active involvement in assisting law enforcement agencies is aimed at promoting trust and transparency within the cryptocurrency space. Since its launch, Tether has actively assisted over 145 law enforcement agencies in recovering more than \$108.8 million USDT linked to illegal activities. A recent collaboration with the US Department of Justice led to the seizure of \$5 million USDT from scammers involved in “pig-butcher” schemes. Furthermore, Tether has proactively blocked over 1,900 cryptocurrency wallets associated with illicit activity.

Similar to Tether, PayPal appears to be betting that stablecoins, with their price stability and ease of use, could be the key to unlocking widespread acceptance of cryptocurrencies.

By providing incentives for institutional investors to hold and use PYUSD, their new rewards programme could further solidify the role of stablecoins as a bridge between traditional finance and the digital asset ecosystem. The partnership between PayPal and Anchorage Digital to offer yield on PYUSD stablecoins held in Anchorage’s institutional self-custody wallet, Porto, is a significant development. It represents an innovative approach to incentivising stablecoin adoption without requiring users to engage in activities like staking or lending, where their assets are exposed to additional risk.

This move is particularly noteworthy given the regulatory uncertainties surrounding stablecoins. While the programme is currently limited to accredited investors, potentially sidestepping some regulatory concerns, it could set a precedent for future initiatives in the stablecoin space. It also underscores the growing interest from institutional investors in stablecoins as a way to earn yield on their digital assets while maintaining control over their funds.

Europe needs a new economic vision

The global economic shocks of the past few years have left Europe particularly vulnerable. While virtually everyone has suffered from climate- and pandemic-related disruptions, the European Union has also had the Ukraine war unfolding on its doorstep, and its acute dependence on energy imports has meant that rising prices — and the need to shift away from Russian fossil fuels — have bitten especially hard. Both growth and economic security are under pressure.

To be sure, some of these were short-term shocks. The pandemic-related disruptions have largely resolved themselves, and even inflation, which surged in the pandemic’s aftermath, seems to be largely under control, thanks to the efforts of EU central banks, not least the European Central Bank, and the issue appears likely to be fully resolved within the next 12 months.

But the EU faces a number of formidable economic challenges that will not simply go away. For starters, rising security risks in its neighbourhood, combined with growing doubts about the durability of America’s commitment to European defence, have put pressure on the EU to strengthen its own capabilities. This implies not only more coordination across countries, but also a significant increase in overall defence expenditure: the bloc’s total spending currently amounts to 1.3 per cent of GDP, well below Nato’s 2 per cent-of-GDP target.

Moreover, productivity growth, which has been flagging in much of the world, is especially low in Europe, and the gap between the EU and the United States is widening each year. With the unemployment rate averaging some 6.5 per cent, there is a bit of room for increased aggregate demand to fuel growth, but robust long-term growth will be virtually impossible if Europe cannot



MICHAEL SPENCE

The author is a Nobel laureate in economics, is Professor of Economics Emeritus and a former dean of the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University.



With the unemployment rate averaging some 6.5 per cent, there is a bit of room for increased aggregate demand to fuel growth.

address lagging productivity.

This will be no easy feat. Long-term productivity growth in the developed economies depends significantly on structural change, driven mainly by technological innovation. This is where Europe’s principal problem lies: in a range of areas, from artificial intelligence to semiconductors to quantum computing, the US and even China are leaving Europe in the dust.

The main reasons for the EU’s innovation deficit are well known. Both basic and applied research and development have suffered from chronic underinvestment. The effectiveness of funding for basic research is undermined by a decentralised approach, with uncoordinated and poorly targeted national programmes taking precedence over EU-level finance and administration. In addition, the integration of the single market remains incomplete, particularly in services. This is especially important in digital fields, where returns on investment in

innovation depend on market size.

The EU faces other barriers to becoming an innovation hub. One is a lack of the necessary infrastructure, especially the massive amounts of computing power required to train AI models.

(At present, the EU relies largely on American tech giants for such capabilities.) Another is that the venture capital and private equity needed to support innovation — investors with the experience and motivation to help young entrepreneurs build innovative enterprises — is not widely available, though there are promising entrepreneurial ecosystems in a number of countries.

But these barriers can be surmounted. And if they are, the EU has important strengths on which it can capitalise, beginning with abundant talent coming from first-class universities. In addition, Europe’s well-developed social services and social-security systems deliver a level of economic security that can facilitate entrepreneurial

risk-taking.

Unless the EU can capitalise on the technological drivers of structural change, however, parts of its economy will remain dominated by traditional industrial sectors that have proven slow to adopt productivity-enhancing innovations. In a global economy where value is increasingly derived from intangible sources, the EU will continue to depend on tangible assets to create value. And Europe’s deep pool of human capital will grow shallower, as its top talent migrates to where opportunities are more abundant.

Europe must decide: it can remain on its current course, which is sure to lead to relative stagnation, or it can chart an entirely new path. The latter approach is riskier, but it also holds far more upside potential. There is no shortage of people in government, business, policy and academia who understand the challenges Europe faces and are more than capable of devising, debating, modifying

and implementing a creative forward-looking plan.

Unfortunately, such a plan does not appear to be a high priority within European countries or at the EU level. It does not feature in the political debates that surround national elections. Perhaps what is missing is a clear picture of the likely consequences of maintaining the status quo, and, more important, a compelling vision that can inspire and guide policy and investment.

When a journey is challenging, a clear view of the destination is vital to keep people motivated. Technocrats often fail to recognise this, but Europe itself has experienced it firsthand in its quest to adopt sustainable growth patterns and economic models, where there is a clear vision of the destination. Likewise, leaders in successful developing countries typically promote a clear picture of their desired future, in order to encourage and enable the difficult choices that are needed to build it.

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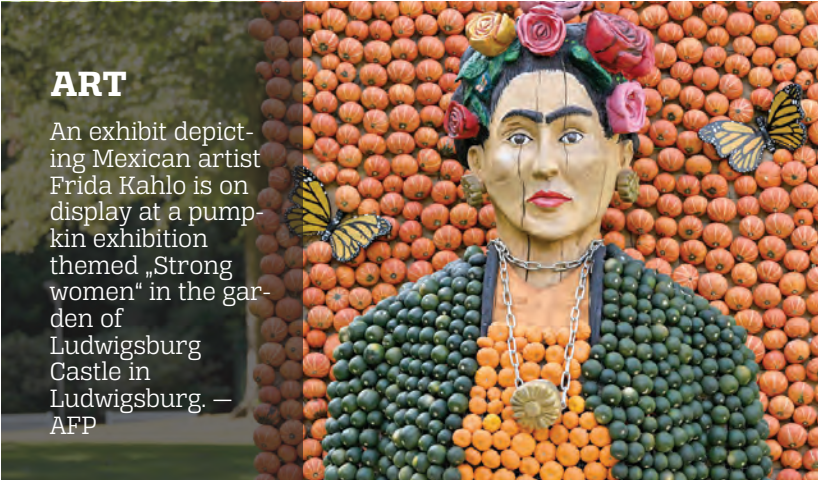
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ART

An exhibit depicting Mexican artist Frida Kahlo is on display at a pumpkin exhibition themed „Strong women“ in the garden of Ludwigsburg Castle in Ludwigsburg. — AFP



TRADITION

An Omani harvester scrapes out the oozing sap from a frankincense tree, where frankincense is produced by Wadi Dawkah's trees and historically used to power trade routes beyond the Arabian Peninsula, in Dhofar Governorate. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

English singer-songwriter FKA twigs attends the world premiere of "The Crow" at the Village East by Angelika. — AFP



FESTIVAL

A decorated elephant walks past the historic Buddhist Temple of the Tooth as part of celebrations to mark the Buddhist festival of Esala Perahera, in the ancient hill capital of Kandy. — AFP



SUNSPOTS

The sun and its sunspots are pictured over Kuwait City on Saturday. — AFP

art & life

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THE BEST PLACES TO CAMP IN OMAN

Camping is appealing because it offers an escape from urban life and a chance to connect with nature. It's cost-effective, flexible, and perfect for adventure and bonding with loved ones. Here are a few camp spots you have to take note of.... P20

ENTERTAINMENT

Victoria Beckham to star in Netflix docuseries after hubby's success



VICTORIA BECKHAM is set to star in a new Netflix documentary series which will explore her fashion and beauty business. The series will offer a "behind-the-scenes" look at her reinvention from Spice Girl to a creative director of her own brand. It follows the success of Beckham, the Netflix docuseries which followed the rise of her husband David Beckham from a young talented footballer to England captain. The series also gave an insight into their family life and the couple's relationship, including the pair addressing speculation that David allegedly had an affair while he was playing for Real Madrid in 2003. David has also denied the claims. The new docuseries, which was announced at Edinburgh TV Festival, will provide further access to the family and those close to them as well as featuring "never-

before-seen" archive footage. The couple married in 1999 and share four children together - Brooklyn, Romeo, Cruz and Harper. Asked whether audiences trust documentaries made by famous stars, Adam Hawkins, director for documentary series at Netflix, said: "I think the audience is incredibly smart, and they can sniff out if you are being inauthentic 100 miles away. "I honestly believe that Beckham, Robbie Williams - they're incredibly authentic. They go to places that aren't always comfortable." Discussing Beckham, he added: "One thing was Victoria herself, those scenes with her. She's surprising, she's warm, she's witty, she's super smart, and now we're going to get a chance to hang out with her for the next several months." Emmy-nominated Nicola Howson, who worked on Beckham, will act as executive producer on the Victoria edition alongside Bafta-nominated producer Julia Nottingham. A docuseries centred on TV chef Gordon Ramsay and another on boy band Take

That were also amongst the slate of new programmes that were announced by the streaming giant on Wednesday in Edinburgh. The Ramsay series will follow the Michelin-starred chef over nine months in the lead-up to "his biggest restaurant venture to date" the opening of five culinary experiences in London's 22 Bishopsgate. It will also see the chef trying to balance his work commitments with being a husband and father-of-six. "The Take That" documentary will explore the pop group's rise to fame in the 1990s as a five-piece originally consisting of Gary Barlow, Howard Donald, Mark Owen, Jason Orange and Robbie Williams. Netflix has said the series will offer "unprecedented insight" into the band with access to Barlow, Donald and Owen alongside interviews by Orange and Williams. Meanwhile, "Furiosa" and "The Queen's Gambit" actress Anya Taylor-Joy set to star as murderous Grace Bernard in the screen adaptation of Bella Mackie's best-seller "How To Kill Your Family." — PA Media/dpa

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FRAGILE BUT UNBROKEN, AFGHAN GLASSBLOWERS REFUSE TO QUIT

SEATED IN FRONT of a searing furnace, Ghulam Sakhi Saifi teases forth sinews of molten blue glass -- the guardian of an Afghan glassblowing trade refusing to break with tradition. "This is our art, our inheritance. It has fed us for a long time," he told AFP, resting from the work that has singed his knuckles and calloused his palms. "We are trying to make sure it is not forgotten. If we do not pass it down, it will disappear from the whole world," said Saifi, who guesses his age is around 50. Glassblowing in Afghanistan's western city of Herat is an ancient craft. Saifi says it has run in his family for about three centuries. The last two furnaces in the windswept metropolis near the border with Iran are in his family home and a mud-and-straw shed with a holey roof in the shadow of Herat's citadel.

SLOW SUFFOCATION Saifi now lights one of the furnaces only once a month -- eking out around \$30 from his stock of cups, plates and candleholders after expensive wood for fuel, dyes and other raw



materials are accounted for. He attributes the dramatic downturn to the exodus of already low numbers of foreign customers during the Covid-19 pandemic followed by the 2021 Taliban takeover, which saw many diplomats and aid workers pack up and leave. Cheaper Chinese-made imports have also dented demand. "There have been times when we haven't worked for three months -- we sit at home forever," he said. "Locals have no use for

these products, for the price they would first think to buy two loaves of bread for their children." But when the furnace is lit, Saifi is in his element. With a crude kitchen knife and a blowpipe he pulls glowing globes of glass out of the mud furnace and inflates them into household wares. Unlike in the past, when they used quartz, the glassblowers now use easier-to-find recycled bottles shattered into shards and superheated back into their liquid state. The green and blue pieces cool into charmingly imperfect shapes, shot through with air bubbles, and are sold from clattering piles in shops in Herat and



the capital Kabul for around \$3 each. Outside the shed it is already 36 degrees Celsius (97 degrees Fahrenheit) but stepping over the threshold is like being gripped by a sudden fever. "Sometimes we really feel the heat, I think I am being slowly suffocated," Saifi said. "But this is our inheritance, we are used to it. "Today is a bad day, but maybe it will get better in the future. Maybe the day after tomorrow, we hope to God."

CRAFT NEEDS TO ENDURE A gaggle of boys and teenagers assists Saifi in his work, but it is growing hard to tempt the younger generation into a trade they view as a dead end. His eldest son became an expert in the craft only to abandon it for migrant labour over the border in Iran. Two cousins who learned to blow glass also saw no future and downed their tools. His middle son, 18-year-old Naqibullah, vows he will continue the trade, though it's not clear how. Before the Taliban takeover there was still enough



demand for three days of work a week -- a distant prospect for the young man who shares shifts with his father on the rare occasion they light the furnaces. "We hope that there is a future and that day by day things will get better," Naqibullah said. "Even if we're not making much money the craft needs to endure," he added. "The art of making things by hand needs to be preserved. We can't let this skill disappear." — AFP

CHANGING WORLD



After breaking free, world's largest iceberg is stuck spinning in circles

FOR MORE THAN 30 years, the world's largest iceberg was stuck in the Antarctic. Five times the size of New York City's land area and more than 1,000 feet deep, the mammoth piece of ice finally became loose in 2020 and began a slow drift toward the Southern Ocean. Now, A23a, as it's known, is spinning in place. After leaving Antarctic waters, the iceberg got stuck in a vortex over a seamount, or an underwater mountain. Imagine a piece of ice about 1,500 square miles in area and as deep as the Empire State Building spinning slowly but steadily enough to fully rotate it on its head over the course of about 24 days. The iceberg is spinning near the South Orkney Islands, about 375 miles northeast of the Antarctic Peninsula, "maintaining a chill 15 degree rotation per day," the British Antarctic Survey, the United Kingdom's polar research institute, said on social media. "It's basically just sitting there, spinning around, and it will very slowly melt as long as it stays there," said Alex Brearley, a physical oceanographer and head of the Open Oceans research group at the British Antarctic Survey. "What we don't know is how quickly it will actually come out of this." A23a has been embroiled in drama since the start, a trait it picked up from its parent-berg. A23, which was even bigger than A23a, was one of three icebergs that broke off, or calved, from the Filchner Ice Shelf in 1986. At the time of the calving, A23 was home to a Soviet Union research centre, and researchers eventually had to abandon the base. A23a broke off later that year and hit bottom in the Weddell Sea, where it would remain for 34 more years. In 2020, A23a finally freed itself, and in December, it began to move out of Antarctic waters on a long meander through the Southern Ocean. It took Brearley and a research vessel almost an entire day to circle it during a visit in December. They were awestruck. "It looks like land; that's the only way to describe it," Brearley said. But by spring, A23a caught the spins. Using satellite imagery, the British Antarctic Survey first observed the iceberg spinning in April. Large Antarctic icebergs are designated by A, B, C and D depending on where in Antarctica they originate, and they receive a number only once they've reached a big enough size. Their sequential order shows how long A23a has topped the list of world's biggest icebergs: A76 calved in 2021, for instance, but melted two years later. The iceberg is in an area of the Southern Ocean known as Iceberg Alley, a popular spot for icebergs. Typically, large icebergs move through quickly and get sucked into the Antarctic Circumpolar Current, the largest ocean current in the world. The blocks of ice eventually get shot out eastward to warmer waters, where they begin to melt and disintegrate. Brearley described the transition as "a warm bath of water" only a couple of degrees above freezing. Not A23a. Instead, the gigantic iceberg got caught in what's known as a Taylor column, a current that forms around seamounts. Standard flow diverges around the underwater mountain and creates a stagnant cylinder of fluids above the seamount, slowly rotating the water counterclockwise around the bump. The bump A23a is swimming over is about 100 kilometres across and rises up from the deep sea floor to a height of about 1,000 metres (3,280 feet), Brearley said, calling it "a pretty cool geophysical phenomenon." How frequently these Taylor columns form or how often icebergs get stuck in them is not known, Brearley said, and there is not enough satellite data or underwater mapping to fully understand the phenomenon's frequency. It's also unclear how long the iceberg will stay in place. But one thing is clear: The largest iceberg in the world will not melt and flood the southern hemisphere. Melting icebergs that originate from floating ice shelves like A23a do not themselves significantly contribute to global sea level rise, said Brearley, because the ice is already floating in the ocean. Climate scientists are concerned that the deterioration of large portions of ice shelves will make the continent's glaciers more vulnerable to warming. Brearley pointed to a 2015 study that observed a robotic float, part of a fleet of instruments that drift in ocean currents to measure water temperature, trapped in a Taylor column for four years just to the northeast of A23a's current location. If A23a spends an extended time in the vortex, the iceberg could melt significantly and affect plankton and other organisms in the marine food chain in the area, Brearley said. — NYT

MOUNTAIN CAMPING

JABAL SHAMS

Why Go: As the highest peak in Oman, Jabal Shams is perfect for camping and mountain adventures. The moderate climate and stunning natural scenery offer opportunities for long hikes, breathtaking panoramic views, and exploring deep valleys.

Getting There: Located about 240 kilometres from Muscat, Jabal Shams is accessible via the highway to Nizwa, with signs leading to the mountain. The journey takes about 3 to 4 hours by car.

JABAL HATT

Why Go: Known locally as the Eastern Mountain, Jabal Haat offers moderate weather year-round, mild in summer, and cold in winter. It boasts attractive natural landscapes and various accommodation options, including campsites, chalets, and hotel apartments. It's also a significant destination for astronomy enthusiasts.

Getting There: Located in the Wilayat of Al Hamra in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, about 200 kilometres from Muscat and 36 kilometres from Al Hamra. The mountain is easily accessible by ordinary vehicles.

JABAL SIFAH

Why Go: Combining mountains and the sea, Jabal Sifah offers diverse terrains, including Rocky Mountains and sandy beaches. Activities include climbing, hiking, swimming, snorkelling, fishing, and kayaking.

Getting There: Located on the northern coast of Oman, it is easily accessible from Muscat, making it a convenient destination.

JABAL SAMHAN

Why Go: Jabal Samhan is ideal for camping due to its stunning natural scenery, including towering mountains, deep valleys, and green spaces. The mountain's rich ecological diversity, housing rare and endangered species, makes it a unique destination for wildlife lovers. The moderate weather year-round ensures comfortable camping with pleasant temperatures and a suitable climate.

Activities: Campers can enjoy hiking, mountain climbing, cave exploration, and stargazing, making for a fun and adventurous experience. The area offers tranquility and isolation away from the city hustle, ideal for relaxation.

Getting There: Despite its rugged terrain, Jabal Samhan is relatively easy to access via equipped roads, making it a convenient destination for campers. The breathtaking panoramic views, rich history, and culture enhance the camping experience, allowing interaction with the traditional mountain villages and cultural heritage of the region.

COASTAL & ISLAND CAMPING

RAS AL HADD

Why Go: Ras Al Hadd features stunning white sandy beaches and clear turquoise waters. It is one of the largest green turtle nesting sites in the world, offering a unique camping experience.

Getting There: Located on the eastern coast of Oman, it is easily accessible.

MASIRAH ISLAND

Why Go: Masirah Island attracts tourists with its mild weather, pristine environment, and beautiful beaches. Activities include fishing, diving, water sports, and bird and turtle watching.

Getting There: Accessible by ferry from the mainland.

DAYMANIYAT ISLANDS

Why Go: The Daymaniyat Islands are ideal for camping due to their stunning natural beauty, crystal-clear blue waters, white sandy beaches, and unique biodiversity. The area is renowned for its diverse marine life, including coral reefs, colourful fish, and sea turtles, making it a haven for diving and snorkelling enthusiasts. The islands offer a tranquil and secluded environment away from city hustle, perfect for relaxation and serenity. Campers can engage in activities like diving, swimming, kayaking, and fishing, adding adventure to their camping experience.

Getting There: Easily accessible by boat from Muscat or nearby coastal towns.

BANDAR AL KHAYRAN

Why Go: Bandar Al Khayran is where the sea meets the mountains, offering calm gulf waters ideal for swimming, snorkelling, and other water sports. The area is also well known for hiking.

Getting There: Its strategic location near Muscat makes it a convenient destination.

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SUNDAY | AUGUST 25 | 2024

THE BEST PLACES TO CAMP IN OMAN

BY AHMED AL KAABI

Camping appeals to travellers as it offers an escape from urban life and a chance to connect with nature. It provides adventure through activities like hiking and fishing and is a cost-effective travel option compared to hotels. The freedom and flexibility of camping allow for personalised experiences, making it ideal for bonding with family and friends. It encourages a digital detox, promoting presence and simplicity. Camping fosters self-sufficiency and skill development while offering unique experiences and health benefits like stress reduction and improved mood. These elements make camping a memorable and attractive travel option for many.

Oman is an ideal camping destination due to its diverse landscapes, including deserts, mountains, coastlines, and wadis. Oman's reputation for safety and the hospitality of its people ensure a welcoming and peaceful environment for campers. We have compiled a list of camping destinations you have to check out next.

DESERT CAMPING

RIMAL AL SHARQIYA

Why Go: Rimal Al Sharqiya, also known as the Sharqiya Sands, offers a vast desert landscape ideal for winter camping. Activities include camel riding, quad biking, and hot air balloon rides.

Getting There: Located 240 kilometres from Muscat, it takes about 2 to 3 hours by car.

(SUGAR DUNES)

Why Go: Known for its mysterious white sands, Khaluf Beach offers a serene and distinctive camping experience, quieter than Rimal Al Sharqiya. There are also nearby attractions one can enjoy from visiting unique formations to exploring nearby coastal villages.

Getting There: Located 500 kilometres from Muscat, it is accessible only by four-wheel-drive vehicles.

RAS AL ROWAIS

Why Go: If you're looking for a remote desert with pristine and virgin beaches meeting the desert, then Ras al Rowais is perfect for you. You have plenty of options for camping spot from top of beautiful cliffs to edge of the desert.

Getting There: Located about 450 kilometres from Muscat, it is accessible only by four-wheel-drive vehicles.

THE EMPTY QUARTER

Why Go: The Empty Quarter in Dhofar is perfect for extreme campers who likes a challenging location. A visit here can also include a hike or drive to the top of one of the tallest dunes in the Middle East.

Getting There: Located almost 1,000 kilometres from Muscat, it is accessible only by four-wheel-drive vehicles.

UNIQUE CAMPING SPOTS

VILLAGE OF SAB BANI KHAMIS

Why Go: In the Wilayat of Al Hamra, the abandoned village of Sab Bani Khamis offers camping on its plateaus. It features old stone and mud houses, a lake formed by a waterfall, and a large cave with stalactites and stalagmites. Visitors need to bring all their supplies, as there are no commercial services available.

Getting There: Located near Jabal Shams in the Wilayat of Al Hamra.

KHOR RURI

Why Go: This archaeological site highlights Oman's historical aspect and is located just a few minutes walk from the ruins of Samharam. This desert area in Dhofar is a beautiful camping option. The Khor (creek) is fed by freshwater from Wadi Darbat, making it easy to use the water for cooking purposes.

Getting There: Located in Dhofar, easily accessible by road.

WADI BIH, MUSANDAM

Why Go: This campsite offers 360° views of majestic mountains and dramatic landscapes. A 4WD is required to reach this secluded spot.

Getting There: Drive south from Khasab, up through the Sayh Plateau, and towards Wadi Bih.

WADI MIBAM

Why Go: One of the most beautiful wadis in Oman, the cliffs of Mibam offer a stunning view of the surrounding mountains and canyons.

Getting There: At the very far end of Wadi Tiwi

BARR AL HIKMAN

Why Go: Barr Al Hikman is an ideal camping destination due to its diverse environment and natural scenery. It offers tranquility and seclusion away from the city's hustle and bustle, making it perfect for relaxation and contemplation. Campers can engage in various activities such as swimming, boating, fishing, and nature walks.

Getting There: Easily accessible, located on the central coast of Oman.

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