

OMAN  DAILY

Observer



Established 1981. Editor-in-Chief: Salim al Shueili

OMAN OBSERVER

[f](#) [X](#) [@](#) [v](#) [y](#)

www.omanobserver.om

editor@omanobserver.om

SUNRISE - 05:45 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:27 AM
DHUHR - 12:15 PM
ASR - 03:42 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:39 PM
ISHA - 07:53 PM



P12

GERMANY GOALKEEPER NEUER RETIRES FROM INTERNATIONAL DUTY

P13

BARKA V PROJECT SET TO EXPAND OMAN'S DESALINATION CAPACITY

P20

IMTI AS AN ART HUB IS FINALLY TAKING SHAPE

NEW YORK

RUSSIAN ORDER FOR OMANI OFFICIAL

The Russian Federation has awarded the 'Order of Friendship' to Dr Adnan bin Rashid al Azri, member of the United Nations' Commission on Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the commission's activities. The honorary medal was presented on behalf of the Russian President by Alexander Kozlov, Russian Federation's Minister of Natural Resources and Ecology. During the ceremony, held at the Russian Mission to the United Nations in New York, Kozlov commended Dr Adnan al Azri's active role in enhancing international cooperation in the field of continental shelf boundaries. **DETAILS ON P2**

CAIRO

OMAN AT RISK REDUCTION MEET

The Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday took part in the second meeting of the Arab ministers entrusted with risk reduction affairs. During the meeting, held at the headquarters of the Arab League in Cairo, Oman was represented by Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League. In his speech at the meeting, Al Rahbi stressed the importance of establishing a unified Arab mechanism to diminish the impacts of disasters and risks. **DETAILS ON P2**

MUSCAT

ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE IN CURRICULA

Environmental Science will be added to the Ministry of Education's curricula from the next academic year to help students with concepts and knowledge related to environmental sciences, and instil correct behavioural values and principles towards the environment. The subjects will be taught for the 11th grade from the 2024-2025 academic year, and the 12th grade from the 2025-2026 academic year. The curriculum is included in the list of elective subjects and will include Introduction to Environmental Management, Environmental Research and Data Collection, Interactions in Marine Ecosystems, Classification and Biodiversity. **SEE ALSO P5**



Farewell to Senegal Ambassador

At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday Serigne Aliou Deme, Ambassador of the Republic of Senegal to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty. HH Sayyid Shihab thanked the ambassador for the efforts he exerted to enhance relations between Oman and Senegal, wishing him success in his future assignments. On his turn, the ambassador lauded the advanced relations binding the two countries. He expressed his appreciation for the cooperation he received during his mission in Oman. — ONA

Rare fungi cultivation experiments in Dhofar

SALALAH: Oman Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Centre (Mawarid) — affiliated to the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation — on Wednesday began experiments to cultivate rare fungi from Dhofar Governorate that have medicinal and nutritional properties.

This stage constitutes part of a research project titled "Wild Fungi in the Sultanate of Oman" being implemented by Mawarid Centre in cooperation with the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences in Sultan Qaboos University, with support from Dhofar University and funding from the Agricultural and Fisheries Development



The success of the project will open up vistas for sustainable investments in some of these fungi.

Fund. Moza bint Mohammed al Kharousiyah, Head of Research Facilities at Mawarid Centre and Project Deputy Manager, said that the success of the project will open up vistas for sustainable investments in some of these fungi. — ONA

Israel kills dozens in Gaza after Blinken ends visit

CAIRO: Israeli airstrikes across Gaza killed at least 50 Palestinians in the past 24 hours, Palestinian health officials said on Wednesday, after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken ended his latest visit to the region with a truce deal still elusive.

As last-ditch diplomacy continued to halt the 10-month-old war between Israel and Hamas, the Israeli military said jets hit around 30 targets throughout the Gaza Strip including tunnels, launch sites and an observation post.

Later in the day, the Israeli military struck a school and a nearby house in Gaza City, killing at least three people and wounding 15, the territory's Civil Emergency Service said.

In the town of Bani Suhaila near Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, an Israeli airstrike killed seven Palestinians at a tent encampment for displaced people, medics said.

The military issued new evacuation orders in the heavily overcrowded area of Deir Al Balah, in central Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced by the fighting have sought shelter.

The conflict churned on as Blinken wound up his ninth troubleshooting visit to the Middle East since the Gaza war erupted last October with still no sign that deep differences between the sides over how to end the war could be reconciled.

Blinken's talks with leaders of ceasefire mediators Egypt and Qatar, as well as in Israel, focused on the fate of tiny, crowded Gaza, where Israel's military campaign has killed more than 40,000 people since October according to Palestinian health authorities.

For displaced people left



Palestinians react, after a school sheltering displaced people was hit by an Israeli strike, in Gaza City, on Wednesday. — Reuters

We feel they are closing in. I live a few hundred metres from the threatened areas, and I have been searching since the early morning in vain for a space in western Deir Al Balah, Khan Yunis, or Nuseirat

ABURAKAN
Displaced person

exposed in Deir Al Balah, the lack of progress towards a ceasefire compounded the misery as they searched for space away from the fighting.

"Where will we go? Where will we go?" said Aburakan, 55, a displaced person from Gaza City in the territory's north who has had to change refuge five times since October.

"We feel they are closing in. I live a few hundred metres from the threatened areas, and I have been searching since the early morning in vain for a space in western Deir Al Balah, Khan Yunis, or Nuseirat," he said via a chat app.

"Unfortunately, we may die before we see an end to this war. All ceasefire talk is a lie."

— Reuters

Australia greenlights world's 'largest' solar hub

SYDNEY: Australia on Wednesday approved plans for a massive solar and battery farm that would export energy to Singapore, a project billed as the "largest solar precinct in the world".

Authorities announced environmental approvals for SunCable's \$24 billion project in Australia's remote north that is slated to power three million homes. The project, which will include an array of panels, batteries and, eventually, a cable linking Australia with Singapore,

is backed by tech billionaire and green activist Mike Cannon-Brookes.

"It will be the largest solar precinct in the world — and heralds Australia as the world leader in green energy," said Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek. It is hoped that energy production will begin in 2030, providing four gigawatts of energy for domestic use.

Two more gigawatts would be sent to Singapore via undersea cable, supplying about 15 per cent of the city-state's needs. — AFP



CAPTURING PERFECT IMAGES!

Dhofar Governorate, with its lush autumn beauty, stands majestically before the lenses of photographers, professionals — amateurs and others alike — who visit the governorate this season from Oman and abroad. With a keen sense and tireless perseverance, they strive to keep their camera lenses constantly alert, capturing the most beautiful and perfect images during their trips and documenting them in the photographic memory of their creative works. **SEE ALSO P2**



OVER 27K STUDENTS ADMITTED TO HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

MUSCAT: The Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation announced the admission of 27,178 students for the first sorting of the 2024/2025 academic year. Ahmed bin Mohammed al Azri,

Director-General of the HEAC, said that government's higher education institutions accounted for 55.7 per cent of the total number of admitted students whereas internal scholarships and grants made up 42.2 per cent and external scholarships and grants

2.1 per cent. After the admission of 27,178 students, a percentage of 5.5 of seats are available for competition while 6.5 per cent of seats remained vacant as the applicants did not meet the conditions due to the lack of a sufficient

number of students meeting the conditions of admission, Al Azri said explaining that admission to for the professional competence certificate at vocational colleges will be in the second sorting in November. The first sorting saw tough

competition due to the large number of applicants with high rates with 10,054 students obtaining a general rate of 90 per cent and higher. This has led to an increase in the competitive rates for admission in the highly competitive and most

in-demand specialisations. The lowest competitive rate accepted in the general medicine major at Sultan Qaboos University for male students was 98.2 while the rate for female students was 99.25, Al Azri said. — ONA



PHOTOGRAPHERS' LENSES CAPTURE THE BEAUTY, DIVERSITY OF NATURE IN DHOFAR



The Dhofar Governorate, adorned with its lush autumnal beauty, stands majestically before the lenses of photographers – professionals, amateurs, and creatives alike – who visit the governorate during this season from both the Sultanate of Oman and abroad. With a keen sense and tireless perseverance, they strive to keep their camera lenses constantly alert, capturing the most beautiful and perfect images during their trips and documenting them in the photographic memory of their most important creative works. – ONA



Russia confers ‘Order of Friendship’ on Omani

NEW YORK: The Russian Federation has awarded the ‘Order of Friendship’ to Dr Adnan bin Rashid al Azri, member of the United Nations’ Commission on Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the Commission’s activities. The honorary medal was presented on behalf of the Russian President by Alexander Kozlov, Russian Federation’s Minister of Natural Resources and Ecology. During the ceremony, held at the Russian Mission to the United Nations in New York, Kozlov commended Dr Adnan’s active role in enhancing international cooperation in the field of continental shelf boundaries. Al Azri’s felicitation reflects the advanced relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation, said



Al Azri’s felicitation reflects the advanced relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation. – ONA

Kozlov, adding that the gesture also embodies international appreciation for Oman’s efforts in global events. It is worth noting that Dr Adnan al Azri played a key

role in a number of important projects and initiatives aimed to consolidate scientific concepts and strengthen ties between member states. — ONA

Oman participates in risk reduction meet

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the second meeting of the Arab ministers entrusted with risk reduction affairs. During the meeting, held at the headquarters of the Arab League in Cairo, Oman was represented by Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League. In his speech at the meeting, Al Rahbi stressed the importance of establishing a unified Arab mechanism to diminish the impacts of disasters and risks. This stand, said Al Rahbi, constitutes an initiative that reflects a sincere desire to address common challenges and achieve positive outcomes that enhance cooperation between Arab countries to limit chances for the occurrence of disasters and risks. Al Rahbi outlined the efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman in the field of risk management



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

and the country’s keenness to limit the scopes of disasters and mitigate their impacts. Al Rahbi pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman has formed a working team from all relevant authorities to study the risks that could affect the country, including economic, social, health or other risks. Following this study, a National Risk Register was compiled, said Al Rahbi, noting that “short-term and medium-term records of the National Risk Register have completed and that the team in charge is embarked on drafting long-term risk records”. — ONA

Climate change conference to generate sustainable solutions

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 21

The Local Youth Climate Change Conference, a pioneering event that marks a significant step forward in Oman’s ongoing efforts to empower young people in addressing the critical issue of climate change, kicked off on Wednesday. Organised under the auspices of the “Madad for Development” initiative and in collaboration with the “Youth Centre,” this conference has garnered strong support from key government entities, reflecting the nation’s commitment

to fostering a generation of environmentally conscious and proactive leaders. Running over the course of two days, this conference is designed to amplify the role of youth in combating climate change, a global crisis that poses unprecedented challenges to the environment, economies, and societies worldwide. By creating a forum where young people can come together to discuss, innovate, and strategise, the event aims to generate fresh, sustainable solutions that will contribute to reducing the negative impacts of climate change



Running over the course of two days, the conference is designed to amplify the role of youth in combating climate change

at both local and global levels. The conference has attracted a diverse and dynamic group of young participants from various governorates across the Sultanate of Oman. These individuals, selected for their dedication and commitment to environmental and climate issues, represent the future of Oman’s efforts to address and adapt to the evolving climate landscape. Throughout the event,

they will have the invaluable opportunity to engage directly with leading experts, academics, and professionals in the field of climate science and environmental management. This interaction is expected to spark a rich exchange of ideas and foster the development of innovative approaches to the challenges at hand. A key highlight of the event is the focus on sustainable planning and the importance of teamwork in addressing environmental challenges. Hafez al Shukairy, head of the Madad Development Team, underscored the crucial role of

youth in shaping climate action. He highlighted that empowering young people is not only essential but imperative, given their inherent creativity and innovative potential. “Young people have the ability and creativity to develop solutions that can meet climate challenges, Al Shukairy remarked. He further emphasised that the conference aims to forge a network of Omani youth who are passionate about climate issues, thereby fostering collaboration on sustainable projects that could significantly mitigate the adverse effects of climate change.



■ ‘SUMMER OF TALENTS’ WORKSHOP CONCLUDES



MUSCAT: The third workshop of the ‘Summer of Talents’ programme concluded on Wednesday. The programme was organised by the Cultural Library of the General-Directorate of Publications and Artistic Works of the Ministry of Information, in collaboration with the Observer newspaper.

SMEDA fetes content creators



The closing ceremony, held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, featured a series of panel discussions, visual presentations and artistic performances

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) concluded its extensive communication, media and marketing campaign aimed at enhancing the visibility and growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and Omani ventures throughout the Khareef Dhofar Season.

The closing ceremony, held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, featured a series of panel discussions, visual presentations and artistic performances. The event brought together a distinguished group of content creators from Oman and across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

The evening’s programme included insightful discussions

on the role of content creation in shaping entrepreneurial narratives and its influence on travel trends. Among the notable speakers were Omar Farouk from Bahrain, Anas Iskandar from Saudi Arabia, along with Omani contributors Haitham al Farsi, Khalid al Maashani, Jassim al Alawi and Anas al Dhibi.

The “Our Entrepreneurs in Dhofar” campaign has garnered significant engagement across social media platforms and traditional media, driven by a strategic blend of media, marketing and communication initiatives. A key element of the campaign was the launch of a promotional guide highlighting over 50 SMEs actively participating in the khareef season. This guide was widely disseminated through SMEDA’s social media channels and official website, with the campaign’s

flagship video alone amassing over two million views on the X platform. The Authority also collaborated with leading content creators to promote these SMEs across various tourist locations.

Additionally, the campaign spotlighted 18 SMEs on electronic billboards along Dhofar’s main roads, further amplifying their visibility. In total, the campaign generated over 25 posts, including advertisements and promotional videos. Complementing these efforts, SMEDA, in partnership with strategic collaborators such as the Challenge Oman Foundation and the Youth Centre, launched a series of specialised, interactive and leadership training programmes catering to diverse age groups.

This event marks the culmination of a highly successful campaign that has not

only raised the profile of SMEs in Dhofar, but also showcased the vital role of content in driving entrepreneurial success.

Shaikh Mohammed al Ghassani, Director of the Department of Small and Medium Enterprises in Dhofar, said: “The campaign has been a remarkable success, demonstrating the incredible potential of our small and medium enterprises. By harnessing the power of content creation and strategic marketing, we have been able to elevate the visibility of our local entrepreneurs, ensuring they play a central role in our governorate’s economic and cultural landscape. This event is a testament to the vibrant entrepreneurial spirit that thrives in Dhofar, and I am proud of the collaborative efforts that have made this campaign so impactful.”

Inspection of agricultural, fishing facilities to ensure consumer protection

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

An extensive inspection campaign was conducted on agricultural and fishing facilities in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan. The campaign is a collaboration between several government agencies with the goal of ensuring that agricultural and fisheries establishments comply with the regulations and laws in the Sultanate of Oman.

The campaign aims to ensure that agricultural and fisheries establishments comply with laws and regulations that protect consumers and ensure the safety of agricultural and fisheries products traded in the markets. It also aims to raise awareness among establishment owners about the importance of following correct practices in production and distribution to maintain product quality and ensure safe and healthy consumption.

Additionally, the campaign works to verify the sustainable and appropriate use of water resources, as the depletion of water resources can significantly impact agricultural and fisheries production and threaten the region’s food security.

Ali bin Khamis al Aarimi, Director of the Control Department in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, stated, “This campaign aims to monitor



The campaign aims to ensure that agricultural and fisheries establishments comply with laws

compliance with current laws and regulations in agricultural, fisheries, animal and water resource projects.” He also confirmed the continuation of such campaigns in other wilayats in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate as planned.

This campaign showcases government cooperation between various parties, with the Control Department in the directorate monitoring compliance with regulations. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources provided technical support to ensure operations align with international practices and standards.

The Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan Municipality played an organisational role, coordinating efforts and providing logistical support. The Consumer Protection Department ensured consumer rights were protected and high-quality products were obtained.

Culinary Arts Festival from today, to promote food tourism

STAFF REPORTER
SALALAH, AUGUST 21

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) is organising the Omani Culinary Arts Festival from August 22 to 26 at Al Haffa Beach in Salalah, coinciding with the Khareef Dhofar Season 2024 events.

Amira al Lawati, Head of the Food Tourism and Culinary Arts Programme at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, stated that the festival will feature a variety of activities over the five days.

These include live cooking demonstrations by top Gulf and Omani chefs (such as Lulwa Altaanak, Nader al Aisari, Ahmed al Saadi, Mohammed Issa, Faisal Sajoor, Umm Ayman and Khulood), a children’s cooking corner, folk music performances



Amira al Lawati

and various competitions.

Additionally, there will be a farmers’ corner with local products, restaurants offering authentic Omani cuisine, and a section for gifts and souvenirs.

Amira al Lawati said that the Omani Culinary Arts Festival aims to promote and enhance food tourism and culinary arts, particularly Omani cuisine, both



The goal is to position Omani culinary arts on the cultural tourism map

locally and internationally.

This will be achieved through gatherings, festivals, events and specialised forums dedicated to food tourism and culinary arts. Al Lawati explained that the festival is part of the ‘Food Tourism and Culinary Arts’ programme. Through this initiative, the ministry aims to showcase Omani cuisine as a means of

achieving economic, social and environmental sustainability.

The goal is to position Omani culinary arts on the cultural tourism map, enhance tourism’s role in benefiting local communities, provide business opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises and create job opportunities in culinary professions.

The Head of the Food Tourism and Culinary Arts Programme stated that the ministry places significant importance on developing tourism based on the comparative and competitive advantages of Oman.

She emphasised that the Omani Culinary Arts Festival is one of the most important tourism types, focusing on showcasing and promoting Omani culinary arts. Food and drink, as well as culinary arts, have always been central to any society, reflecting the cultural and civilisational diversity that distinguishes it from others. There is a growing global trend towards this type of tourism.

The Food Tourism and Culinary Arts Programme aims to document the heritage, history and traditions of Omani cuisine. The programme seeks to

preserve and sustain this heritage through the development and innovation of recipes and menus to suit the evolving tastes of tourists while maintaining the essential ingredients that define these recipes. It also focuses on innovating products linked to supply chains to enhance competitiveness, benefiting local communities.

Additionally, the programme aims to foster entrepreneurial opportunities in manufacturing, services and tourism products, as well as innovative experiences. The ministry emphasised that the successful implementation of these initiatives requires the combined efforts of public and private sector stakeholders, tourism sector partners, and the involvement of the local community, associations and chefs.



IP, PATENTS OPEN DOORS TO INNOVATION, MARKET ACCESS

US INVENTOR THOMAS EDISON HAD ACQUIRED A RECORD NUMBER OF PATENTS, TOTALLING 1,093, BOTH SINGLY AND JOINTLY

The assurance of IP protection can also attract investors by providing a safeguard for their investments in new ideas. In addition, innovations often lead to the creation of new industries and job opportunities, contributing to overall economic development.

Another advantage is that companies with strong patent portfolios can gain a competitive edge, potentially increasing their market valuation. This also implies protection of original works in the categories of art, literature and music. With Oman focusing on the creative industry, this is a necessity that can encourage diverse forms of media and art.

Supporting fair competition, it is essential for entrepreneurs to know what is available to them. The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority's Oman Start-ups Programme has introduced a set of guides to support the entrepreneurial journey.

The target group includes owners of start-up companies and entrepreneurs interested in the field of intellectual property and patents. The guide provides information on the mechanism for obtaining intellectual property, the types of intellectual property, the concept of intellectual property and patents, and the importance of intellectual property.

The How-To guides launched by the Oman Start-Ups Programme also delve into patent and intellectual property registration, business accelerators, terminologies needed for entrepreneurship and start-ups, stages of establishing start-ups, ways entrepreneurs can attract investment and how to establish incubators, among other topics.

IP laws help ensure that businesses can compete fairly, protecting them from unauthorised use of their inventions or brand identity, which could detract from their market exposure and profits.

Strong IP regulations help maintain product quality and brand reputation, ensuring that consumers can trust the products they purchase.

A healthy sector can result in patents facilitating the licensing of technology, enabling companies to monetise their inventions and share them with others, which can accelerate technological advancement across industries.

This could also lead to collaborative innovation, where there could be collaboration between entities, creating joint ventures and partnerships utilising each entity's strengths.

Most importantly, it can lead to market access, as companies with strong IP rights have more opportunities to enter international markets, enhancing global competition and innovation.

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Intellectual Property (IP) and patents play a crucial role in fostering innovation, ensuring economic growth and protecting the rights of inventors and creators.

Among countries, China leads in the number of patents applied and registered, followed by the United States of America and Japan. US inventor Thomas Edison had acquired a record number of patents, totalling 1,093, both singly and jointly.

In terms of protection of inventions, patents grant inventors exclusive rights to their inventions for a certain period, encouraging them to invest time and resources into developing new products and technologies without the fear of immediate competition.

According to the World Intellectual Property Organisation, between 2020 and 2022, organisations from Oman that secured intellectual copyrights were Sultan Qaboos University with six, Synergy Investments LLC with two, Higher College of Technology with one, Octal Saoc Fcz, Sultanate of Oman with one, and Green Eagles Technology LLC with one.



RECALL DATE: 22-08-2024

KIA
Niro (DE)

Recall

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
Niro (DE)	November 2015 ~ June 2023	4

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

Recall consequence

In some Niro cars(DE) of the 2015-2023 model produced on the specified date range stated in the Technical Services Bulletin, the printed circuit board in the hydraulic clutch actuator is contaminated with liquids, a printed circuit board contaminated with liquids may cause a short circuit which increases the risk of fire in the engine compartment while driving. Affected vehicles may experience a warning signal while driving, the estimated percentage of error is 1% However, Kia conducts this recall as a precautionary measure to avoid Hazard.

Recall Action

Verify affected vehicles as per the VIN list and inspect the DTC in the vehicle then replace the fuse or Hydraulic Clutch Actuator as recommended by KIA. All affected vehicles will be inspected and repaired at no expense to the vehicle owner.

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



Contact details: Toll free - 80073222
Working days: Sunday - Thursday
Working Time: 8.30 - 17.30 hrs.





196 DOCTORS JOIN SPECIALTY PROGRAMMES



Doctors will train over 5 years in accredited centres that combine theoretical and practical education

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

As many as 196 doctors from various health institutions in the Sultanate of Oman recently joined specialised training programmes being conducted by Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB) during the current academic year 2024/2025. The batch includes 60 doctors from internship programmes and 5 doctors from the Royal Hospital's local fellowship

programmes (paediatric intensive care), the University Medical City's department of genetic medicine and adult blood diseases (Sultan Qaboos University Hospital) and Al Nahdha Hospital's department of ear medicine and surgery. In the coming weeks, interactive meetings will be held between new doctors, training programme directors, and members of educational committees to introduce doctors to their training programmes

and facilitate their integration into the academic and training environment. These meetings will take place at the council's headquarters or at accredited training centres like Ministry of Health hospitals, the Medical City for Military and Security Forces, and the University Medical City. The aim is to provide information on medical training in specialty programmes and address any inquiries. In an effort to meet the



growing needs of the health sector, a new training programme in the specialty of neurology has been launched, receiving its first batch of trainees this year. Doctors will train over 5 years in accredited centres that combine theoretical and practical education. The Oman Medical Specialty Board provides various training programmes that aim to raise the efficiency of doctors and equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to provide high-quality healthcare.

The council is the leading authority in advanced medical education in the Sultanate of Oman, offering internationally accredited programmes that contribute to improving the quality of healthcare provided to patients. Dr Yasser al Lawati, an emergency medicine specialist, advised the new batch of doctors to recognise the importance of enjoying life and taking care of themselves. He encouraged them to embark on this journey

together, making the most of every moment. "Taking time for yourself is not just a luxury but a necessity," he emphasised. Dr Al Lawati urged them to carve out time in their busy schedules for self-care and relaxation. Whether it's reading a book, going for a walk, or spending time with loved ones, he stressed that investing in personal well-being ultimately enables them to share their positive energy and compassion with others.

Environmental Science to be added to school curricula: MoE

MUSCAT: Environmental Science will be added to the Ministry of Education's curricula for the next academic year to help students with concepts and knowledge related to environmental sciences, and instil correct behavioural values and principles towards the environment. The subjects will be taught for the 11th grade from the 2024-2025 academic year, and the 12th grade from the 2025-2026 academic year. The curriculum is included in the list of elective subjects and will include Introduction to Environmental Management, Environmental Research and Data Collection, Interactions in Marine Ecosystems, Classification and Biodiversity.



CHAIRMAN OF DEFENCE ACADEMY RECEIVES COMOROS OFFICIAL

MUSCAT: Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, received in his office at Bait Al Falaj on Wednesday General Youssouf Idjihadi, Chief of Defence Staff of the Union of the Comoros, and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides touched on a set of areas of mutual interest. — ONA

Qatari delegation visits Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences

NIZWA: The Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences in the Wilayat of Nizwa, Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, on Wednesday received a delegation from the Ministry of Interior in the State of Qatar. The delegation was led by Maj

Gen Nasser Yousuf al Mal, Acting Director of the International Cooperation Department. During the visit, members of the Qatari delegation were briefed on the tasks, specialisations and role of the various institutes in the academy.

They were also oriented with the role of the academy in grooming human cadres at the Royal Oman Police (ROP). The guests were also familiarised with the different training programmes offered by the academy. — ONA



During the visit, members of the Qatari delegation were briefed on the tasks of the academy. — ONA



Sultanate of Oman
The Supreme Judicial Council
Tender Announcement

The Supreme Judicial Council announces its desire to submit the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
25/2024	Maintenance and Rehabilitation Works at Al Kamil Al Wafi Primary Court Building	25/08/2024	23/09/2024	Second, Third	RO 25/-

Where you can buy the more detailed tender documents electronically via the link below website:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders must submit a letter of commitment to the bid, addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tenders Committee of the Supreme Judicial Council, based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tenders Council and the latest updates to the electronic bidding system. Based on Circular No. (1/2024) issued by the General Secretariat of the Tender Board.

1- For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:
Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tender system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).

2- For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:
Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:
Phone: +968 24402200
Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om



Indian PM Modi kicks off Poland, Ukraine visit

CALLS FOR EARLY RETURN OF PEACE AND STABILITY IN THE REGION

WARSAW: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched on Wednesday his historic trip to Poland and Ukraine, where he has pledged to campaign for a peaceful resolution of Russia's war on Ukraine.

Modi will be the first Indian prime minister to make a Ukraine trip and first in 45 years to travel to Poland, Kyiv's staunch ally that is a key transit for foreign leaders heading to its war-torn neighbour.

He is expected to meet with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and President Andrzej Duda on Thursday, as well as with Indian nationals living in the Central European country.

"This visit will add momentum to the India-Poland friendship and benefit the people of our nations," Modi said on X upon landing in Warsaw.

On Wednesday, Modi commemorated an Indian maharaja who sheltered Polish children during World War II, before laying flowers at a war memorial and delivered a speech to the Indian community in Poland.

Poland "needs a lasting partnership with India," deputy Polish Prime Minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz told reporters



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi gestures as he arrives in Warsaw, Poland, on Wednesday. – AFP

before Modi's visit, adding that economic ties would also be on the agenda.

Modi has trodden a delicate balance between maintaining India's historically warm ties with Russia while courting closer security partnerships with Western nations as a bulwark against regional rival China.

His government has avoided explicit condemnations of Russia's 2022 war on Ukraine, instead urging both sides to resolve their differences through dialogue.

"As a friend and partner, we hope for an early return of peace and stability in the region," Modi said in a statement published on Wednesday before his departure for Poland.

advocated for diplomacy and dialogue to reach a negotiated settlement," Indian foreign ministry official Tanmaya Lal said before the visit.

Zelensky announced on Monday that "a number of documents are also expected to be signed" during the meeting with Modi, whose previous diplomatic efforts drew condemnation from Kyiv.

In July, hours after Russia pummelled multiple cities across Ukraine, Modi visited Moscow and was pictured hugging Putin at his residence.

He also visited Russia in 2019 and hosted Putin in New Delhi two years later, weeks before Moscow began its offensive against Ukraine.

India has largely shied away from explicit condemnation of Russia and abstained on UN resolutions targeting the Kremlin. However, Russia's fight with Ukraine has also had a human cost for India.

New Delhi has pushed Moscow to return several of its citizens who signed up for "support jobs" with the Russian military but were later sent to fight on the frontlines in Ukraine. At least five Indian soldiers have been killed in the conflict. — AFP

Gaza student tries to study despite destruction of universities

KHAN YUNIS: Shahed Abu Omar, 20, was in her third year studying computer science at Gaza's Al Azhar University when it was reduced to rubble by Israel's military campaign in the Palestinian territory.

She is now one of 90,000 university students left stranded in a war with no end in sight that has damaged or destroyed all 12 of the higher education institutions in the Gaza Strip, according to Palestinian official data.

However, Abu Omar is determined to keep studying, braving a perilous daily journey to reach a stable Internet connection that allows her to learn online.

"We cannot go to our university or study away from it," she said, alluding to the difficulty of remote learning with such poor Internet connection.

Perched in the rubble of a



Shahed Abu Omar, a computer engineering student, sits on the rubble of a house studying online via her mobile phone, in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. – Reuters

destroyed house, Abu Omar studies from her mobile phone. Her mother, Hanin Sarour, said they had come to the area to reach an Internet connection. The connection, vital to downloading pre-recorded lectures and communicating with professors, was still weak, she said. "Every step is dangerous and difficult,"

Sarour added.

Most of Abu Omar's professors are in the Gaza Strip as well, she said, facing the same difficulties their students do.

Abu Omar's final exams are in just two weeks. She fears she will only fall further behind. "I am sure we will lose more than the year that we've lost already," she said.

She dreams of returning to university, sitting in a classroom, and meeting with professors and friends.

The war, now in its 11th month, has also interrupted education for Gaza's estimated 625,000 school-aged children, leaving them unable to attend classes.

The uncertainty for Abu Omar and students across the small coastal enclave is likely to persist. Even after the war ends, students do not know when universities will reopen, she said. — Reuters

IRAN PARLIAMENT APPROVES PEZESHKIAN'S UNITY CABINET

TEHRAN: Iran's parliament approved President Masoud Pezeshkian's 19 ministers on Wednesday, state media reported, giving way to a cross-factional cabinet reflecting his focus on consensus after days of debate.

In contrast to former president Ebrahim Raisi's team, the new cabinet includes figures such as Health Minister Mohammadreza Zafargandi, who secured his position despite receiving the lowest number of votes, at 163.

Approval of the ministerial line-up is not a formality.

"The road to our salvation is unity and solidarity," Pezeshkian said on Wednesday in his speech to the 285 parliamentarians present to give their vote of confidence to the cabinet, which had been debated since Saturday.

Farzaneh Sadeq was approved as minister of roads and transportation, becoming the only second female cabinet minister since the Islamic Republic's establishment in 1979.

Mohsen Paknejad was approved as minister of oil. He served as deputy minister of oil for the supervision of hydrocarbon resources from 2018 to 2021.



Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses parliament during a session to approve his new cabinet appointments in Tehran on Wednesday. – AFP

SHORT TAKES

BERLIN

Germany's Scholz to visit 'troubled' shipbuilder

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz will on Thursday visit shipbuilder Meyer Werft, raising union hopes for government support for the company which is battling to fill a 2.7-billion euro hole in its finances. Meyer Werft, one of the world's biggest cruise ship builders, builds around two ships annually at a cost of at least 1.5 billion euros each, and recently booked an order from US entertainment group Disney.

Yet following a near-collapse in orders during the pandemic,



the company finds itself struggling to bridge a gap in its finances. "We expect the chancellor to bring good news with him," Thomas Gelder of the IG Metall union said.

TEHRAN

28 pilgrims killed as bus crashes in Iran

At least 28 Pakistani pilgrims travelling to Iraq for a ritual were killed as their bus crashed in central Iran, state media reported early on Wednesday.

"A bus carrying 51 Pakistani pilgrims overturned and caught fire in front of Dehshir-Taft checkpoint in the central province of Yazd on Tuesday night," Iranian state television reported.

It said "28 people have been killed and 23 injured so far with the possibility of the death



toll increasing".

Yazd province crisis management chief Ali Malek-zadeh told the broadcaster that some of the injured were in critical condition.

TEHRAN

Helicopter of late Raisi crashed due to weather

The helicopter crash in which Iran's late president Ebrahim Raisi was killed in May was caused by weather conditions and the aircraft's inability to handle the weight it was carrying, Iran's semi-official news agency reported on Wednesday, citing a security source informed of the final investigation results.

A preliminary report by Iran's military had said in May that no evidence of foul play or attack had been found so far during investigations into the crash.



"The investigation in the case of Ayatollah Raisi's helicopter crash has been completed... there is complete certainty that what happened was an accident," the security source said.



omanobserver.com/podcast

In brief

■ LONDON



UK PLEDGES £3.1M FOR CONGO TO CONTAIN MPOX

A £3.1 million (\$4.04 million) UK government package to tackle mpox will “ultimately benefit us all,” British Africa Minister Ray Collins has said. On a visit to the National Institute of Biomedical Research in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Collins pledged money on Wednesday to prevent the spread of the disease, which was previously known as monkeypox.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), some 15,000 clinically compatible cases of mpox have been detected in the DRC in 2024, with 500 deaths reported. WHO also identified more than 20,770 cases of cholera.

■ SARAJEVO



BOSNIA SCHOOL SHOOTING KILLS 3 WORKERS

Three employees were shot dead on Wednesday at a high school in northwest Bosnia by a co-worker who then tried to kill himself, police said.

The shooting occurred around 10:00 am (0800 GMT) in Sanski Most as teachers met to prepare the upcoming school year and no students were present, local media reported.

The violence comes after high profile mass shootings in other Balkan nations in recent years, including back-to-back attacks that rocked Serbia in 2023.

“This man used a military firearm, an automatic rifle, to kill three school employees and tried to kill himself,” a police spokesman, told national radio.

■ NAIROBI



5 KENYAN POLICEMEN ARRAIGNED OVER JAIL BREAK

Five Kenyan police officers were arraigned on Wednesday, accused of helping a suspected serial killer and 12 others escape from a police station in the capital Nairobi, court documents showed.

Prosecutors asked the court to detain the policemen, who were on duty during Tuesday’s jail break, for two weeks to allow officers to complete an investigation into their alleged involvement. Prosecutors asked the court for more time to collect statements, scour CCTV footage and examine the policemen’s phones. Among the escapees was Collins Jumaisi, arrested last month.

Ukraine launches ‘one of largest ever’ drone attacks on Moscow

KYIV: Ukraine launched one of the largest ever drone attacks on Moscow on Wednesday, the city’s mayor said, with Russian air defence units destroying at least 10 drones flying towards the capital.

Some of the drones were destroyed over the city of Podolsk, Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said. The city in the Moscow region is some 38 km south of the Kremlin.

“The air defence systems of the defence ministry continue to repel enemy UAV (unmanned aerial vehicles) attacks,” Sobyanin said on the Telegram messaging app at 4:43 am (0143 GMT).

“This is one of the largest attempts to attack Moscow using drones ever. We continue to monitor the situation.”

He said that according to preliminary information, there were no injuries or damage in the aftermath of the attacks.

Ukraine has often launched one or two drones targeting Moscow in recent months, causing no substantial damage.

The Wednesday attack, however, seems larger than May 2023 attack when at least eight drones were destroyed over the capital in an attack President Vladimir Putin said was Kyiv’s attempt to scare and provoke Russia.

Russian officials rarely disclose the full size of the attacks, reporting only drones that its air defence units destroy.

Both Ukraine and Russia also rarely disclose the full extent of the damage their attacks inflict, unless residential or civilian infrastructure is damaged, or civilians die.

The Wednesday attack on Moscow was part of a broader Ukraine’s drone attack on Russia with air defence system destroying also 18 drones over the border Bryansk region and separate drones and missiles over other regions, Russian officials said.

There were no casualties



Servicemen of 24th Mechanized Brigade of the Ukrainian Armed Forces fire a 2s5 “Hyacinth-S” self-propelled howitzer towards Russian troops at a front line, near the town of Chasiv Yar in Donetsk region, Ukraine. – Reuters

or damage reported in the aftermath of attack on the border Bryansk region in Russia’s southwest, Alexander Bogomaz, the governor of the region wrote on Telegram.

Russia’s RIA state news agency reported also that two drones were destroyed over the Tula region, which borders the Moscow region to its north.

Separately, Vasily Golubev, governor of the Rostov region in Russia’s southwest, said that air defence forces destroyed a Ukraine-launched missile over the region, with no injuries reported.

Reuters could not independently verify the reports. There was no immediate comment from Ukraine.

In recent months, Kyiv has stepped up its air attacks on Russian territory, saying its aim is to destroy infrastructure key to Moscow’s war efforts. It also says that its attacks are in response to Russia’s continued strikes on Ukrainian territory.

Meanwhile, Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia’s Security Council, said Ukraine’s incursion into Russia’s Kursk region means there will be no talks between Moscow and Kyiv until Ukraine is completely defeated on the battlefield.

“The casual chit-chat of self-proclaimed intermediaries on the virtuous subject of peace has ceased. Even if they cannot say it out loud, everyone recognises the reality of the situation,” Medvedev wrote on his official account on the Telegram messaging app.

“They understand that there will be NO NEGOTIATIONS UNTIL THE ENEMY IS COMPLETELY AND UTTERLY DESTROYED!”

Medvedev, who has styled himself as one of the Kremlin’s toughest anti-Western hawks, said that the “premature and unnecessary peace” talks that had previously been suggested “had vague prospects and no tangible outcomes.” — Agencies

Michelle tells Trump the presidency just may be a ‘Black job’

CHICAGO: Michelle Obama tore into Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump at the Democratic National Convention, criticising his character and racist attacks that have targeted her and her husband Barack in the past.

“His limited and narrow view of the world made him feel threatened by the existence of two hardworking, highly educated, successful people who also happened to be Black,” she said of Trump.

Michelle Obama also taunted Trump for his reference on the campaign trail to “Black jobs,” which he claims are being taken by migrants crossing into the US away from Black Americans.

“Who’s going to tell him that the job he’s currently seeking might just be one of those ‘Black jobs?’” Obama asked, drawing roars from the crowd.

Trump and his campaign have denied claims he’s employed racist attacks.

Trump launched his political career through false, racist attacks on Barack Obama’s citizenship status and has reprised similar attacks on Harris. In the former first lady’s memoir, “Becoming,” published in 2018, she wrote that Trump’s attacks on Barack Obama’s citizenship put her family’s safety at risk and had “underlying bigotry and xenophobia.”

Michelle Obama was speaking in support of Democratic candidate Kamala Harris, who will formally accept the party’s nomination for president at the convention and, if elected, would be the first Black and South Asian person to become president.

Obama also drew a contrast with Trump and most Americans who don’t grow up wealthy like Trump, whose father was a real estate investor.

“We will never benefit from the affirmative action of generational wealth,” she said. “If we bankrupt a business ... or choke in a crisis, we don’t get a second, third, or fourth chance,” she said. “If things don’t go our way, we don’t have the luxury of whining or cheating others to get further ahead.”

Trump, some Republicans in



Former US First Lady Michelle Obama speaks at the United Center in Chicago, Illinois, on Tuesday. – AFP

Congress, right-wing activists and online trolls have smeared Harris with racist and sexist attacks that have intensified since she began her presidential bid in July, after incumbent President Joe Biden dropped out of the race. Trump has also falsely questioned Harris’ racial identity.

“It’s his same old con,” Obama said, speaking of Trump. “Doubling down on ugly, misogynistic, racist lies as a substitute for real ideas and solutions that will actually make people’s lives better.”

Obama compared the energy in the Democratic National Convention arena and across the country for Harris to her husband’s 2008 presidential campaign.

“Something wonderfully magical is in the air,” she said to the delegates and guests crowded into Chicago’s United Center. “A familiar feeling that’s been buried too deep for far too long. It’s the contagious power of hope.”

“Hope is making a comeback.” Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign used the word “Hope” as a slogan to launch him into the White House as the nation’s first Black president.

Michelle Obama said Harris’ story is “your story. It’s my story. It’s the story of the vast majority of Americans trying to build a better life.”

Still, she said the race between Harris and Trump will be close and urged people to organise and mobilise voters. — AFP

2 bodies found inside Mike Lynch’s sunken yacht

PORTICELLO: Scuba divers scouring the wreck of British tech Mike Lynch’s family yacht, which sank off Sicily two days ago, have found two bodies inside it, a source close to rescue operations said on Wednesday.

One of the bodies belonged to a heavily built man, the source said.

Rescue officials have been looking for six missing people, including Lynch, his 18-year-old daughter and Jonathan Bloomer, a non-executive chair of Morgan Stanley International.

The British-flagged Bayesian, a 56-metre-long superyacht, was carrying 22 people, and was anchored off the port of Porticello, near Palermo, when it capsized during a fierce storm on Monday.

Fifteen people survived, while the body of the onboard chef, Canadian-Antiguan national Recaldo Thomas, was found near the wreck hours after the disaster.

Inspection of the wreck, lying



Rescue personnel operate at a port to search for the missing, including British entrepreneur Mike Lynch, after a luxury yacht sank off the coast of Porticello, near the Sicilian city of Palermo, Italy, on Wednesday. – Reuters

sideways at a depth of around 50 metres, was a “long and complex” operation, the Italian fire department said, with inside spaces obstructed by furniture and debris, and scuba divers having just 8-10 minutes beneath the

water before needing to resurface.

Separately, the coast guard deployed a remotely operated vehicle to scan the seabed and take underwater pictures and videos that it said may provide “useful and timely elements”

for prosecutors looking into the disaster.

The coast guard has been questioning survivors, including the captain of the Bayesian, and passengers on the yacht that was moored next to it who witnessed the ship going down, judicial sources said.

No one is under investigation at the moment, sources added.

Lynch, 59, is one of the UK’s best-known tech entrepreneurs and has been referred to as the country’s Bill Gates.

He built the UK’s largest software firm, Autonomy, which was sold to HP for \$11 billion in 2011, after which the deal spectacularly unravelled with the US tech giant accusing him of fraud, resulting in a lengthy trial. Lynch was acquitted on all charges by a jury in San Francisco in June.

The other missing passengers were Bloomer’s wife Judy, Clifford Chance lawyer Chris Morvillo and

his wife, Neda Morvillo. Morvillo represented Lynch in the San Francisco trial, while Bloomer was a character witness on his behalf.

Experts have been at a loss to explain how a large luxury vessel, presumed to have top-class fittings and safety features, could have sunk within minutes, as recounted by witnesses. The yacht anchored next to it was unharmed by the tempest.

The Bayesian, which was owned by Lynch’s wife, was built by Italian shipbuilder Perini in 2008 and last refitted in 2020. It had the world’s tallest aluminium mast, measuring 72 metres, according to its makers.

Its captain James Cutfield, a 51-year-old New Zealander who survived the shipwreck, was a “very good sailor” and “very well respected” in the Mediterranean, his brother Mark told *The New Zealand Herald*.

— Reuters

Saving the vanishing forests of Iraq’s Kurdistan



Tony Gamal-Gabriel

The writer is Iraq bureau chief for AFP

In a plant nursery in northern Iraq’s autonomous Kurdistan region, hundreds of pine, eucalyptus, olive and pomegranate saplings grow under awnings protecting them from the fierce summer sun.

The nursery in Sarchinar in the Kurdish city of Sulaimaniyah is part of efforts to battle the destructive effects of deforestation in the region.

“Almost 50 per cent of forests have been lost in Kurdistan in 70 years,” said Nyaz Ibrahim of the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP).

She attributed the loss to “water scarcity, rising temperatures, irregular decreasing rainfall and also fire incidents”.

The loss is catastrophic, as the Kurdistan region is home to 90 per cent of forests in Iraq, which has been among the hardest hit globally by climate change and desertification.

Much of this comes down to illegal tree felling and forest fires — intensified by summer droughts — as well as military operations on Iraq’s northern border.

In the nursery — the oldest in Iraq — workers are busy unloading young saplings from a trailer which they then line up on a patch of land.

Here, some 40 varieties are developed to later be planted in forests or given to farmers, among them pines, cypresses, junipers and oaks — the emblematic tree of the Kurdish forest.

“Climate change has an impact on the development of plants,” said agricultural engineer Rawa Abdulqader. “So we prioritise trees that can withstand high temperatures and which consume less water.”

With support from the WFP, micro-mesh nets were installed in the nursery to protect the trees from the sun, accelerating growth and minimising evaporation.

Other greenhouses have been equipped with hanging sprinklers, which are more water-efficient.

The project has helped Sarchinar’s annual production grow from 250,000 sprouts before it began in late 2022, to 1.5 million in 2024.

Over five years, the WFP intends to support authorities and local actors to plant 38 million trees over more than 61,000 hectares in Kurdistan, and work to preserve 65,000 forested hectares.

According to two official studies, between 1957 and 2015, more than 600,000 hectares were lost.

WITH SUPPORT FROM THE WFP, MICRO-MESH NETS WERE INSTALLED IN THE NURSERY TO PROTECT THE TREES FROM THE SUN, ACCELERATING GROWTH AND MINIMISING EVAPORATION

Over the last 14 years, some 290,000 hectares have been hit by fires, said Halkawt Ismail, director of the forestry office in Kurdistan’s agriculture ministry.

These fires “break out mainly during the summer drought... and above all because of the negligence of citizens”, he said. He added that illegal logging in the 1990s by locals using the wood to warm their homes during an economic crisis had significantly contributed to the shrinking of forests.

Elsewhere in Kurdistan, forests have been the collateral damage of fighting between the Turkish army and militants from the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). This summer, Kurdish media and organisations said Ankara’s bombardment of the PKK triggered several forest fires.

In late June, the Turkish defence ministry accused the PKK of lighting fires to reduce visibility and conceal its positions.

“Turkiye has established over 40 military outposts and bases” in Iraqi Kurdistan, “logged many dozens of kilometres of roads through forested areas, and cleared forest around their bases,” Wim Zwijnenburg, a researcher with the Dutch peace-building group PAX, said.

Brazil fishermen turn to mobile app to combat pollution

FLORIAN PLAUCHEUR AND EUGENIA LOGIURATTO

Brazilian activist and fisherman Alexandre Anderson uses one hand to steer his boat, and the other to film an oil stain spreading over Rio de Janeiro’s Guanabara Bay.

He will upload the video to an app developed to expose environmental damage in the iconic bay crucial for tourism and the fishing industry, but plagued by spills of oil, chemicals and untreated wastewater.

Guanabara Bay, a natural port of about 400 square kilometres, battles pollution not only from visiting vessels and oil rig accidents, but also from old ships abandoned in its waters and runoff from cities.

Frustrated with what they see as a lack of official response, the bay’s fishermen decided to take matters into their own hands, and with the backing of non-governmental organisation 350.org, had an app developed for them.

“We used to take pictures with our cell phone or a camera,” but without exact geolocation data, it was of little use, Anderson — president of the bay’s Ahomar fishermen’s association — said as he filmed a steady stream of wastewater being dumped from a ship.

The app, however, “gives me the precise” data with which to file a complaint, anonymously.

The information is verified by a moderator and published on a dedicated website, after which it is reported to authorities such as the country’s Ibama environmental regulator or Brazil’s navy, which patrols the bay.

Every time he monitors the dark waters for just a few hours, Anderson encounters several illegal spills, he says.

Within three weeks of the app launching on July 26, 20 complaints were posted on the web, and more than 100 others are under analysis, according to administrators.

“The inspection agencies always claimed they don’t have the tools to deal with complaints,” said Paulo Barone, who belongs to another local fishermen’s association.

But with this new app, he said, the authorities “can no longer deny or ignore” the complaints.

For 350.org’s Brazil coordinator Luiz Afonso Rosario, artisanal fishermen have been on the “front lines” for too long.

“Oil and gas companies, in addition to polluting the waters that are a source of food, income and leisure for thousands of families, aggravate the climate crisis... by providing fossil fuels that are the main cause of global warming,” he said. — AFP

Gaza engineer harnesses sunlight to make saltwater drinkable

YOUSSEF HASSOUNA

In war-ravaged Gaza, every drop of water counts, making Inas al Ghul’s makeshift sun-powered water filter a vital asset for parched Palestinians surviving endless bombardment under the territory’s scorching heat.

Using wood from the few pallets of aid that make it into Gaza, and window panes salvaged from buildings that have largely been abandoned in 10 months of war, the 50-year-old agricultural engineer built a glass-covered trough.

She lets saltwater evaporate from the trough, heated by the greenhouse effect created by the glass panes, allowing the water to distil and leaving behind the salt.

From there, a long black hose carries the evaporated water to other containers filled with activated charcoal to further filter out impurities.

“It is a very simple device, it’s very simple to use and to build,” Ghul said after taking a long gulp from a glass of filtered water in her house in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip.

Ghul’s device “doesn’t require electricity, filters, or solar panels, it operates solely on solar energy”, which Gaza has in abundance, with 14 hours of sunshine per day in the summer, and eight hours in the winter.

This has proven particularly useful at a time when Gaza’s only power plant is down and electricity supplies from Israel have been cut for months.

With fuel also in short supply, Gaza’s desalination plants that haven’t been damaged in the fighting have been working at a drastically reduced capacity.

Mohammad Abu Daoud, a displaced Gazan sweating in the midday sun, said Ghul’s invention “comes exactly at the right time”.

“For about two months, we have relied on it entirely,” he said.

This brings crucial help to those who benefit from it, as the available water for Gazans currently averages 4.74 litres per day, “under a third of the recommended minimum in emergencies”, Oxfam reported in July.

This represents “less than a single



The available water for Gazans currently averages 4.74 litres per day.

toilet flush”, the aid group warned in a report, which estimates that available water per person per day in the Gaza Strip plummeted by 94 per cent since the beginning of the war.

OXFAM ACCUSES ISRAEL OF USING ‘WATER AS A WEAPON OF WAR,’ AND HAS WARNED OF A DEADLY HEALTH CATASTROPHE’ FOR GAZANS, ALMOST ALL OF WHOM HAVE BEEN DISPLACED AT LEAST ONCE

Water was already scarce before the conflict erupted, and most of it was undrinkable. The 2.4 million population relies primarily on an increasingly polluted and depleted aquifer, humanitarian agencies say.

The war broke out with October 7 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,199 people, according to an

AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Israel’s retaliatory offensive in Gaza has killed at least 40,173 people, according to the territory’s health ministry. In the school-turned-shelter where Abu Daoud lives, close to Ghul’s house, other displaced families have come to rely on the water filtration system to fill up their bottles.

The 250-litre tank that stores the clean water quickly empties.

Oxfam accuses Israel of using “water as a weapon of war”, and has warned of “a deadly health catastrophe” for Gazans, almost all of whom have been displaced at least once.

The aid group calculated that “Israeli military attacks have damaged or destroyed five water and sanitation infrastructure sites every three days since the start of the war”.

The lack of clean water has had drastic effects on the population, with “26 per cent of Gaza’s population falling severely ill from easily preventable diseases”, it said.

Conscious of the pressing need for her device and of the ubiquitous danger of air strikes, Ghul regularly climbs up to her terrace to watch over her creation, and to open or close her precious taps. — AFP

A hope for better future!

Bangladeshi student Omar Faruq believes the future of his country is bright but all he can see is darkness, after police trying to crush a student-led revolution blinded him with rubber pellets.

More than 450 people were killed — many by police fire — in the weeks of protests leading up to the ouster of ex-premier Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India on August 5 ending her 15-year rule.

But dozens of protesters were also robbed of their vision — some in one eye, others entirely — by the plastic or rubber grapeshot pellets police fired from shotguns.

Bangladeshi security forces are accused of having resorted to excessive force to quell the protests.

“I was bombarded with pellets all over... my nose, eyes, everywhere — from close range,” said 20-year-old Faruq.

He had hitchhiked 200 km from the northern city of Bogura to attend the protests in the capital Dhaka.

Now he is getting treatment at the National Institute of Ophthalmology and Hospital (NIOH), the country’s biggest specialised eye centre.

Its records show nearly 600 people have lost at least some vision from shotgun pellets fired during the weeks of civil unrest against Hasina. Among those, 20 have been blinded completely.

Hundreds of others with pellet injuries in their eyes are undergoing treatment in smaller hospitals across Dhaka, according to local media reports.

“We were doing up to 10 surgeries at a time,” said Mohammad Abdul Qadir, NIOH’s acting director. “We have never seen such a situation before.”

Rights groups discourage the use of pellets for crowd control against unarmed protestors, calling the cluster clouds of shots indiscriminate.

US-based Physicians for Human Rights has called their use “inherently inaccurate”, and potentially “lethal to humans at close range”.

The United Nations last week



Arunabh Saikia

The writer is a South Asia correspondent at AFP

NEARLY 600 BANGLADESHIS HAVE LOST AT LEAST SOME VISION FROM SHOTGUN PELLETS FIRED DURING THE WEEKS OF CIVIL UNREST

said there were “strong indications” Bangladeshi security forces used “unnecessary and disproportionate force”, with a team expected to visit Dhaka to investigate.

Those in the NIOH hospital, where ward after ward is filled with protesters with impaired vision, say they are witnesses to the violence.

Mohammad Abdul Alim, 34, lay writhing in pain in his bed at the hospital, several pellets still lodged in his body. His left eye was swollen and bloodshot.

“Sometimes I wish I could just cut off the left side of my face,” said Alim, visibly anguished.

“I can’t even properly see how much rice there is on my plate when I eat.”

An X-ray image of Alim’s skull seen by AFP bore testimony to his agony — dozens of pellets lodged all over.

Alim said the police gave him and his fellow protesters 20 seconds to disperse before raining them with pellets.

He said scores of people “immediately collapsed” after the shots.

Alim said he hoped the new authorities — an interim administration led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus — would “take care” of his treatment.

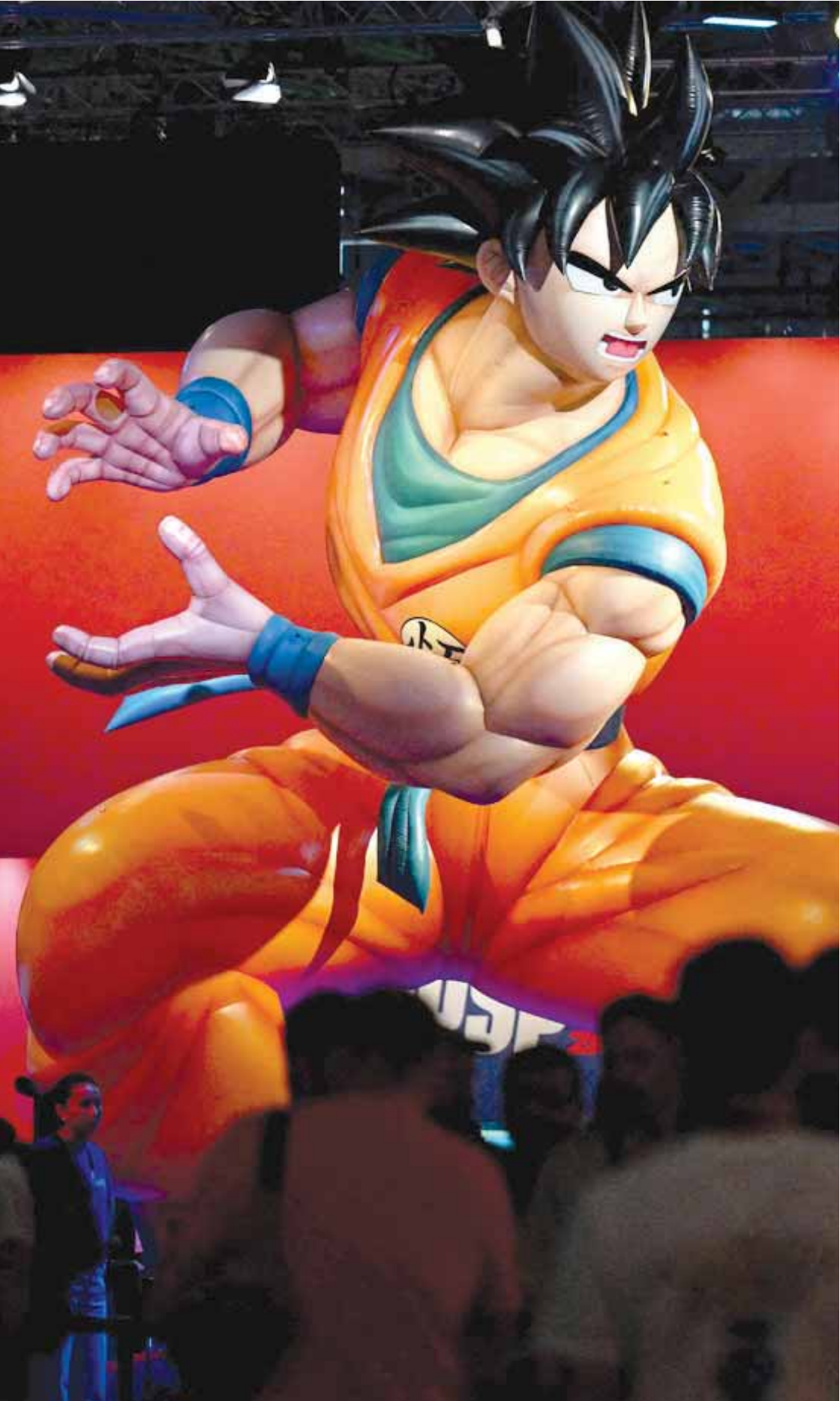
Yunus’s government said on Tuesday it was setting up a foundation to “take care of the wounded and the families of the dead and wounded” who took part in the protests.

“We can never forget the contributions of the students and people who sacrificed their lives and who were grievously wounded while participating in the protests against the dictatorship,” Yunus said in a statement.

He vowed his government would do “whatever is needed to take good care of the wounded and families of the deceased” as soon as it could. But, for now, the injured have only their families to fall back on.

In another ward at NIOH, Nazrul Islam stroked the hair of his younger brother Rahmatullah Sardar Shabbir, trying to comfort him.

‘BASE GOKU’ ON DISPLAY



Visitors walk past a tall sculpture of a main character called ‘Base Goku’ that is part of the ‘Dragon Ball - Sparking! Zero’ game at the Bandai Namco Entertainment booth during the media day at the Gamescom video games trade fair in Cologne, western Germany on Wednesday. According to organisers, around 1,400 exhibitors from 64 countries will be presenting their products during the fair running until August 25. – AFP

Protecting informal workers from extreme heat

Today’s escalating climate crisis disproportionately affects the world’s two billion informal workers.

As heat waves become increasingly frequent and intense, the absence of global occupational safety and health (OSH) protections against climate-related risks leaves these workers dangerously exposed. Forced to labour in record-breaking temperatures, their health and even lives are in jeopardy.

In 2022, the International Labour Organization (ILO) declared a “safe and healthy working environment” a fundamental right. But although many countries have recognised extreme heat as an occupational hazard and implemented workplace-safety protections, these measures rarely extend to the world’s most vulnerable workers: those working informally in fields, landfills, street markets, and homes.

More than 2.4 billion workers worldwide are exposed to extreme heat annually. With heat stress projected to increase rapidly over the next few decades, the international community must urgently reform labour-protection frameworks to ensure workers’ health, safety, and livelihoods. Without decisive action, millions will continue to suffer needlessly, trapped in a cycle of rising temperatures and hazardous working conditions.

This danger is particularly acute in low- and middle-income countries, where informal jobs account for roughly 90 per cent of total employment. While data on these workers’ health and safety



Laura Alfors

The writer is Director of the Social Protection Programme at Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising



Christy Braham

The writer is Workers’ Health Coordinator at Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising, is Senior Atlantic Fellow for Health Equity based at George Washington University’s Milken Institute School of Public Health

are limited, a growing body of research suggests that extreme heat has a profoundly negative impact on their well-being and livelihoods.

For example, research by Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising (WIEGO) and the University of Sheffield found that 85 per cent of waste pickers in Brazil experienced heat stress in 2022 and 2023, resulting in serious health risks and reduced productivity. In Delhi, where temperatures breached 50° Celsius in May, the death of a 53-year-old labourer prompted the lieutenant governor to issue new guidelines adjusting labourers’ working hours and expanding access to drinkable water. As a recent World Health Organization editorial notes, the severe effects of extreme heat on informal workers include an increased risk of skin cancer.

While discussions about protecting informal workers from heat stress often focus on outdoor labourers such as farmers and street vendors, extreme heat also affects those who work indoors in poorly ventilated spaces with limited access to potable water. In Brazil, a waste picker told WIEGO researchers that “the heat is sometimes unbearable. Being inside a shed, which has a zinc roof, affects everyone.” Finding sustainable cooling solutions is also important for domestic workers and caretakers, most of whom are

women.

But despite recent advances on establishing global OSH standards, policymakers face significant challenges in addressing the issue. Notably, 64 per cent of informal workers are self-employed. Without employers to finance essential safety measures, economically vulnerable workers must use their limited resources to protect themselves. As Yuleina Carmona, WIEGO’s Mexico City coordinator, observed, “Those who work on the street buy their own water, carry their umbrellas, wear hats, and mitigate the effects of the heat with their own resources.”

This weakness reflects a disconnect between local and national policymakers. In urban areas, informal workplaces are typically regulated by municipal authorities that rarely coordinate with national labour agencies responsible for workplace safety. Moreover, informal workers are

often stigmatised and seen as an undesirable source of crime and urban blight.

Even when national and local authorities manage to coordinate their efforts, significant gaps remain. India’s heat action plans, for example, aim to tackle climate-related risks across multiple levels of government. But these plans overlook the realities of informal work and the need for targeted interventions at the municipal level, particularly in densely populated urban areas.

While establishing global norms and standards is necessary, they must be translated into concrete measures that protect informal workers in the regions most affected by rising temperatures. In particular, local and municipal authorities must adopt inclusive labour regulations and invest heavily in appropriate infrastructure, including expanded access to potable water, shade,

indoor ventilation, and high-quality occupational health services. To prevent the rise in morbidity and mortality rates associated with heat stress, these services must be affordable, adequately funded, and accompanied by structural shifts at the national level to provide vital income support to workers grappling with climate-related displacement.

Informal worker organisations are already leading the way. In Zimbabwe, informal traders have convinced Masvingo’s city council to approve public investment in critical urban infrastructure.

In India, the Self-Employed Women’s Association, one of the world’s largest worker organisations for women in informal employment, recently launched its own insurance programme that enables beneficiaries to avoid working during dangerous heat waves.

In addition to such worker-driven solutions, OSH protections must be integrated into climate policies. As heat-related hazards continue to evolve and intensify, a staggering number of workers – including those in informal employment – face the risk of chronic illness, death, and disability.

Without coordinated action, the future of work will be increasingly dangerous and uncertain, leaving millions of workers to face the brunt of the climate crisis.



More than 2.4 billion workers worldwide are exposed to extreme heat annually.

sport

Al Nahda, Al Khabourah and Seeb secure crucial wins

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

Al Nahda secured a hard-fought 1-0 victory over Ibri on Tuesday at the Ibri Sports Complex, as part of the second round of the Omantel League. Since the beginning of the match, Al Nahda intensified their attacks in search of an early goal and almost achieved that in the third minute with a header from Ahmed bin Ali al Matroushi, but the ball passed next to the left post. The pressure from Al Nahda continued, and at the end of the first half in the 44th minute, Abdulaziz bin Khalfan al Shamousi managed to score the only goal of the match after a wonderful pass from Bilal Bin Saha, to end the first half with Al Nahda leading. In the second half, Al Nahda continued their attacks but for the steadfastness of Ibri's defence and the brilliance of their goalkeeper. Despite Ibri's attempts to adjust the score through counterattacks, Al Nahda maintained the lead until the final whistle. With this victory, Al Nahda continued to achieve the full mark under Serbian coach Nikola Durovic, posting their second victory in a row. Ibri remained without points under national coach Mohsin Darwish after suffering their second defeat.

AL KHABOURAH
EDGE SUR 1-0
Al Khabourah earned a valuable 1-0 win over Sur at the Sur Sports Complex. The first half started with an average pace from both teams, until the 11th minute when Noah al Araiimi managed to score the first goal for Al Khabourah, taking advantage of Sur's defence retreat. In the 18th minute, Al Khabourah had another opportunity through Zakariya al Qartoobi, but he failed to convert it into a goal.

After that, the match took on a fast attacking character with Al Khabourah trying to increase their lead, while Sur sought to equalise the score. Despite Al Khabourah's good organisation in the middle of the field, Ahmed al Riyami almost scored a second goal with a powerful shot from outside the penalty area that hit the post in the 39th minute, ending the first half with Al Khabourah ahead. In the second half, Sur increased pressure in search of an equaliser, as they wasted a valuable opportunity in the 63rd minute when Moaz al Arimi's shot hit the post. Sur continued attempts, but Al Khabourah managed to organise their defence and control the midfield to maintain their lead, and the match ended with Al Khabourah winning by 1-0. With this victory, Al



Al Nahda and Ibri players in action during the second round of Omantel League 2024-25.



Al Khabourah players celebrate after beating Sur.



Seeb's Omar al Malki scores with a header against Al Shabab.

Khabourah continued their brilliance after their promotion from the first-division league, achieving their second consecutive victory. As for Sur, this match was their first in the tournament after their first match against Dhofar was postponed due to the latter's case before the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

SEEB KEEP OL LEAD
Seeb claimed an important 1-0 win over Al Shabab at the Rustaq Sports Complex. The match started cautiously from both sides, with early attempts from Al Shabab, as the first opportunity was in their favour through a header by Khalid al Buraiki that hit a Seeb defender and

turned into a corner kick in the 16th minute. Two minutes later, Ali al Busaidy sent a cross from the left side but it did not find anyone to follow it in front of Al Shabab's goal. Seeb showed better organisation in the middle. Omar al Malki managed to score the only goal of the match in the 20th minute with a header that he put into the net of Al Shabab. After the goal, Seeb continued attempts to raise the lead, while Al Shabab tried to equalise. In the second half, Al Shabab pressed hard in search of a draw, but their attempts failed in front of the organised Seeb defence and the brilliance of their goalkeeper. Both teams made several changes to change the result, but the match ended with a victory for Seeb, who continued to lead the league with six points after their victory in the first round over Ibri. Al Shabab remained without points after the two rounds.



Oman receive the trophy in the recent West Asia bodybuilding in Muscat.

Bodybuilding Committee in Oman doing a good job, says IFBB chief

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

Fitness and bodybuilding world chief Rafael Santonja has affirmed that Oman Bodybuilding Committee (OBC) is moving forward in excellent manner. The president of the International Fitness and Bodybuilding Federation (IFBB) said that the Sultanate of Oman delivered an outstanding edition of West Asian Bodybuilding and Fitness Championship which concluded recently in Muscat. IFBB is the world governing body for Fitness and Bodybuilding featuring 204 countries including from Asia. "West Asian Bodybuilding and Fitness Championship in Muscat city featured great numbers of professional athletes representing different countries around the world. I find this event at highest international standards while the venue was very nice and the stage set at professional level. I want to congratulate Oman Body bodybuilding Committee (OBC) which is moving forward in excellent manner," he said.

The IFBB chief said the sport of bodybuilding is witnessing remarkable development across Asia particularly in West Asia. "Oman is rich in young and talented athletes in bodybuilding who are expected to have a promising future. Athletes and OBC need to work hard to achieve the best global results" he added. "There are expected programmes in the near future as umpiring workshops and activities for coaches in Oman. There are many qualified referees and trainers here in Oman. We support organising more programmes in the near future to increase the number of competent coaches and umpires. We look forward to a successful partnership with the OBC in the near future to organise these workshops and programmes."

World Championship
Regarding to the forthcoming edition of the World Championship which is scheduled to be held in Iran, Santonja said: "We expect a large number of participants



IFBB chief Rafael Santonja

and representation from different countries worldwide in this major global event. The International Congress members agreed to hold this championship in Iran and we are looking forward to a large and successful event with the desired outcomes." Santonja stressed the importance of separating politics from sports emphasising that sports unite people from various cultures and religions providing an opportunity for athletes to meet and compete fairly. Santonja also highlighted the significant role of women in bodybuilding. "The number of athletes in bodybuilding is equal between both genders. We highly respect and appreciate the customs and traditions in Arab countries regarding women's participation in bodybuilding competitions. We have good plans to develop the sport for women in a way that aligns with the privacy and cultural considerations of Arab and Muslim women. The key is to respect and acknowledge all beliefs and cultures and then to explore the available avenues to organise competitions within the boundaries that align with these considerations." Rafael Santonja concluded by lavishly praising the country after his visit to Oman during the championship."I have visited Oman several times but this visit was different as I attended the championship and followed by some tours to Oman's tourist attractions including a visit to the National Museum which I consider the best museum I have visited worldwide. The museum offers unique historical and cultural insights about the country. I would like to thank all my colleagues and friends in Oman for their warm hospitality and gracious reception."

Khalid al Raisi elected as chief of OHA's Athletes Committee

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

The General Assembly of the Athletes Committee of the Oman Hockey Association (OHA) elected Khalid al Raisi as chairman of the committee, Hashim al Shatri as vice-chairman, Abdul Jabbar al Balushi as secretary, Thani al Wahaibi as a member representing the committee in the Board of Directors of the OHA for the electoral period from 2024-2028 and Salah al Saadi as a member of the committee.

The elections were held at the headquarters of the Oman Olympic Committee in the presence of Mohammed al Mashrafi, Chairman of the Elections Committee of the OHA, and Adil al Farsi, Chairman of the Electoral and Appeals Committee, in addition



Voting for the Athletes Committee of the Oman Hockey Association in progress.



PHOTOS BY ABDULWAHID AL HAMADANI

to 24 people out of 35 members of the General Assembly of the Athletes Committee, which enabled the legal quorum to be completed for voting. The committee was formed of five members after they won the direct vote out of 7 candidates. The committee aims to enhance the role of athletes in developing

hockey in the Sultanate of Oman.

After determining the members of the Board of Directors of the Athletes Committee of the OHA, Khalid al Raisi, expressed his happiness and gratitude, saying: "We congratulate ourselves all for having the opportunity to chair the Athletes Committee of the

hockey federation. After holding a meeting with the members of the committee, it was agreed to determine the people to occupy the positions of chairman, vice-chairman and secretary of the committee. This committee seeks to take care of the affairs of athletes in hockey, whether they are players of the national

teams or old and retired players.

This committee is formed for the first time at the level of the Oman Hockey Association after the ministerial decision related to the administrative structure of sports federations issued by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

He added: "These are just the

beginnings, and we expect that there will be special tasks that deal with the affairs of athletes, whether they are club or national team players, or even what serves the game in general. We are here as members looking forward to providing an additional service to the players, whatever their relationship with the committee. We have a person who represents us all and represents the players on the board of directors, and we are ready to serve them."

He pointed to the challenges facing the players, saying: "From our previous experience, we see that there are some problems facing the players, such as their rights, entitlements and moving from one place to another. Sometimes, players face difficulties in expressing their problems. We are here to deal with these matters and we expect to be part of the solutions to these challenges."



England's Chris Woakes celebrates with team-mates after taking the lbw wicket of Sri Lanka's Angelo Mathews. — Reuters

England maintain grip on first Test against Sri Lanka

MANCHESTER, United Kingdom:

Sri Lanka captain Dhananjaya de Silva rescued his side from a top-order collapse against England with a determined fifty only to fall shortly before tea on the opening day of the first Test at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

Sri Lanka were still struggling at 178-8 come the interval but it represented a huge recovery given they had slumped to 6-3 soon after De Silva won the toss in the first of this three-match series.

But De Silva responded with a fine 74 and received excellent support from debutant fast bowler Milan Rathnayake (32 not out) in an eighth-wicket partnership of 63.

No other Sri Lanka batsman, however, had yet made more than Kusal Mendis's attractive 24.

De Silva's impressive innings ended when he turned a quicker ball from off-spinner Shoaib Bashir straight into the hands of Dan Lawrence at leg slip.

Bashir had tea figures of 2-31 in 12 overs after Chris Woakes (3-32 in 11) had done much of the initial damage.

Sri Lanka had previously lost three wickets for no runs in 10 balls as they slumped to 6-3 in a dream start for stand-in England captain Ollie Pope, leading his country for the first time after Ben Stokes was ruled

out with a torn hamstring.

They came into their first Test in England in eight years on the back of just a solitary warm-up game — a defeat by the second-string England Lions.

Sri Lanka's collapse started in the sixth over when Dimuth Karunaratne top-edged a hook off fast bowler Gus Atkinson to wicketkeeper Jamie Smith.

Woakes then took two wickets in the next over, with Nishan Madushka, the other opening batsman, driving loosely at an outswinger and edging to Joe Root at first slip as he fell for four.

MATHEWS OUT FOR NOUGHT

Five balls later, worse followed for Sri Lanka when Angelo Mathews was plumb lbw for a duck to Woakes playing no shot to a ball that nipped back off the pitch.

Mendis struck four fours, the best a cover-drive off fast bowler Matthew Potts — recalled in place of Stokes.

But he was undone by express fast bowler Mark Wood, with Mendis gloving a superb 93 mph (150 km/h) delivery that reared up from short of a length to second slip.

Sri Lanka's plight was compounded shortly before lunch when Dinesh Chandimal was lbw for 17 to a Bashir ball that hardly bounced. — AFP

Ayub, Shakeel rescue Pakistan in first Test against Bangladesh

RAWALPINDI, Pakistan: Left-handers Saud Shakeel and Saim Ayub hit fighting half-centuries to help Pakistan recover to 158-4 on a rain-hit opening day of the first Test against Bangladesh in Rawalpindi on Wednesday.

Shakeel was unbeaten on 57 at the close while Ayub scored 56 for his maiden fifty during an innings-building stand of 98 for the fourth wicket after Pakistan were tottering at 16-3.

Shakeel brought up 1,000 runs in his 11th Test when he reached 33 and hit five boundaries in his seventh half-century. He added a further 44 for the fifth wicket with Mohammad Rizwan, who was unbeaten on 24.

Ayub, who hit four boundaries and a six, fell late in the day, driving wildly off Hasan Mahmud and was caught at third slip.

The new-ball pairing of Shoriful Islam (2-30) and Mahmud (2-33) jolted Pakistan after a delayed start of 230 minutes due to a wet outfield after overnight rain.

Shoriful removed the home team's skipper Shan Masood for six and then star batter Babar Azam for a two-ball duck before Pakistan launched their recovery on a greenish pitch.

Mahmud hoped Bangladesh would dismiss Pakistan early on Thursday.

"We tried to bowl in the right areas and got early success," he said. "We will come up with a plan to get early wickets on this pitch tomorrow."

Ayub said the partnership with Shakeel was crucial. "We lost early wickets so it was important to build partnerships and we did that and I am sure the good work will continue tomorrow," he said.

Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto wasted no time in sending Pakistan in to bat after winning the toss and had them on 81-3 at tea.

Mahmud gave the visitors the first breakthrough when Abdullah Shafique was smartly caught at gully by Zakir Hasan for two in the fourth over.

Shoriful then had Masood



Pakistan's Saud Shakeel plays a shot during the first day of the first Test match between Pakistan and Bangladesh at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi on Wednesday. — AFP



Pakistan Saim Ayub plays a shot during the first day of the first Test match between Pakistan and Bangladesh at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi on Wednesday. — AFP

caught behind off a sharp delivery, with Bangladesh successfully reviewing a not out decision by South African umpire Adrian Holdstock.

Azam nicked a leg-side delivery in Shoriful's next over and was caught by wicketkeeper Liton Das for his first home-

ground duck in 14 Tests.

Pakistan entered the Test with four fast bowlers in an all-pace attack with no frontline spinner, while Bangladesh included three pacers and two spinners.

The two-match series is part of the nine-team World Test championship, with Pakistan

currently sixth in the standings and Bangladesh eighth. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

FIRST TEST, DAY 1

Pakistan first innings 158-4 (Saud Shakeel 57, Saim Ayub 56; Shoriful Islam 2-30, Hasan Mahmud 2-33)

GERMANY GOALKEEPER NEUER RETIRES FROM INTERNATIONAL DUTY

MUNICH: Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, a 2014 World Cup winner, announced his retirement from international football on Wednesday at the age of 38.

Bayern Munich veteran Neuer played 124 matches for Germany, captaining his country 61 times. His final appearance came in the quarterfinal loss to eventual champions Spain at Euro 2024.

Neuer wrote on social media that although he was tempted to play until the 2026 World Cup, he was “convinced that now is the right time to take this step”.

He shone at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and was named as the tournament’s best goalkeeper as Germany won the trophy for the fourth time.

Known as the archetypal ‘sweeper-keeper’ of the modern era, Neuer revolutionised the position, often venturing far from his penalty box to snuff out attacks while possessing skills with his feet usually reserved for outfield players.

Neuer revealed he had made the announcement after discussions with his family, as well as a comprehensive conversation with Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann on Wednesday morning.

He said he planned to “concentrate fully” on playing for Bayern, with whom he has won two Champions Leagues and 11 Bundesliga titles.

This season’s Champions League final will take place at Munich’s Allianz Arena.

Neuer broke his leg in a skiing accident in December 2022 and only returned to the Germany squad just ahead of Euro 2024 on home soil, reclaiming his role as first choice.

He was criticised before Euro 2024 after a series of mistakes at the club and international level but impressed at the tournament.

“It was a great time which shaped me and of which I am very proud,” he said.

“Winning the World Cup title in 2014 and the special atmosphere during the European Championship at home this year are highlights for which I am extremely grateful.

“It was an honour for me to be captain of our national team until 2023. I loved wearing the Germany jersey.”

From 2010 until 2016, Neuer and Germany made it to the final four of every major tournament.

After disappointing group-stage exits at the 2018 and 2022 World Cups and a last-16 elimination by England at Euro 2020, Germany won their first knockout match in eight years at Euro 2024.

Neuer follows fellow 2014 World Cup winners Thomas Mueller and Toni Kroos, who both played at Euro 2024, into international retirement.

On Monday, current Germany captain Ilkay Gundogan, who missed the 2014 World Cup campaign through injury, also announced he had played his last game at international level.

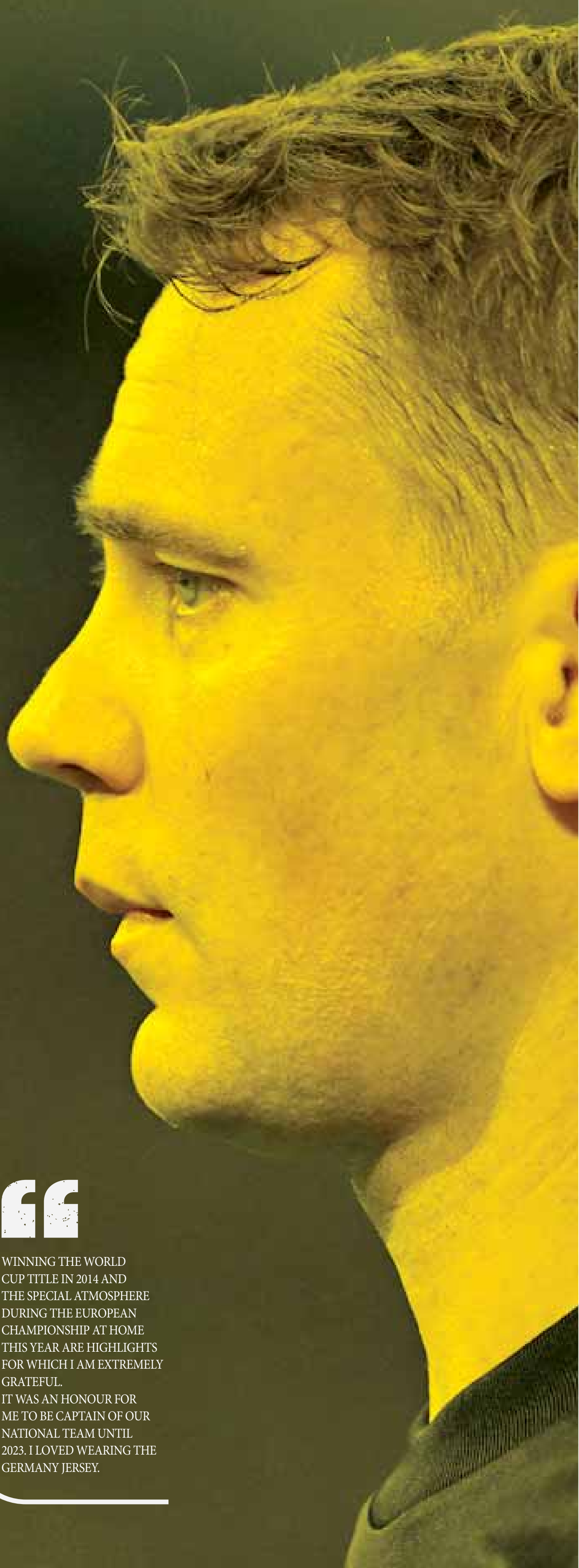
A product of the Schalke academy in his home town of Gelsenkirchen, Neuer made his international debut in 2009 and has more caps than any other Germany goalkeeper.

Germany won 81 of the 124 matches Neuer played, and he kept 51 clean sheets.

The retirement clears the way for long-time back-up Marc-Andre ter Stegen of Barcelona, who is expected to take over from the Bayern captain as Germany’s number one. — AFP

“

WINNING THE WORLD CUP TITLE IN 2014 AND THE SPECIAL ATMOSPHERE DURING THE EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP AT HOME THIS YEAR ARE HIGHLIGHTS FOR WHICH I AM EXTREMELY GRATEFUL. IT WAS AN HONOUR FOR ME TO BE CAPTAIN OF OUR NATIONAL TEAM UNTIL 2023. I LOVED WEARING THE GERMANY JERSEY.





Ladies Account

Empowering you more than ever!

Dhofar.islamic

Dhofar_islamic

2477 5777

www.dhofarislamicbank.com

Barka V project set to expand Oman’s desalination capacity



Desalination components at the Barka V plant.

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

The Sultanate of Oman has marked a milestone in its water infrastructure with the successful completion of the Barka V desalination plant. Developed by GS Inima, a global leader in the water sector, the plant has passed its final acceptance tests and is now fully operational, delivering water to Nama Power and Water Procurement Company, Oman’s sole procurer of power and water. The Barka V facility, which achieved 100 per cent availability during its final performance test, is now supplying 105,000 cubic metres of high-quality drinking water per day, serving a population of 800,000 in Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South governorates. Construction of the Barka V plant, which uses advanced reverse osmosis technology, began in March 2022 and concluded in June 2024.

The Barka V facility, which achieved 100 per cent availability during its final performance test, is now supplying 105,000 cubic metres of high-quality drinking water per day, serving a population of 800,000 in Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South governorates

GS Inima led the project as the EPC contractor, overseeing engineering, procurement, construction and commissioning. The project also achieved a significant safety milestone, completing 3 million work hours without any lost time incidents (LTI). This rapid completion, within 26 months, sets a new benchmark in the desalination industry in Oman, reaffirming

GS Inima’s capability to manage and deliver technically complex projects while maintaining the highest safety standards. The completion of Barka V follows another landmark project in Oman’s desalination sector. In November 2023, Oman inaugurated a 17-megawatt peak (MWp) solar photovoltaic (PV) farm in Sur, developed by Veolia in partnership with TotalEnergies. This solar plant powers the Sharqiyah Desalination Plant, the largest solar-powered desalination facility in Oman, producing over 32,000 megawatt-hours (MWh) of green electricity annually. The solar farm aligns with Oman’s National Energy Strategy, which targets 30 per cent of electricity from renewable sources by 2030, supporting the broader goals of Oman Vision 2040. Both projects highlight Oman’s commitment to expanding its desalination capacity while embracing sustainable energy solutions.

OPAZ enhances incentives to attract global investors

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

The Sultanate of Oman’s strategic location at the crossroads of Asia, Africa and Europe makes it a compelling hub for international trade. The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) — established under Royal Decree No 105/2020, issued on August 18, 2020 — oversees key zones, including the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, and free zones in Suhar, Salalah and Al Mazunah. OPAZ is committed to fostering a competitive business environment, providing a range of incentives and benefits to companies operating within its jurisdiction. This commitment is evident in the diverse offerings tailored to meet the needs of investors. One of the most attractive features for investors is the zero import and re-export duties, significantly reducing operational costs. This, combined with tax exemptions, positions Oman as a cost-effective destination for businesses looking to maximise their return on investment. OPAZ provides developed plots and well-equipped warehouses, ensuring that companies have access to the infrastructure necessary for efficient operations. The availability of various real estate solutions further enhances the ease of establishing and expanding business activities in the region. The fast-tracked issuance of investor residence within 48 hours exemplifies OPAZ’s



The Special Economic Zone at Duqm covers an area of 2,000 sq kms, including 90 kms of coastline, making it an ideal hub for regional and international operations.

commitment to facilitating a smooth entry process for international investors. Coupled with expedited procedures for skilled worker recruitment, businesses can quickly establish a foothold and scale operations effectively. Investors are offered 100 per cent foreign ownership, a significant incentive that empowers companies to retain full control over their ventures. This policy is complemented by the availability of a variety of land areas for investment, catering to diverse business needs across industrial, commercial and tourism sectors. OPAZ’s one-stop shop for all permits and licences simplifies the bureaucratic process, allowing investors to focus on business growth rather than paperwork. The integration of economic diversity within these zones supports a wide range of activities, from manufacturing to tourism, offering investors multiple avenues for expansion. Qualified national cadres and integrated industrial complexes provide a robust

support system, ensuring that businesses have access to skilled labour and state-of-the-art facilities. Additionally, raw material warehouses enhance operational efficiency by facilitating easy procurement and management of essential resources. Oman’s strategic location offers easy access to target markets across the Middle East, Asia and Africa. This geographical advantage, paired with the comprehensive incentives offered by OPAZ, makes Oman an ideal base for regional and international operations. Additionally, under Royal Decree No 53/2022, issued on June 28, 2022, OPAZ also oversees the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), further expanding its role in driving economic growth. Through its competitive incentives and strategic initiatives, OPAZ is reinforcing Oman’s position as a key player in the global market, making it a compelling choice for businesses worldwide.

Japan welcomes record 3.29 million tourists in July

TOKYO: Japan welcomed 3.29 million foreign tourists in July, official data showed on Wednesday, its second straight monthly record as it turns to tourism for economic growth. The 3.29 million visitors represented a 41.9-per cent increase from a year ago, according to Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO). It was also a 10.1-per cent rise compared with July 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic halted international travel. July also surpassed the previous record of 3.13 million visitors who came to Japan a month earlier. “Visitor numbers rose sharply from such areas as East Asia and Europe where school vacations began and boosted travel

demand to Japan,” the JNTO said. The number of Chinese visitors more than doubled in July from a year ago to 776,500, followed by 757,700 South Koreans, representing a 20.9-per cent increase. Taiwan was the third-biggest with 571,700 visitors, up 35.4 per cent. Increased direct flights from major markets also helped contribute to the July record, the JNTO added. Japan expects as many as 35 million foreign tourists in 2024. The yen’s weakness attracted large crowds to Japan this year, with many businesses relying on tourists’ spending power for everything from candies to kimonos. Japanese officials have also been trying to address the problem of too many tourists at



A tourist takes a picture of Mount Fuji appearing over a convenience store in Fujikawaguchiko town, Yamanashi prefecture, Japan.

— Reuters file photo

some of Japan’s most popular destinations, such as Mount Fuji and Kyoto. Officials from the town of Fujikawaguchiko erected a barrier to block a popular view of Mount Fuji in May because of the disruptive behaviour of tourists, although the large screen was taken down this month. Tourists were also banned from entering private alleys in Kyoto’s famous geisha district as the ancient city tackles overtourism. Although the yen has strengthened recently, it touched a 38-year low against the dollar last month, making japan a bargain destination. Out of 23 markets tracked by the JNTO, travellers from 19 regions set new records for July arrivals.

— Agencies

OETC energises Al Jawabi grid station with a total investment surpassing RO 11.5 Million

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

To enhance performance, support continuous growth in the sector, and strengthen the safety, reliability, and sustainability of the electricity transmission network, Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has recently completed all construction and energisation work for the 132/33 kV Al Jawabi Grid Station, along with the additional 132 kV overhead transmission lines stretching 30 kilometres between Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Grid Station and Al Jawabi Grid Station. The project, which took more than 18 months to complete, was accomplished with a total investment exceeding RO 11.5 million, achieving over 1.3 million safe work hours.

The project includes 132 kV gas-insulated switchgear (GIS) featuring two feeders for the 132 kV overhead transmission lines and two feeders for transformers with a capacity of 125 MVA. Additionally, the project comprises two transformers with a capacity



Oman Electricity Transmission Company has recently completed all construction and energisation work for the 132/33 kV Al Jawabi Grid Station.

of 125 MVA at 132/33 kV, (2) 33 kV GIS, control and protection panels at 132 and 33 kV, SCADA systems, and communication and monitoring systems for the Grid Stations.
Eng Masoud bin Salam al

Riyami, Chief Operations Officer, highlighted the company's ongoing efforts to expand the network and enhance its reliability, safety, and sustainability. He also emphasised the company's commitment to launching

various vital projects across the Sultanate of Oman to improve the electricity transmission network by implementing smart solutions to optimally respond to growth and demand.
Al Riyami added: "This Grid

Station plays a crucial role in meeting the increasing demand for electricity in the region.
The peak demand reached around 132 MW in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate during June 2023 in which 92 MW will be

transferred to Al Jawabi GS. This underscores the ongoing developmental journey of the country and the growing need for sectoral support. Our role is to meet these needs through our strategic and vital projects, which we are committed to establishing and inaugurating across various governorates in the Sultanate of Oman to ensure the reliable and sustainable flow of energy units."
It is worth mentioning that OETC, a member of Nama Group, is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity across the Sultanate of Oman's network. The electricity is transmitted from production stations to distributed load centres in the governorates.
The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132kV and above to cover most of the governorates in the Sultanate of Oman, whether in the north or the south. Furthermore, OETC manages the interconnection lines between Oman and the GCC interconnection network, which operates at a voltage of 220kV.

NBO LAUNCHES FINTECH ACCELERATOR HACKATHON TO DRIVE INNOVATION IN OMAN

MUSCAT: In line with Oman Vision 2040's strategy of economic diversification, National Bank of Oman (NBO) is proud to announce the launch of the Fintech Accelerator Hackathon as part of the NBO Fintech Accelerator Programme. Registrations for this highly anticipated event have commenced, with the Hackathon scheduled from Friday, August 30 to Sunday, September 1, 2024, at the NBO head office. This initiative marks a significant milestone in NBO's efforts to foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and the development of Oman's fintech sector.

Mustahil bin Ahmed al Maamari, Assistant General Manager and Head of Strategy and Transformation at NBO highlighted the long-term significance of this initiative:



"The NBO Fintech Accelerator Hackathon is more than just an event; it's a catalyst for change. By bringing together innovative minds from universities, organisations and

international startup firms, we aim to cultivate ideas that will shape the future of fintech in Oman. Participants will have the opportunity to innovate under pre-identified themes, pushing

the boundaries of technology and entrepreneurship. We remain dedicated to promoting platforms that inspire collaboration and growth, aligning with our overarching strategy to contribute to Oman's economic diversification, give back to the community, and foster a culture of innovation and knowledge sharing."
The NBO Fintech Accelerator Hackathon is a strategic initiative aimed at transforming Oman's fintech landscape by empowering the nation's brightest minds to develop pioneering solutions that will drive the industry forward. By aligning with Oman Vision 2040, NBO is committed to supporting the country's economic growth by nurturing innovation and creating sustainable opportunities within the fintech sector.

Chery Group achieves first-time entry into Fortune Global 500

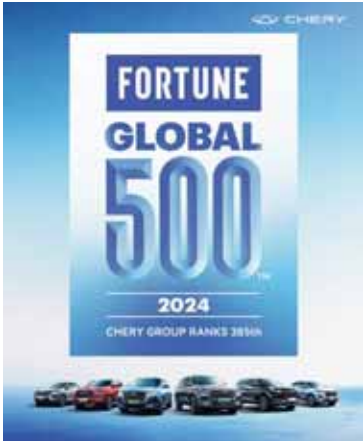
MUSCAT: Chery Holding Group Co., Ltd. has recently made its debut on the 2024 Fortune Global 500 list, ranking 385th with an impressive revenue of \$39.0917 billion. This historic achievement not only marks another milestone for China's automotive industry but also underscores Chery's strong presence and potential on the global stage as China's No 1 auto exporter.

The Fortune Global 500 list is one of the most prestigious and authoritative rankings for assessing the strength of large global companies. It provides insights into the rankings of major corporations from different countries, as well as changes in operational quality, such as return on sales, return on equity and total factor productivity.

This year, the total revenue of companies on the Fortune Global 500 list is approximately \$41 trillion, a slight increase of 0.1 per cent from the previous year, with the minimum revenue threshold for entry being \$32.1 billion. China has 133 companies on the list, with a combined revenue of around \$11 trillion in 2023.

Chery, making its debut on the list, represents China's independent automotive brands. Founded 27 years ago from humble beginnings, Chery thrived during China's rapid automotive development and significant transformation periods.

Today, Chery boasts 14.2 million global users, operates in over 80 countries and regions and has become one of the most internationalised Chinese automotive brands on the Fortune Global 500 list. Chery's sustainable development journey is marked by its long-term vision



The Fortune Global 500 list is one of the most prestigious and authoritative rankings for assessing the strength of large global companies.

and resilience through economic cycles.
Chery is currently on a high-speed path of quality development. Chery has cumulatively exported 3.9 million vehicles, maintaining its position as the leading Chinese brand in passenger car exports for 21 consecutive years. In 2023, one in every three Chinese passenger cars exported overseas was a Chery. In the first half of 2024, Chery's sales exceeded 1.1 million vehicles, a 48.4 per cent year-on-year increase, setting a new historical record. Chery is the only company in the industry to achieve growth in both new energy and fuel vehicles and in both Chinese and international markets.
Chery's path to globalisation has evolved from "only exporting" to "getting users' favour" and finally to "enhancing brand strength." By adhering to the global strategy of "In somewhere, for somewhere," Chery seeks market share expansion and aims to be a valuable contributor and exemplary corporate citizen in global markets.

For the first time in Oman owning a credit card made super easy with BankDhofar

MUSCAT: For the first time in the Sultanate of Oman, BankDhofar is pleased to announce the simplification of credit card eligibility requirements, providing enhanced convenience and value to customers. With a simplified application process and relaxed documentary requirements, owning a BankDhofar credit card has never been more accessible.
Being the only bank in Oman offering this service; non-BankDhofar customers can avail of this offer by walking into any of our 126 branches across the Sultanate of Oman. Once the account is opened based on their employer status at the Bank, the credit card application process will be



according to the documentation required. With a minimum salary starting from RO 250 and first year annual fee waived; if the customer's employer is not included in the approved list of companies, they can own a BankDhofar credit card with

one month salary assignment letter and two months bank statement to complete the application process. To apply; customers can visit their nearest branch. On the other hand, customers are not required to transfer their salaries to

BankDhofar if their employer is included in the approved list of companies.
"At BankDhofar, we recognise the needs of our customers, and with only a minimum salary of RO 250; we offer them a credit card in order to provide a seamless banking experience that caters to their financial requirements and aspirations." Said Bilal bin Faiz al Raesi, AGM - Cards & Bancassurance at BankDhofar.
BankDhofar is committed to delivering excellence in banking services and fostering financial empowerment. With a rich heritage of meeting the customer needs for more than three decades, BankDhofar focuses on innovation and customer-centricity.

FoodCoin: Currency of the Future

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

The world is currently experiencing radical transformations, with economic, social environmental challenges intertwining in unprecedented ways. Amid these changes, a new and intriguing concept emerges: food as a new currency. Could food be more than just a basic commodity? Could it become a means to enhance wealth and invest in the future? In this context, the FoodCoin podcast introduces the idea of food as a new currency, one whose value can grow over time, unlike traditional currencies. It calls for a revival of traditional and cultural foods, recognising their role—not only in preserving biodiversity and cultural diversity—but also in economic and commercial contexts. This involves investing in sustainable food supply chains, enhancing value in the manufacturing sector through the localisation of cutting-edge technologies to improve quality and develop innovative, high-quality food products, encouraging entrepreneurs to create pioneering projects in this field marketing these products in global markets as premium goods with unique cultural identities that align with evolving consumer demands, thereby driving local economies towards a progressive future envisioned in the country's strategy.

From Zero to the Top: Episode One with Mohamed Amin



Dr Abeer al Kalbani, ICV Director at MoAFWR, Mohammed Amin, GM at Sea Pride Company, at the podcast.

The first episode of the FoodCoin podcast features Mohamed Amin, General Manager of Sea Pride, a pioneer in the fishing sector in the Sultanate of Oman. In this episode, Amin discusses his journey in the industry, the challenges he faced in how he successfully built his company.

Listeners will experience the dynamic spirit of an entrepreneur through Amin's story. Starting from scratch with no specialised scientific or technical background, he managed to establish a prominent name in the sector within a few decades. He transformed every challenge or obstacle into a new launching pad for broader opportunities in larger markets. For instance, how did an export ban become a stepping stone to accessing European markets? However, this success undoubtedly required a supportive investment

environment and a resource-rich sector, enabling investors to achieve their current market position. Looking at the fishing sector in the Sultanate of Oman, which boasts unique and high-quality resources, along with government-developed and refined facilities and regulations, it is clear that, as mentioned in the episode, "the sector welcomes everyone." Oman's coastline stretches over 3,000 kilometres, strategically linking the East and West through maritime routes for over 3,000 years. With an annual production of over 700 million tons of diverse and globally recognised high-quality fishery resources, this coastline now features the essential investment infrastructure, including ports, landing sites a logistics network. National plans have prioritised many projects and programmes to attract investment in this sector.



Scan the QR code to watch the full podcast.

The first episode of the FoodCoin podcast also delivers significant messages to young entrepreneurs, enthusiasts even external investors about the potential of this vital sector and possible investment opportunities. It highlights the endless possibilities along the value chains. You can't finish the episode without seeing the Sea of Oman as the magic lamp, waiting for the touch of modern solutions in manufacturing and added value to reveal its unique treasures!

FoodCoin: Adding Value ... Adding Wealth

The FoodCoin podcast is part of the Oman Observer podcast series and is broadcast across all its digital platforms in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources of the Sultanate of Oman. We hope that future episodes will provide a deeper and more ambitious perspective on the role of local value addition in maximising our natural resources and driving the growth of Oman's economy.

MedcoEnergi expands presence in Oman's upstream energy sector

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu
Indonesian oil and gas firm PT Medco Energi Internasional Tbk (MedcoEnergi) has described stake acquisitions in two key hydrocarbon blocks in the Sultanate of Oman as a "significant milestone" for the state-owned company.

MedcoEnergi saw its presence in Oman's upstream sector ramp up dramatically late last year when it successfully acquired a 20-per cent stake each in Blocks 48 and 60, owned and operated by OQ Exploration and Production (OQ EP), the upstream arm of Omani energy group OQ.

"After a successful 17-year presence in Oman, MedcoEnergi expanded its portfolio with the acquisition of two 20 per cent interests in onshore exploration and production sharing agreements (EPSAs) from OQ Exploration & Production LLC. The producing Block 60 and the exploration Block 48 are located in western Oman near the Saudi Arabian border. Block 60 provides an immediate uplift in production and both blocks offer significant oil and gas resource potential," the company stated in its 2023 Annual Report.

Prior to the stake acquisitions, MedcoEnergi's presence in Oman was limited to two assets: Karim Small Fields (within PDO's concession) Block 56. MedcoEnergi holds a 58.5-per cent operating interest in the Karim Small Fields Service Contract. As part of its remit, MedcoEnergi is providing infill drilling, workover and thermal enhanced oil recovery services to maintain production from 20 fields within the cluster. Oil production averaged 13 million barrels of oil per day (mbopd) in 2023.

In the onshore Block 56, MedcoEnergi holds a 5-per cent interest. The exploration period was successfully extended by one year to the end of 2024

following the commitment of an additional exploration well.

Marking a "significant milestone" for the company are last year's stake acquisitions in Blocks 48 and 60. "(The acquisition) delivers immediate production uplift, unlocks future exploration potential expands the Company's geographic footprint in a strategically important region. The partnership with OQ Exploration & Production further strengthens MedcoEnergi's position, leveraging their expertise and established presence in Oman," MedcoEnergi stated.

Block 60, covering 1,485 km2, currently produces approximately 63 million barrels of oil equivalent per day (mboepd) from the Bisat oil and Abu Butabul gas and condensate fields. "This translates to an additional net 12.6 mboepd production to MedcoEnergi," said the Indonesian company. "The EPSA expires in 2048 and the block has substantial undeveloped discovered gas resources." Likewise, Block 48, covering 2,995 km2, also holds significant potential for further Oil & Gas discoveries, according to the company. "The Block 48 EPSA is in the second phase of the exploration period and extends until the end of 2025, with a commitment to acquire a new 3D seismic. Although non-operated, MedcoEnergi will be actively involved by seconding experienced personnel – senior staff and technical experts well-versed in gas development, production, technology sustainability – to support the asset."

The parent group currently has interests in 15 oil and gas properties in Indonesia, as well as 12 international properties in Thailand, Oman and Yemen. Total oil and gas production was 160 mboepd in 2023, comprising 80 per cent gas and 20 per cent liquids.



MedcoEnergi now owns a 20-per cent interest in Oman's Block 60.

Oman's oil exports see slight increase in July

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

The National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI) has revealed that the Sultanate of Oman's total oil exports reached 179.36 million barrels by the end of July this year, marking a slight increase of 0.05 per cent compared to 178.9 million barrels during the same period last year.

The report also highlighted a decrease in the average price of oil, which fell to \$83.9 per barrel in July, a 6.1-per cent drop from the previous month's price of \$89.3 per barrel. Meanwhile, the average oil price dropped to \$83.9 per barrel in July, a 6.1-per cent decrease compared to the previous month when it was \$89.3 per barrel.



LPG sales climbed 11.5 per cent in July.

The latest data revealed a 5.2-per cent decline in Oman's total oil production, which fell to 211.8 million barrels by the end of July 2024, down from 223.5 million barrels during the same period last year. Crude oil production saw a significant decrease of 7.1 per cent, totalling 162.2 million barrels, compared to 174.6 million barrels a year earlier. In contrast, condensate production increased by 1.6 per cent, reaching over

49.6 million barrels, up from 48.9 million barrels last year. The average daily oil production in July 2024 was recorded at 994.8 thousand barrels, a decrease from the 1.5 thousand barrels reported during the same period in 2023.

The report also highlighted that the People's Republic of China remains the top importer of Omani oil, with imports reaching 171.7 million barrels by the end of July, marking a 4.8-per

cent increase compared to 163.1 million barrels during the same period last year. Japan followed with approximately 3.4 million barrels.

NCSI's data further indicated that gas usage in industrial projects surged by 14.6 per cent by the end of July 2024, reaching more than 20.7 billion cubic meters, up from 18.1 billion cubic meters in the same period last year. Gas consumption in power generation also rose by 11.9 per cent, totalling over 5.3 billion cubic meters compared to 4.7 billion cubic meters last year. However, gas used in oil fields saw a decline of 19.3 per cent, dropping to 6.3 billion cubic meters from 7.8 billion cubic meters during the same period in 2023.

Manufacturers highlight investment potential of Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 21

In a notable development poised to redefine the industrial landscape of Oman, Dr Hilal bin Abdullah al Hinai, Chairman of the Omani Manufacturers Association (OMA), has unveiled a strategic blueprint for investment opportunities in Dhofar. The road-map, presented at the Dhofar 2024 Forum, underscores Dhofar Governorate's potential to become a leading industrial hub, bolstered by its strategic location and rich natural resources.

Dr Al-Hinai's presentation was a comprehensive examination of Dhofar's industrial prospects,

highlighting its advantageous position along the Arabian Sea and its diverse natural endowments. These factors, he argued, make Dhofar a compelling destination for industrial investment. The governorate's burgeoning infrastructure and the government's supportive policies further enhance its appeal to investors.

One of the most compelling aspects of Dhofar's investment potential is its advanced infrastructure. Equally important is Dhofar's skilled workforce. The governorate boasts a substantial pool of trained and qualified national personnel, ready to contribute across various



Dr Hilal bin Abdullah al Hinai, Chairman of the Omani Manufacturers Association (OMA), speaking at the forum.

industrial sectors. The role of government support cannot be overstated in Dhofar's investment equation. Additionally, the availability of industrial land at competitive prices further

strengthens the region's investment proposition.

Dr Al Hinai's presentation also shed light on several key sectors in Dhofar that offer substantial investment opportunities: Food

Industries: Dhofar's agricultural potential is significant, with ample farmland and groundwater resources.

The rising demand for locally-produced food creates a promising investment opportunity in this sector. By leveraging modern agricultural and manufacturing technologies, investors can achieve high productivity and superior product quality.

Petrochemical Industries: The availability of natural gas supplies presents a robust opportunity for developing the petrochemical sector. This industry has the potential to diversify national income streams and generate new employment opportunities,

enhancing the economic stability of the governorate.

Construction and Building Materials: The ongoing urban expansion in Dhofar has driven up demand for construction materials. This trend opens extensive investment possibilities in the construction sector. Additionally, the availability of natural resources like limestone and gypsum can be effectively utilised in the production of building materials.

Mining: Dhofar is rich in mineral resources, including copper, gold silver. These assets, when harnessed with modern mining technologies, present significant opportunities for growth in the mining sector.

Environmental and economic benefits of vehicle tyre recycling



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

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

A few days ago, a new decision was issued by the Consumer Protection Authority regarding banning the trading of used tyres and raising the value of the administrative fine imposed on those who violate the provisions of the decision to RO 1,000 (2,600 US dollars) from RO 500 (\$1,300) previously. The decision also indicated that an administrative fine would apply to those who continue to violate it as well.

For those who are working in these professions know very well that there is a group that buys used tyres that owners leave them at change shops and workshops. Most of them are not wealthy and have financial circumstances that do not allow them to buy

new ones. The used tyres are sometimes exported to other countries, where their owners recycle them to make new tyres, or they are crushed into dirt and used in new industries and in paving modern streets.

During the past years, consumer protection agencies were able to arrest some expatriate workers in the country who trade and sell large quantities of these used tyres in their shops. There is no doubt that this is a great risk, but some consumers do not care about the matter, exposing their health, life and safety to danger. This is what prompts the Consumer Protection Authority to periodically follow up and monitor markets in various parts of the country to control these dangerous practices that are

harmful to consumers and their safety.

There are workers storing these used tyres in some shops and their residential locations in preparation for selling them in the markets, which prompted the Authority to take legal measures against them. The manufacturing dates of these counterfeit tyres are sometimes manipulated in order to sell them through illegal recycling. Consequently, the concerned authorities should conduct an economic feasibility study to establish other industries of these tyres to preserve the environment.

In several countries, these tyres are recycled due to their environmental and economic benefits and at the same time, they constitute an economic solution to the problem of disposal, as

they are sent to public landfills to be burned, which causes environmental pollution and becomes a threat to the health of humans, animals and plants.

With the emergence of new technologies, these used tyres can be exploited to be recycled to create new and useful products, which gives companies an opportunity to obtain income and profit and contribute to strengthening economies by providing new job opportunities.

The crushed rubber of these tyres can also be used to make playground floors, sidewalks, or rubber sheets and in plastic industries, as well.

This also helps in strengthening the partnership between governmental and private institutions and individuals and in

introducing modern technologies into institutions which prompts countries to make important investments in industry and in the future of people in terms of cleanliness and health.

There are many commercial institutions that work on these products in the country, as they are available in car repair shops, tyre shops, vehicle maintenance centres and others.

Finally, recycling vehicle tyres will contribute to reducing gas emissions associated with the burning of tyres, which can have a direct impact on the climate and on environmental and human health. The concerned authorities must adopt appropriate policies and legislation to encourage and promote the recycling of used tyres.

The evolving landscape of Takeoff and Landing Vehicles (TOLs)



CAPTAIN FAHAD
IBNE MASOOD

The author is part of MRAeS and is a distinguished aviation professional with over 25 years of comprehensive experience in aviation. He is presently teaching Airport Management & Aviation Management undergrads in MCBS – Modern College of Business & Science in Muscat, Oman

and V-TOLs. They require shorter runways than C-TOLs, making them more versatile for regional airports and smaller communities. S-TOLs often feature advanced aerodynamic designs or specialised propulsion systems to achieve shorter takeoff and landing distances.

V-TOLs: The Future of Urban Aviation V-TOLs, as the name suggests, can take off and land vertically, eliminating the need for runways altogether.

This capability makes them ideal for urban environments, where land availability is limited, and noise pollution is a concern. V-TOLs are being developed with electric aka eVTOLs or hybrid-electric propulsion systems, aiming to reduce emissions and noise pollution.

The Future of TOLs The future of TOLs is likely to be shaped by a combination of technological advancements, changing transportation needs, and environmental concerns. eV-TOLs, in particular, are poised to play a significant role in urban aviation. As battery technology improves and infrastructure develops, we can expect to see a growing number of eVTOL aircraft operating in cities around the world. A New Frontier in Aviation: Oman's Leap into Advanced Air Mobility Oman, a country known for its progressive approach to technology and infrastructure development, is actively exploring the potential of eVTOLs in the Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) space to enhance its transportation landscape. The country's strategic location, coupled with its growing tourism industry, makes it an ideal candidate for the implementation of AAM solutions.

The world of aviation is undergoing a transformative shift, driven by advancements in technology and the growing demand for more efficient and sustainable transportation solutions.

At the forefront of this evolution are Takeoff and Landing vehicles (TOLs), which have been classified into three primary categories: conventional takeoff and landing vehicles (C-TOLs), short takeoff and landing vehicles (S-TOLs), and vertical takeoff and landing vehicles (V-TOLs).

C-TOLs: The Traditional Choice C-TOLs have long been the dominant type of aircraft, serving as the backbone of commercial aviation.

These require extended runways for takeoff & landing, making them suitable for major airports' long-haul flights. They are characterised by large size, powerful engines & extensive range.

S-TOLs: Bridging the Gap These represent a middle ground between C-TOLs



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is the founder of Knowledge Oman.

Ahmed recently received a voice call from his younger brother Saeed, who was on vacation with family in Bangkok, Thailand. Saeed lost his wallet and was therefore in distress begging his elder brother Ahmed to help and support him by sending money to a designated money transfer web service.

Ahmed immediately noted down the website link, accessed and transferred a huge amount of money required by his younger brother Saeed and his family, only to realise a week later that he was actually scammed but in a revolutionary way!

How come? Ahmed was certain that he was speaking to his younger brother Saeed. I personally receive on a periodic basis a lot of videos of public figures, celebrities, politicians and the like who say, act and do strange things, again only to realise, out of experience and being technology savvy of course, that these videos are actually fake (AI generated).

Yes, don't blindly believe what you see and/or hear because these are a new form of scam, yet again using the power of Artificial Intelligence. Ahmed was scammed via AI voice cloning, while the videos that I, and pretty sure many of you too, received were a form of AI Deepfake videos.

Last week my article revolved around the most viral traditional form of scams that one may encounter. This week I would like to shed light on contemporary methods of scams that you may encounter (no thanks to the power of Artificial Intelligence). First things first, let us define an AI Scam for you.

Quite simply, using AI as a technology to scam people. For those who wish to know more about the traditional scams, kindly refer to my last week's article on the same which highlights the definition, forms

of scams, techniques and lastly tips on ways to avoid them. The objective of AI scam is the same i.e. deceiving the victims into extracting money, personal information and the likes. Spotting AI scams is not easy and knowing about how they work is important for yourself and the loved ones, to stay safe and get scammed free.

AI Scams come in different forms (and continue to be sophisticated and difficult to spot too). The ones that are on the prowl today are AI voice (uses artificial intelligence to replicate human voices) and AI video (generates fake videos)

ACCORDING TO A REPORT I READ ONLINE, AI-RELATED FRAUD CASES HAVE INCREASED BY OVER 50 PER CENT IN THE PAST FEW YEARS WITH LOSSES TOTALLING BILLIONS OF DOLLARS GLOBALLY

scams.

Ahmed, the fictional character I shared at the beginning of my article this week, was an example of scamming done using AI voice, while myself and many others are examples of victims that were almost scammed by an AI video scam (also known as Deepfake, a form of AI Scam that impersonates people).

Knowing that such sophisticated scams do actually exist helps keep one be aware of the same, for the impact of the unknown is severe that includes financial loss, identity theft, compromise sensitive personal information such as passwords and bank account details, apart from the respected reputation and trust that have been built over the years. The FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) noted that AI-

driven scams have contributed to a significant portion of the \$10.3 billion lost to cybercrime in 2022 alone. According to a report I read online, AI-related fraud cases have increased by over 50 per cent in the past few years with losses totalling billions of dollars globally.

Clearly, these alarming stats that one should be wary of, for whatever happen in the west, can happen in Oman too – we are all connected onto the information super high-away after all.

How can one protect him/herself from AI Scams? There is no easy way as every advancement in AI technology has the potential of also advancing AI scams.

Nevertheless, I would like to share a few approaches that I personally follow. As I had mentioned in my previous article, avoid providing personal and/or financial information over the phone unless you were the one who initiated, made the call and are certain of the call's identity and legitimacy too. Also, if in doubt, hang up the phone and verify the identity of the caller through official channels and authorised bodies. With reference to the video, look for unnatural pauses or robotic-sounding speech (although this is becoming difficult to spot). Lastly, report the suspicious voice calls and videos received to relevant authorities in order to help prevent others from falling victim. One cannot deny that Artificial Intelligence as a technology is transforming our world for the better and we have seen many tools that help keep individuals and organisations productive as a result. Nevertheless, as we have seen in my article today, Artificial Intelligence also presents new opportunities for scammers. Staying informed and keeping oneself updated is a sure way to protect against the rising threat of AI scams. Until we catch up again next week, stay safe and be positive.



LIFESTYLE

A woman stirs a pot of lentil soup as she prepares meals at the kitchen of a centre sheltering people displaced by conflict in Sudan's eastern city of Gedaref. — AFP



FILM

US musician and actress Taylor Momsen attends the world premiere of "The Crow" at The Village East by Angelika in New York. — AFP



CULTURE

Tibetan performers dance to welcome tourists to Yushu, in north-western China's Qinghai province. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

People walk past the image of the 'Monkey King' character, or 'Sun Wukong' of Chinese action role-playing game 'Black Myth: Wukong', developed by Chinese video game company Game Science, during its launch day in Hangzhou, in eastern China's Zhejiang province. — AFP



TRAVEL

View of the Christ the Redeemer seen from the Botafogo beach during the sunset in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP

art & life

THURSDAY | AUGUST 22, 2024 | SAFAR 17, 1446 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



IMTI AS AN ART HUB IS FINALLY TAKING SHAPE

Imti, a historic Omani village, has undergone a beautiful transformation. A concerted effort is making it into a vibrant space adorned with cultural artworks, attracting visitors and preserving the village's rich heritage while fostering community engagement and sustainable tourism... P20

CHANGING WORLD



Shaddad al Musalmy

Shaddad al Musalmy is a seasoned Omani journalist who worked for top newspapers in the country. He's currently one of Oman Observer's senior editors and contributes across different beats. His commentaries about life in general paint a vivid picture of the changing landscape in Oman.

FOR FEEDBACK, EMAIL THE AUTHOR AT shadadm75@gmail.com

Mind your language, communicate right

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION is a cornerstone of healthy relationships, both at home and in the workplace. It fosters understanding, builds trust, and enhances collaboration. In today's column, I want to explore the importance of good communication with family and co-workers, highlighting key strategies to improve interactions in both spheres. Communication within families serves as the foundation for emotional support and connection. When family members communicate effectively, they create an environment where everyone feels valued and understood. This is particularly crucial for

children, who learn essential life skills through their interactions with parents and siblings. Parents serve as role models for their children. The way parents communicate—here I mean the tone, body language, and choice of words teaches children how to express themselves. For instance, when parents engage in active listening and respectful dialogue, children are likely to adopt similar behaviours. Also, there is a need to open lines of communication to foster trust among family members. When individuals feel safe expressing their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment or retaliation, it strengthens familial bonds.

Trust is essential for resolving conflicts and navigating challenges together. Effective communication helps family members articulate their emotions clearly. This skill is vital for developing emotional intelligence, which plays a significant role in personal relationships and professional success later in life. In a professional setting, communication is equally vital for fostering teamwork and achieving organisational goals. Good communication practices can lead to increased productivity, improved morale, and enhanced problem-solving capabilities. Clear communication ensures that team members understand

their roles and responsibilities within a project. Regular check-ins and updates help keep everyone aligned on objectives while allowing for feedback that can enhance performance. Good communication skills are vital for nurturing healthy relationships both at home and at work. By practising active listening, encouraging open dialogue, resolving conflicts respectfully, and fostering an environment of trust, families can strengthen their bonds, while coworkers can enhance collaboration within teams. Till next time, mind what you say and how you say it.

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



salalah_adventure_tours
Salalah, Dhofar, Sultanate of Om...

Following

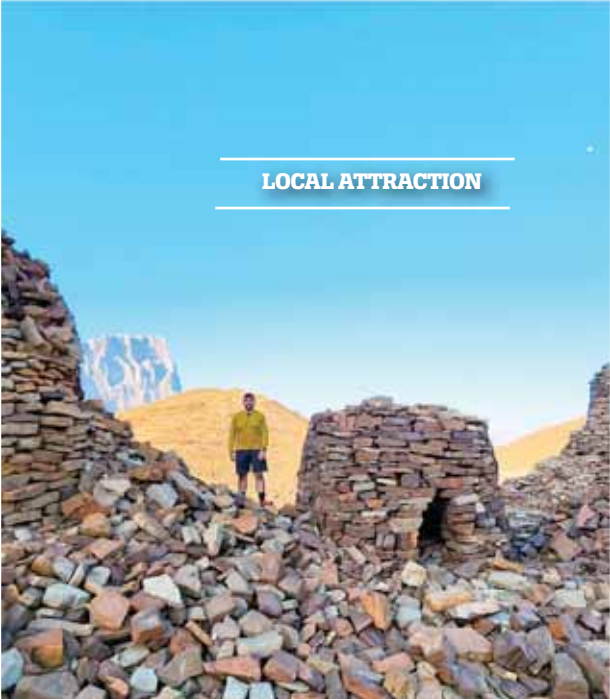


FRIENDLY BUNCH



omantripper
Al Ain's Beehive Tombs

Following



LOCAL ATTRACTION



lau.reise.reise
Hossam Ramzy • Naima's Desert...

Follow

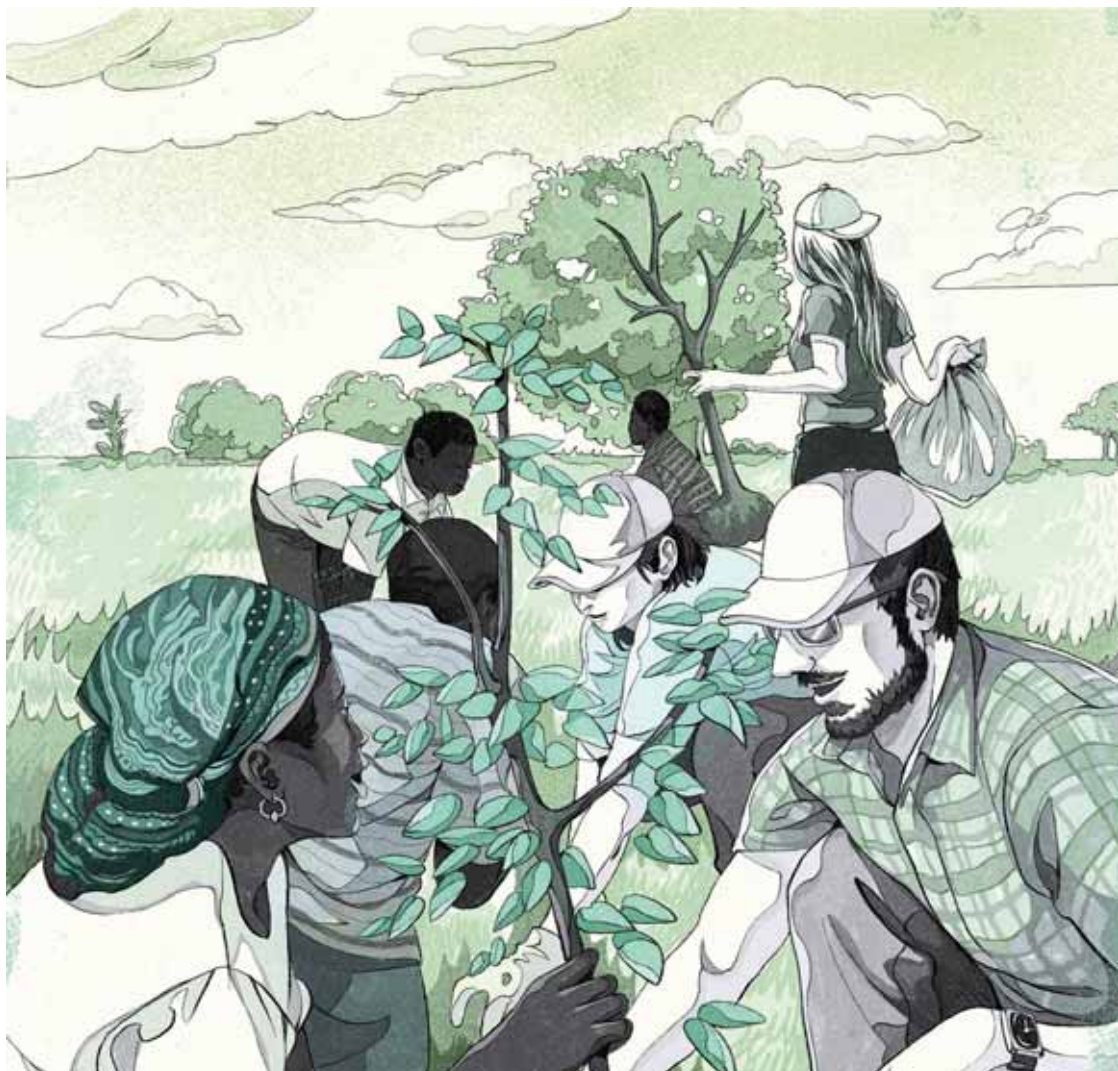


HISTORIC STRUCTURES



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.



HOW TO CHOOSE A VOLUNTEER TRIP

FOR TRAVELLERS INTERESTED in packing purpose into their trips, volunteer vacations offer opportunities to leave a place better than they found it. But time commitments, costs and the work required varies. The following tips explore the variables that distinguish volunteer travel experiences.

UNDERSTAND THE SPECTRUM OF WORK

Volunteer trips with the most impact require a significant work contribution. They tend to be run groups like Global Volunteers, a nonprofit based in St. Paul, Minnesota, that has operated in 37 countries for 40 years. Volunteers usually have evenings and weekends free while living in communities where they are working.

For those seeking a balance of work and travel, a category of trips known as "voluntourism" combines lighter service and

more time for tourism activities.

The website Workaway, for example, lists global opportunities to volunteer, including land-scaping in the Gulf Islands of Canada and harvesting tea in Vietnam. Workaway volunteers are expected to work five hours a day in exchange for shelter and some meals, and the website allows users to browse opportunities by country and by service subject.

COMMIT TO AT LEAST ONE WEEK

Organisations that offer travel programmes that last a week or two say short-term work can be powerful if well organised.

"With a group, you can get a lot of project work done," said Chris Braunlich, the board chair and CEO of the California-based nonprofit Conservation VIP, which runs outdoor trips from the Scottish Highlands to Patagonia, Chile, that might

involve building or maintaining hiking trails with a crew of six to 18 volunteers working roughly seven to eight hours most days.

Assess Your Impact
Vet the organisation you're considering by looking for impact reports and asking questions.

"To avoid exploitation, find someone with long-term partnerships and ask them, 'where does my week fit into the service vision of this community?'" said Michele Gran, the co-founder and senior vice president of Global Volunteers.

PREPARE TO PAY

Though travellers volunteer their time — and some programmes, like those offered by Workaway, provide meals and overnight stays — many programmes charge a fee to cover travellers' expenses, including lodging, meals and local transportation.

"We want to make sure you are safe, well-fed and well-cared for so that when you hit the ground you have enough energy and motivation to do what you're there to do," said Gran, noting that Global Volunteers maintains tourist-class lodging and meal standards.

Fees vary based on the destination and duration. A week with Habitat for Humanity, the nonprofit that builds affordable housing and community amenities around the world, generally costs \$1,625 to \$2,500 a person.

"Volunteers who pay tend to be more serious," said Julie Kelley, the founder of Let's Be SMART, a cat shelter near Athens, Greece, that accepts free Workaway volunteers and those who pay through Natucate, a Germany-based service that lists volunteer vacations. The latter receive better accommodations and more perks.

Whether there's a fee or not, most volunteer programmes do not cover travel expenses such as airfare.

Check the volunteer organisation's tax status. If you volunteer with a registered nonprofit,

the IRS will allow you to deduct your trip, including airfare, as a charitable donation.

DETERMINE YOUR INTERESTS

Volunteer vacations can align with a range of topics from the outdoors to social services.

The international environmental nonprofit Earthwatch offers opportunities to help scientists with field research on trips that are rated for their activity level and run about \$350 to \$460 a day.

A nine-day Earthwatch Expedition to Costa Rica, for example, has participants trek off trail to collect caterpillars in an ongoing study measuring the effects of climate change on them. Targeting hikers and backpackers, the nonprofit American Hiking Society ranks from easy to very strenuous in its volunteer vacations that focus on building and maintaining trails. Trips that involve backpacking, such as a recent programme in the Bitterroot National Forest of Montana and Idaho (\$425), require volunteers to bring their own camping gear.

Conservation VIP targets travellers who are concerned about their impact on the world by tackling projects in bucket-list destinations such as the Cinque Terre in Italy (to restore its stone-walled terraces) and the Galápagos Islands in Ecuador (to participate in sea turtle research and habitat protection). Domestic trips include a week of trail maintenance in Yosemite National Park in Northern California based at a campsite not open to the public and including catered meals (\$1,090).

Gardeners will find opportunities like raising organic produce for people in need in Romania with International Volunteer HQ, based in New Zealand (\$504 for one week). Those who sew or knit can join a women's cooperative in Cuba to create and teach islanders to make clothing through Global Volunteers (\$2,790 for a week).

Pet shelters often use animal lovers to help with the care and feeding of their residents. At Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Kanab, Utah, visitors can work with cats, dogs, horses and other orphaned animals (free, though volunteers pay for local accommodations, food and transportation).

APPLY YOUR SKILLS

Most service organisations say that no special skills are required. But volunteers with experience in construction, teaching, gardening and child care will find many opportunities to contribute.

Don't underestimate your abilities. For example, many Global Volunteer opportunities, including working with Ukrainian refugees in Poland, involve practicing conversational English with foreign language speakers and don't require the volunteer to know the local language.

SPREAD THE WORD

Many organisations thrive on word-of-mouth to carry their message and generate new volunteers.

In Northern Thailand, the sanctuary Elephant Nature Park — which supports rescued elephants and has been internationally recognised for responsible tourism — relies on volunteers to spread its anti-cruelty message. Day tours help fund the operation. Volunteers who stay longer can help with their care. "When they go back home, they are really keen to educate their friends and community," said Saengduan Chailert, the sanctuary's founder. — **NYT**

LIFESTYLE



Record-breaking Nepali teen eyes final 8,000-metre peak

AT JUST 18 YEARS old, Nepali mountaineer Nima Rinji Sherpa is on the brink of a remarkable achievement.

With 13 of the world's highest peaks already behind him, he is now one summit away from becoming the youngest person to conquer all 14 mountains towering above 8,000 metres (26,247 feet).

Sherpa, who already holds multiple records from his ascents of dozens of peaks, said he is on a mission to "inspire a new generation and redefine mountaineering".

His final challenge, Shishapangma in Tibet, awaits him next month -- if China issues a permit. Sumitting all 14 "eight-thousanders" is considered the epitome of mountaineering aspirations. Italian climber Reinhold Messner first completed the feat in 1986, and only around 40 climbers have successfully followed in his footsteps. Many other elite climbers have died in the pursuit.

All of the mountains are in the Himalayas and neighbouring Karakoram range, which span Nepal, China, India and Pakistan.

Reaching each summit requires entering the thin air of the "death zone", where there is not enough oxygen to sustain life for long.

"When I am in the mountains, I may die anytime," Sherpa said. "You need to realise how important your life is."

The young man says the mountains have taught him to stay calm.

"Mentally, I have convinced myself... when I see an avalanche, bad weather, an accident in the mountains I am not in a hurry, I don't get nervous," he added.

"I have convinced myself this is normal in the mountains. I think this has helped me a lot."

REAL VALUE OF LIFE

Hailing from the Sherpa ethnic group, renowned for its mountaineering prowess, the teenage climber is no stranger to the treacherous terrain.

His uncle, Mingma Gyabu 'David' Sherpa, currently holds the record of the youngest person to climb all 14 peaks. He achieved it in 2019, at the age of 30.

His father, Tashi Sherpa, grew up in the remote Sankhuwasabha district, herding yaks before joining mountaineering as a teenager with his siblings.

The entrepreneurial brothers now lead the biggest mountain expedition company in Nepal, Seven Summit Treks, and its sister company, 14 Peaks Expedition. "I come from a privileged fami-

ly," the teen climber said. "But going to the mountains has taught me what hardship is, and the real value of life".

Raised in the bustling capital Kathmandu, Sherpa initially preferred to play football.

He was also more interested in filming and photography than following his father's footsteps.

"My whole family is from mountaineering. I have always been near mountaineering and expeditions," he said. "But I never wanted to be myself in mountaineering."

Instead, he would take his camera out to the mountains during school holidays.

But two years ago, he put his camera down to pursue mountaineering and has since broken records.

In August 2022, Sherpa scaled his first of the 14 peaks, reaching the top of the world's eighth highest Mount Manaslu (8,163 metres) at the age of 16, the first teenager to do so.

The last mountain he scaled was Kanchenjunga in June, again making a record for the youngest to climb the world's third-highest mountain.

"I have learned so many things about nature, the human body, human psychology," he said.

"Everything in the world I learnt from the mountain."

INSPIRE NEWCOMERS

When not in the mountains, the student runs on the treadmill every day and avoids junk food.

"Physically and mentally, you should be very fit for big mountain climbing," his father Tashi Sherpa said, adding he had been helping him prepare for the challenge for years.

"He will inspire newcomers," he added.

Nepali guides -- usually ethnic Sherpas from the valleys around Everest -- are considered the backbone of the climbing industry in the Himalayas.

They carry the majority of equipment and food, fix ropes and repair ladders.

Long in the shadows of their paying foreign customers -- it costs more than \$45,000 to climb Everest -- Nepali mountaineers are slowly being recognised in their own right.

The teenager envisions a future where climbing is recognised as a demanding, athletic pursuit for Nepali climbers as well.

"My focus will be to make mountaineering a professional sport," he said. — **AFP**

BY YERU EBUEN

Exciting developments are unfolding in the village of Imti, located approximately an hour's drive from Muscat. This small village, which has undergone significant restoration over the past decade, is renowned for its picturesque falaj. It welcomes visitors at the entrance, where locals often gather to enjoy the cool waters, especially during the summer.

Imti is a village rich in character, nestled against a mountain on one side, providing natural protection from strong winds, while on the other side, lush gardens of date palms and seasonal produce flourish on the outskirts, where the more modern part of the village has evolved.

Efforts are now underway to revitalise this hidden gem and attract more visitors. A stroll through its winding alleys reveals a dramatic transformation over the last ten years. Once crumbling structures have been strengthened, with old

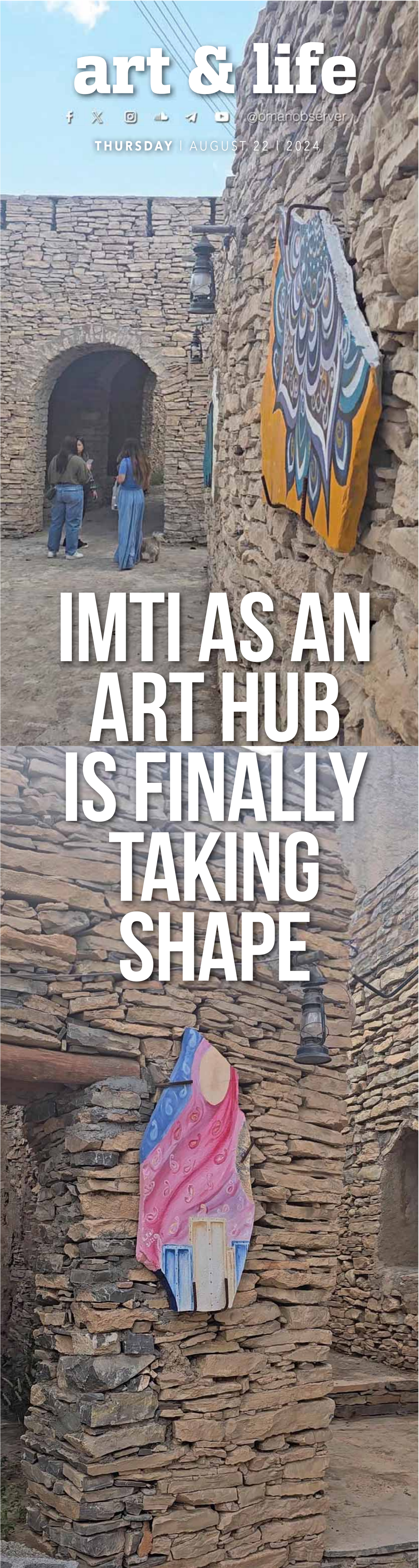


timbers replaced, and stone foundations reinforced and improved. Visitors can now climb to the rooftops of some homes, offering a unique perspective from the summit of the nearby mountain, showcasing the village's grandeur.

Following the pandemic, a new café has emerged at the village entrance, featuring outdoor seating ideal for winter months. This café has quickly become a popular spot, drawing hundreds of tourists and locals from surrounding towns and cities.

One of the most striking changes in Imti is the proliferation of artworks adorning walls, fences, and even lamp posts. Maryam al Zadjali, the former chairman of the Omani Society of Fine Arts (OSFA), has been a driving force behind this infusion of colour. As a pioneer of a unique restoration project in Imti and its 200-year-old settlement, her efforts have been supported by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. She has collaborated with various artists, hosting exhibitions in the village, including one focused on miniature artworks that received widespread acclaim from Omani artists and art enthusiasts.

Maryam's influence, along with that of her supporters, is



evident throughout the restored ruins. The artworks, depicting cultural objects with vibrant colours, tell tales of bygone eras. Particularly notable are wood and rocks painted with elements of traditional Omani women's clothing—colourful, ornate, and reflective of the village's rich heritage. The village entrance itself features a large mural celebrating traditional life, evoking a deep sense of nostalgia, despite the fading paint. Even the smallest details, such as the art on lamp posts, make the village more appealing to visitors.

Beyond the art, local vendors now sell traditional trinkets and seasonal produce harvested from nearby farms. A small shop, housed in what was once a majlis, offers a variety of dates, oils, and frankincense. Nearby, after a short climb to the second floor of a house, a restored shuwa pit, traditionally used during festivals and holidays, has become a focal point for tourists. Earthen pottery hanging from the few remaining trees adds a touch of authenticity to this beautifully preserved village.



A VISION TAKING SHAPE

Imti has witnessed numerous transformations throughout its long history. Walking along its dusty paths and through its restored structures offers a fascinating journey back in time. The old houses, with their intricately carved lintels and painted wooden doors, reveal a wealth of historical details. Beautifully arched windows invite light into rooms, highlighting niches blackened with soot from ancient lamps. Clay shelves built into the walls suggest that these spaces once served as bedrooms or storerooms. Some of the more grand and elaborate houses likely belonged to wealthier residents, with one such house featuring a large majlis centred around a clay pillar. Despite their fragile appearance today, the original wooden rafters and other elements of these structures have endured centuries of harsh conditions, testifying to their resilience.

In a 2019 interview, Maryam al Zadjali shared her vision for Imti: "My vision is to transform Imti into a vibrant hub where Oman's rich heritage, art, and culture are both celebrated and preserved. I aspire to create a space that fosters creativity and collaboration, working in partnership with the local community and leadership to develop sustainable opportunities that also attract visitors and tourists. When I first encountered this town, I sensed its unique potential—a special energy that could be harnessed to create something truly remarkable."

She continued, "With the cooperation of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, I initiated the project, 'Immortalising the Archaeological Moments in Art.' This groundbreaking initiative is the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman and I am eager to see my vision come to life. I believe that the Imti project has the potential to be an extraordinary attraction, offering a unique platform to showcase the work of local Omani artists and craftspeople. By intertwining this creative theme with the rich history of the area, we can establish a sustainable village that benefits the local community. Furthermore, I hope this project will inspire others to revive and restore many similar abandoned settlements across Oman."

Today, as one walks through Imti, it is clear that this vision is becoming a reality, with ongoing developments continuing to enhance this historic village.