

HM greetings to North Korea

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Kim Jong-un, First Secretary of the Workers' Party, First Chairman of the National Defence Commission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army, on his country's Independence anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Kim and the friendly people of his country.

SUNRISE - 05:51 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:35 AM
DHUHR - 12:09 PM
ASR - 03:37 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:22 PM
ISHA - 07:33 PM



P12

SABALENKA SURVIVES PEGULA STORM TO WIN US OPEN WOMEN'S TITLE



P13

NEW STUDY SEES POTENTIAL FOR COASTAL CARBON CAPTURE IN OMAN



P20

THE GREAT CAVE CANYON EXPLORATION



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO TAJIKISTAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Emomali Rahmon of the Republic of Tajikistan on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes for good health and happiness to President Emomali Rahmon. His Majesty also wished the people of Tajikistan further progress and prosperity.

PROPHET BIRTHDAY HOLIDAY ON SEPT 15

On the occasion of the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday (PBUH) anniversary, it has been decided that September 15 (Rabee Al Awwal 11, 1446 AH) will be an official holiday for employees of units of the state's administrative apparatus and other legal entities and establishments in the private sector. The Ministry of Labour said that employers may engage employees on the aforesaid holiday if deemed necessary due to the nature of their work, provided they compensate the workers for the holiday. — ONA

HM GETS MESSAGES FROM BAHRAIN KING, QATAR EMIR



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain. The message was handed over to Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, when he received at his office, on Sunday, Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Ka'abi, Ambassador of Bahrain to Oman. During the meeting, the ambassador conveyed greetings and best wishes of King Hamad to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people. On his turn, Sayyid Khalid asked the ambassador to convey greetings and best wishes of His Majesty the Sultan to King Hamad and the people of Bahrain. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has also received a written message from Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar. **SEE ALSO P2**

\$4.5m pact signed to aid 4,400 stranded Gazans

CAIRO: The Qatar Red Crescent and the UN agency for Palestinians (UNRWA) signed an agreement on Sunday, with \$4.5 million from a Qatari state development fund, to aid more than 4,400 stranded Palestinian workers and patients from Gaza in the West Bank. "Cash assistance will represent vital support for those displaced who have not been able to return to the Gaza Strip since the start of the Israeli aggression on the Strip last October," a statement from Qatar's state news agency said. "Thousands of

Palestine refugees from Gaza remain trapped in the West Bank, stranded in this crisis situation, separated from their loved ones and livelihoods," UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said. Since Israel's blockade of Gaza began in 2007, movement in and out of the Strip has been heavily restricted, forcing individuals to seek medical care, education or jobs in the West Bank, while escalating violence often closes borders, trapping those in need of essential services. **SEE ALSO P6**

Sultan Haitham City to feature 'model' schools

SUHAIL AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, Sept 8

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning said the schools in Sultan Haitham City will feature creative architectural designs that reflect modern aspects of the educational environment to provide a comprehensive and sustainable educational system.

The ministry noted that the schools will be organised into complexes, with each complex containing three schools for different stages. The facilities will include green spaces, playgrounds, swimming pools, as well as other amenities designed to develop the creative and innovative skills of future generations. Each school complex will accommodate 2,300 students.

Each school within the complexes will serve as a model of the so-called educational home, a flexible educational unit comprising multiple classrooms. The schools will include dedicated spaces for innovative laboratories, resource centres, music rooms and theatres, all of which will support diverse learning and extracurricular activities.

The design of the schools will enhance student interaction within the school environment through common spaces, break areas, canteens and multi-purpose rooms to encourage and enrich the educational experience.

The roofs of the schools will feature green gardens designed for outdoor learning and recreational purposes.

TURN TO P2



AL MOUJ MUSCAT SELL-OUT SUCCESS OF ITS ICONIC BUSINESS PARK

A significant milestone with the sell-out of both phases of the eight buildings of Al Mouj Business Park.

Al Mouj Muscat has set a new benchmark for corporate offices with the launch and sell out of its stunning Business Park. Positioned at the intersection of nature and quality design, this premier business destination boasts 39,000 sqm of flexible workspace spread across eight Grade A office buildings. With its award winning design and infrastructure, the Business Park redefines the standard for premium office environments in Oman.

Nestled in a breathtaking oceanfront and golf course setting, Al Mouj's Business Park comprises two interconnected precincts—Business Park South and Business Park North. Together, they offer an unparalleled work environment where your business can thrive in an environment like no other. Whether you are a multinational corporation or an emerging enterprise, these spaces provide the flexibility to grow and evolve while enjoying the benefits of a prestigious location.

2 State-of-the art business park destinations

8 World-class mid-rise premium office buildings

A Grade-A office design

Al Mouj Muscat's commitment to excellence extends beyond just office space. It's about creating a destination where innovation flourishes, ideas are exchanged, and businesses are empowered to reach new heights. The success of the Business Park, now fully sold out, is a testament to the vision and quality that Al Mouj Muscat delivers.



With both business park phases sold out, Al Mouj Muscat continues to push the boundaries of what a business destination can offer. Stay tuned for more exciting developments from Oman's premier lifestyle and business community.



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HM receives message from Emir of Qatar

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar.

The message was handed over to Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, when he received in his office today Shaikh Mubarak bin Fahad al Thani, Ambassador of Qatar to Oman.

During the meeting, the Ambassador conveyed the greetings and best wishes of Shaikh Tamim to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people.

In turn, Sayyid Khalid asked the Ambassador to convey the greetings and best wishes of His Majesty the Sultan to Shaikh Tamim and the people of Qatar.

— ONA



The message was handed over to Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, when he received in his office Shaikh Mubarak bin Fahad al Thani, Ambassador of Qatar to Oman. — ONA

Oman, Brazil talks focus on investments in renewable energy and agriculture

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Federative Republic of Brazil on Sunday held a session of political talks in Muscat.

During the session, the Omani side was headed by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, while the Brazilian side was headed by Mauro Vieira, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The two sides reviewed areas of bilateral cooperation in various fields, marking the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Oman and Brazil.

They also explored means of boosting economic and trade partnerships.

The session highlighted the importance of focusing on mutual investments in the fields of renewable energy and agriculture.

Both sides underlined the



The two sides reviewed areas of bilateral cooperation in various fields, marking the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Oman and Brazil. — ONA

importance of utilising the strategic location of the two countries in augmenting trade exchange and growing the volume of joint investments.

Moreover, the two sides touched on regional and international developments, as well as the joint efforts that are exerted to consolidate security and stability in the region and the world at large.

The Brazilian minister lauded the role undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman in enhancing regional stability.

He also expressed his country's keenness to boost relations on all levels in a bid to achieve joint development and prosperity.

In turn, Sayyid Badr commended the efforts exerted by Brazil in adopting several international topics that benefit humanity.

Further, the two sides underscored the importance of promoting political dialogue and constant coordination in international fora. — ONA

Masirah International Technical and Marine Services L.L.C Awarded Marine Package for Ghubrah III Desalination Plant Project

Masirah International Technical and Marine Services L.L.C, the leading Marine Construction Company in the Sultanate of Oman, is proud to announce that it has been awarded the contract to execute marine works for the Ghubrah III Desalination Plant in Oman.

Led by GS Inima, the plant will produce 300,000 cubic meters of desalinated water per day and is set to begin operations in early 2027.

"We are delighted to work with GS Inima on this landmark project that will have a lasting impact on Oman's water infrastructure," said Jonathan Turner, Chief Operating Officer at Masirah International. "This contract is a testament to our capabilities and the trust that GS Inima and other stakeholders have placed in us."

The project is a significant step toward enhancing water security in the Sultanate, and Masirah International looks forward to contributing to its successful completion.

Boost to defence relations with UK



MUSCAT: Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defence, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa Maria Eagle, Minister of State for Defence Procurement and Industry of the United Kingdom (UK). During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views and

discussed several matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by senior officers of the Ministry of Defence and the Sultan's Armed Forces, as well as the Military Attaché of the British embassy in Muscat.

Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of

the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), also received Maria Eagle, on Sunday, in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views and reviewed several topics of common concern. The meeting was attended by several senior officers of the COSAF. — ONA

Bilateral ties with Singapore discussed

MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, received Samuel Tan, Director General of the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia Directorate of the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on Sunday.

The two sides reviewed the



bilateral relations and ways of promoting them to serve the interests of the two countries.

They also exchanged views on regional and global issues of mutual concern.— ONA

Sultan Haitham City to have 'model' schools

FROM PAGE1

The gardens will be environmentally friendly with a natural thermal insulation system and will provide a multi-use educational environment, including sports fields and spaces for various activities.

On the other hand, the

Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has offered 151 investment sites, including 62 for bidding through the Tatweer platform. These include 57 sites for industrial investment, two commercial projects and three commercial residential projects with an area of 100,000 square metres.

In the agricultural sector,

89 investment opportunities have been rolled out in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. These include 70 projects for the plant sector, 10 projects for the animal sector, seven for the water sector, and two for the fisheries sector, covering an area of 9,357 million square metres.



Dhofar reflects on a remarkable khareef as spring approaches

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
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As Dhofar transitions from khareef season to the early days of Sarb (Spring), residents and visitors alike have started to reflect on what many are calling one of the most memorable monsoon seasons in recent history.

While an official weather report is yet to come, seasoned residents of Salalah are sharing their recollections of the most intense and beautiful khareef they've seen in the last three decades.

"Frankly, I haven't seen anything like this in the last 30 years," says Mohammed al Mahri, a local who has witnessed countless monsoon seasons. "The greenery was so rich this year, and the air had this crispness that made every moment in the outdoors special. We are used to khareef being pleasant, but 2024 was extraordinary," he said.

The khareef season, which spans from June to early September, draws in thousands of tourists from across the GCC due to Salalah's unique monsoon climate. This year, with temperatures hovering between 22-25°C and a persistent gentle mist, the city became a haven for families seeking relief from the scorching summer heat that grips most of the region.



2024 brought light rains with sustained cool breezes, resulting in perfect conditions for outdoor exploration

Weather experts were not able to give any conclusive statement for want of properly analysed data, but they were not hesitant to say that the season was one of the best in so many years. "We can't make a formal statement without thorough data, but there's no doubt that the consistency in cloud cover, lower humidity levels, and the steady breezes made this khareef feel longer and more enjoyable than in recent years."

The weather experts, however, noticed one change in trend in the western parts, where the impact of the monsoon was lesser than in previous years. "Generally, the monsoon knocks Salalah from the west, but places like Dhalkout and Rakhyout did not experience as intense a khareef as in previous years," said some locals in those areas.

Salalah and its adjoining areas, however, were entirely different this season. While khareef

is synonymous with heavy drizzle and occasional showers, 2024 brought light rains with sustained cool breezes, resulting in perfect conditions for outdoor exploration.

Nature enthusiasts and hikers had a field day this season, flocking to the lush mountains of Dhofar.

"It wasn't just about the weather, though," comments Abdullah al Hashmi, a frequent visitor from Muscat. "The whole atmosphere in Salalah this year was different. You could sense a kind of rejuvenation in the environment. The festival events were better organised and there was more to do in the city than before."

Even as the mist begins to clear and the vibrant green slowly fades, Salalah continues to draw tourists, especially from neighbouring Gulf countries. Visitors are now transitioning to enjoy the early Spring season, known locally as Sarb, which brings its own allure with milder weather and brightening landscapes.

As one season closes and another begins, the memories of khareef 2024 will linger. Locals are optimistic that future monsoons will follow in the footsteps of this unforgettable season, making Salalah a year-round destination for nature lovers.

Oman takes part in The Hague embassy festival



THE HAGUE: The Sultanate of Oman's Embassy in the Netherlands took part in the annual Embassy Festival, held in The Hague. During the event, Shaikh Dr Abdullah bin Salim al Harthy, Ambassador of Oman to the Netherlands, received in the Omani corner the Mayor of The Hague, some ambassadors of the participating countries and senior visitors. During their visit, they became acquainted with the tourism and heritage landmarks of Oman. — ONA

Forum showcases education and job opportunities

MUSCAT: Acting in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Labour on Sunday organised a professional qualifications forum in Muscat. The forum reviewed ways of expanding employment opportunities and upgrading methods.

During the forum, working papers presented by academics, officials and decision-makers highlighted pillars of sustainable education and means of guiding society towards embracing knowledge and competitive



The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Ministry of Labour organised a qualifications forum.

national capabilities. The opening ceremony was

held under the auspices of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy,

Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development. Professional qualifications enhance job opportunities and reflect the keenness of the labour market on accommodating specific skills and knowledge that enable individuals to adapt to the challenges of modern times.

These qualifications constitute standards for their holders and a means for accessing global standards, skills, knowledge and specialisations that qualify them to professionally undertake any jobs or missions. — ONA

Cardiovascular issues, road accidents cause of most deaths

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

Cardiovascular diseases remained the top reason for deaths in Oman, according to the annual statistical book, which reported a total of 3,939 deaths due to various causes in the country. Complications related to pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum caused just four fatalities.

The Royal Hospital reported the highest number of deaths while Al Wusta Governorate saw the fewest. The government continues its efforts to improve healthcare and infrastructure to combat rising mortality rates.

Heart disease, including heart attacks and strokes, remains a leading cause of death in Oman. Data from the Ministry of Health shows an increase in

cardiovascular disease cases, driven by high obesity rates, sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy eating habits.

"Heart diseases are one of the main causes of death in Oman, largely due to unhealthy living," said Dr Abdullah Saeed, a Consultant in Cardiovascular Diseases. "Lack of exercise, a diet high in fats and sugars, and smoking significantly raise the risk of heart disease. Awareness campaigns must emphasise lifestyle changes to help reduce these rates." Dr Saeed also highlighted the importance of early detection through routine check-ups, which can identify heart conditions early and reduce mortality.

In addition to cardiovascular issues, diabetes and high blood pressure are key contributors to mortality rates in Oman.



Heart disease, including heart attacks and strokes, remains a leading cause of death in Oman

These chronic conditions, if not properly managed, can lead to serious complications such as kidney failure, neurological damage and vision impairment.

"Diabetes and high blood pressure are major health challenges," stated Dr Fatima al Hasani, Consultant

Endocrinologist. "Many people discover these diseases too late, complicating treatment. We need to encourage regular check-ups, healthy diets and physical activity to curb the spread." Dr Al Hasani emphasised ongoing governmental and community efforts to promote awareness and

early screening, while urging an intensification of these efforts for better outcomes.

Traffic accidents are another major cause of death in Oman, particularly among young people. Despite government initiatives to reduce road accidents, including stricter traffic laws and public safety campaigns, reckless driving remains a significant issue. Most fatal accidents in 2023 were caused by excessive speeding, distracted driving, and non-compliance with traffic rules.

The Royal Oman Police's Traffic Department reiterated that while improvements have been made to laws and monitoring systems, speeding and inattention remain major challenges. "We are continuously running campaigns to promote road safety and developing infrastructure to prevent accidents," a department

spokesperson said. They also stressed the need for community cooperation to improve road safety.

Cancer is another critical health challenge in Oman, with annual cases steadily rising. Breast cancer is prevalent among women, while men are more often diagnosed with colon and lung cancer.

The National Cancer Center reports that despite advancements in early detection and treatment, educating the public on regular screenings remains a pressing challenge.

Specialised cancer centres across the Sultanate of Oman have improved survival rates, but a greater focus on awareness is essential.

Oman's health sector faces growing challenges from chronic diseases and traffic accidents.

Bait al Munzafa Museum

GLIMPSE OF OMAN’S RICH PAST

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BAIT AL MUNZAFa MUSEUM, the first and only museum in Al Dhahirah Governorate, is nestled in the village of Majzi, Wilayat of Ibri. This unique cultural site was restored by Khalfan al Maamari, who transformed his ancestral home into a captivating tourist attraction that invites visitors to travel back in time. The museum is set amidst scenic palm, lemon and mango trees, offering a picturesque backdrop that enhances its historical charm. The name ‘Bait al Munzafa’ was chosen to honour the original site where the house stands.

Khalfan al Maamari said the house has been in his family for over a century, dating back to his third grandfather’s time. Historical documents in the museum reveal a deep connection between the Al Busaidi royal family and Al Maamari’s ancestors, including nearly one hundred royal correspondences that span over a hundred years. These documents, along with private letters, sermons, speeches and rare manuscripts, paint a vivid picture of Oman’s rich history. The museum showcases the lives of ancient Omanis, featuring pre-Renaissance artefacts, pottery, leather goods and women’s jewellery. Among its treasures are ancient Omani Khanjars (daggers), with one dagger’s history dating back more than fifty years, as indicated by the engraving on its hilt.

Visitors can also explore artefacts related to Bedouin life, including traditional weapons, wooden crafts, swords and spears. Additionally, heritage enthusiasts in Al Dhahirah Governorate are

encouraged to display their manuscripts and antiquities in the museum, ensuring the preservation of their heritage. Beyond its exhibition halls, the museum offers a multi-purpose space for events and a guest house with several rooms, a swimming pool and a garden, allowing visitors to immerse themselves fully in the tranquil surroundings. Khalfan al Maamari, hailing from a family deeply committed to preserving both material and moral history, explains that his family’s collection of over 800 documents and manuscripts reflects their dedication to knowledge and its transmission across generations. This passion for preserving his family’s legacy led him to convert his inherited

THE MUSEUM SHOWCASES THE LIVES OF ANCIENT OMANIS, FEATURING PRE-RENAISSANCE ARTEFACTS, POTTERY, LEATHER GOODS AND WOMEN’S JEWELLERY

home into a museum. Located on a hill overlooking lush palm oases, Majzi village is not only a historical site but also a thriving agricultural area, known for producing figs, lemons, grapes, and other seasonal crops. The village’s rich history is further evidenced by ancient rock inscriptions in the old “Musnad” script and remnants of a copper mine. The Wilayat of Ibri, situated in Al Dhahirah Governorate, has historically been a hub for trade caravans, enhancing its commercial and economic significance. The area’s diverse environments, ranging from urban to Bedouin and rural, combined with its picturesque landscapes, make it an exceptional tourist destination. Ibri’s heritage is also reflected in its ancient forts, such as Ibri Fort and Al Sulaif Fort, and its traditional markets that continue to showcase the authentic Omani culture.





MOHT SET TO TAP SPAIN AS NEW SOURCE MARKET

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) will be exploring new source markets to get inbound tourists to the country.

Speaking to *Observer*, Saada al Harthy, Director of Business

Development at MoHT, said that apart from the traditional markets of Germany and the UK, the ministry is now targeting Europe and Russia.

“We are targeting Spain and Russia as our main markets for 2024 and 2025. We have already started activities in Russia. We had a roadshow in Russia, and

now we are running a digital campaign. We are looking into opening a representative office for the Spain market and there is a family trip called the ‘European Marhaba’. We are planning a roadshow at the end of this year in Madrid and Barcelona.”

It may noted that Germany has been topping the list of

Europeans coming to the country over the years.

“Germany has been popular because we have direct flights. Besides, there are regular charter flights.” It is one of our biggest markets in Europe, which showed an increase of 182 per cent in 2023, followed by Italy with an 87 per cent increase. The

rest of the markets are growing.

Another reason is because we have invested a lot in these markets. There’s a lot of marketing activity implemented in these markets. Not only Italy and Germany, but we even have good numbers from the UK market and France, our other source markets. The Ministry

of Heritage and Tourism will be working on ‘Developed Tour Packages in the Tourism Sector’, along with one-on-one meetings and joint discussions between representatives of Omani tourism institutions and their European counterparts, apart from the signing of cooperation agreements.

71 MoUs signed for Oman Science Festival from Nov 4

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

The Ministry of Education has signed 71 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with various companies and institutions to support the upcoming Oman Science Festival, scheduled from November 4 to 11.

The signing ceremony was overseen by Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, and attended by key officials, including Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, and Majid bin Said al Bahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Administrative and Financial Affairs, along with CEOs from contributing organisations. This year marks the fourth edition of the Oman Science Festival, which aims to make science accessible and engaging for students and the general public. The event will promote interactive learning



The Oman Science Festival aims to make science accessible and engaging for students and the public

that stimulates creative thinking, while keeping pace with global trends in science, technology, and future advancements.

The festival’s objectives align with ‘Oman Vision 2040’ and the National Innovation Strategy, striving to position Oman as a leader in innovation by 2040.

The festival is scheduled to take place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition

Centre, the festival will span 12,000 square metres and feature over 2,500 participants from 120 government and private entities. More than 500 activities will be hosted, offering a wide range of learning experiences for attendees. During the signing event, Dr Ambusaidi emphasised the significance of collaboration between the public and private sectors, noting that past successes

were driven by two key factors: The strong support from the private sector and the dedicated efforts of Omani youth, who meticulously planned and executed the event.

The MoUs were signed with prominent companies including OQ, Petroleum Development Oman, Oman Energy Association (OPAL), Oman LNG, Duqm Refinery, Occidental Oman, Al Yusr Foundation, and Omantel. Additionally, Majid al Bahri signed agreements with Shell Oman, Financial Services Regulatory Authority, Be’ah, Vodafone, Mazoon Dairy, Safa Foods, Ansar Technology, Al Waha Water, and Atyab Company. The festival will target a wide range of participants, including students, educators, parents, higher education institutions, researchers, and industry professionals. Its aim is to foster human capital, boost global competitiveness, stimulate the economy, and enhance Oman’s standing in innovation and creativity on the global stage.

UTAS Musannah enrols 764 students for new academic year



UTAS-A held an orientation day for new batch of General Diploma students

MUSANNAH: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Al Musannah (UTAS-A) welcomed a new batch of General Diploma students for the academic year 2024-2025. About 764 students were enrolled for the fall semester in the College of Engineering and Technology, the College of Computing and Information Sciences, and the College of Economics and Business Administration.

Dr Saeed bin Hamad al Rubaiee, Vice-Chancellor, orientation day speech welcomed the students as they embark on their academic journey. “We are delighted that they have chosen UTAS-A for their studies. We also extend our congratulations to our new colleagues among the staff who have recently joined UTAS. Strive for excellence and success to achieve your goals. Make education your focus and noble aim,” he said while urging them

to continue journey towards realising their ambitions.

Dr Nasser bin Salem al Bimani, Assistant Vice-Chancellor, UTAS-A, delivered a welcome speech, emphasising the importance of hard work, time management and research skills.

A video presentation was highlighted the university, colleges, its vision, and the key facilities in UTAS-A. The rules and regulations were then explained regarding the General Foundation Programme, placement exams, attendance, and the evaluation systems in the English, computer, and mathematics courses of the GFP.

The students were also introduced to electronic systems and student services and the importance of entrepreneurship and innovation. The orientation week continues with students taking placement exams. in English, computer, and mathematics.

Ryoma Manga seminar launched in Sur

MUSCAT: In celebration of the commencement of ‘Ryoma Manga Seminar’ in Sur, the Arab Tourism Capital for 2024, the Embassy of Japan in Oman, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, hosted a reception at the Sur Grand Hotel on September 1.

The event was graced by the presence of Yousef bin Salem bin Nasser Al Mukhaini,

Member of the Majlis Ash’shura representing the Wilayat of Sur.

Jota Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate of Oman, in his speech, reaffirmed the significant role that manga plays in strengthening the friendship between Japan and Oman. He expressed hope that the seminar participants would excel as ambassadors of

Japanese manga.

Starting on the same day, the manga seminar organised by the Ministry began at the Youth Centre in Sur. Japanese manga artists Yoshihiro Iwagami and Yuka Yamashita, invited from Kochi Prefecture, Japan, are providing lectures to participants on the art of manga creation.

Techno Fest showcases future of innovation and technology

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Techno Fest 2024, an event of technology and technical expertise was organised recently and brought together industry leaders, engineers and technology enthusiasts to showcase the latest advancements and innovations in the field.

Organised by the Kerala Engineers Family (KEF), the Techno Fest 2024 featured an impressive array of technical exhibition stalls, where cutting-edge technologies and innovations were on display. This platform allowed companies to present their latest products and services, offering attendees a glimpse into the future of technology.

The event also included insightful presentations by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, along with leading companies where industry leaders shared their expertise and vision for the future. Topics ranged from emerging technologies to industry trends, providing valuable knowledge to the participants.

The day highlighted a broad spectrum of investment opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman, and ways and strategies were discussed further enriching the event’s contributions to fostering industry relations and innovation.

The event, held under the auspices of Eng Hamoud bin Salem al Saadi, Vice-Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry

(OCCI), was inaugurated by the Ambassador of India, Amit Narang, in the presence of Dr P Mohammed Ali, Founder of Galfar Engineering and Contracting, Mohiyudeen, Vice-Chairman of Galfar Engineering and Contracting, and Ananth, Director of Lulu Group.

Kerala Engineers Family (KEF) is a vibrant organisation comprising engineers of Kerala origin residing in Oman. KEF is dedicated to fostering professional growth, knowledge sharing, and camaraderie among its members, while also contributing to the broader community through various initiatives.

Techno Fest 2024 is one such initiative aimed at promoting technological innovation and collaboration.

TENDER NOTICE



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries
Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
617/2024/ MAFWR/ HQ-9	Cleaning works for the buildings of the General Directorate of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources in the Central Governorate	Sunday 8/9/2024	Sunday 29/9/2024	Sunday 20/10/2024	Specialized companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board with excellent, first, second, third and fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.

- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies, and for International company that not have headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender) and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources.

- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.

- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtct.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources



Gaza fighting rages, rescue official killed

CAIRO: An Israeli air strike on a house in Jabalia on Sunday killed Mohammad Morsi, deputy director of the Gaza Civil Emergency Service in the northern areas of the Gaza Strip, and four of his family, health officials said.

The Civil Emergency Service said in a statement that Morsi's death raised to 83 the number of its members killed by Israeli fire since October 7. There was no immediate Israeli comment on Morsi's death.

Residents said Israeli forces had also blown up several houses in the Zeitoun suburb of Gaza City 5 km from Jabalia. Medical teams said they were unable to answer desperate calls by some of the residents who had reported being trapped inside their houses, some wounded.

"We hear constant bombing in Zeitoun, we know they are blowing up houses there, we don't sleep because of the sounds of



Palestinian man and his son, both injured in an Israeli bombing in the Bureij refugee camp, sit outside the Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir Al Balah. — AFP

explosions, the roaring of tanks sound close and the drones don't stop circling," said one resident of Gaza City, who lives around 1 km away. "The occupation is wiping out Zeitoun, we are afraid about the people trapped in there," he added, refusing to be named.

Israel and Hamas continued to blame one another for the failure of mediators, including Qatar, Egypt and the US, to broker a ceasefire.

The US is preparing to present a new proposal, but the prospects of a breakthrough appear dim as gaps between the sides' positions remain large.

Meanwhile on Sunday the United Nations, in collaboration with local health authorities, extended by a day a campaign to vaccinate children in the southern Gaza Strip against polio before it moves on Monday to the north.

The campaign aims to vaccinate 640,000 children in Gaza after its first polio case in around 25 years. Limited pauses in the fighting have allowed the campaign to proceed.

UN officials said they were making progress, having reached more than half of the children needing the drops in the first two stages in the southern and central Gaza Strip. A second round of vaccination will be required four weeks after the first.

The latest bloodshed in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict was triggered on October 7 when the Palestinian groups attacked Israel, killing 1,200 and taking about 250 captives, according to Israeli tallies.

Israel's subsequent assault on Gaza has killed more than 40,900 Palestinians, according to the local health ministry, while also displacing nearly the entire population of 2.3 million, causing a hunger crisis and leading to genocide allegations at the World Court, which Israel denies.

— Reuters

Sudan rejects UN call for 'impartial' force

PORT SUDAN: Sudan has rejected a call by UN experts for the deployment of an "independent and impartial force" to protect millions of civilians driven from their homes by more than a year of war.

The conflict since April last year, pitting the army against paramilitary forces, has killed tens of thousands of people and triggered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

The independent UN experts said on Friday their fact-finding mission had uncovered "harrowing" violations by both sides, "which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity".

They called for "an independent and impartial force with a mandate to safeguard civilians" to be deployed "without delay".

The Sudanese foreign ministry, which is loyal to the army under General Abdel Fattah Al Burhan, said in a statement late on Saturday that "the Sudanese government rejects in their entirety the recommendations of the UN mission."

It called the UN Human Rights Council, which created the fact-finding mission last year, "a political and illegal body", and the panel's recommendations "a flagrant violation of their mandate".

The UN experts said eight million civilians have been displaced and another two million people have fled to



Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (C) visits a children's hospital in Port Sudan. — AFP

neighbouring countries.

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, on a visit to Sudan on Sunday, said: "The scale of the emergency is shocking, as is the insufficient action being taken to curtail the conflict and respond to the suffering it is causing."

In Port Sudan, where government offices and the United Nations have relocated to due to the intense fighting in the capital Khartoum, Tedros called on the "world to wake up and help Sudan out of the nightmare it is living through".

The Sudanese foreign

The UN experts said eight million civilians have been displaced and another two million people have fled to neighbouring countries

ministry statement accused the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, led by Burhan's former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, of "systematically targeting civilians and civilian institutions".

The statement added that the UN Human Rights Council's role should be "to support the national process, rather than seek to impose a different exterior mechanism". It also rejected the experts' call for an arms embargo.

On Saturday, Hundreds of families fled a northern suburb of Sudan's capital Khartoum after fighting between the army and paramilitaries intensified around a key military base.

The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces attacked the Hattab base in Khartoum North, also known as Bahri, on Wednesday. — AFP

Yagi weakens after leaving dozens dead

HA LONG: Typhoon Yagi weakened to a tropical depression on Sunday, after killing over a dozen people, tearing roofs off buildings, sinking boats and triggering landslides across Vietnam.

The typhoon had left a trail of destruction and two dozen people dead across southern China and the Philippines before it ravaged Vietnam.

A family of four was killed on Sunday after heavy rain caused a hillside to give way and collapse onto a house in the mountainous Hoa Binh province of northern Vietnam. Since Friday, 10 others have been killed in storm-related incidents, some crushed by falling trees or drifting boats, the defence ministry's disaster management agency.

On Sunday afternoon, six more people, including a newborn baby and a one-year-old boy, were killed in a landslide in the Hoang Lien Son Mountains of northwestern Vietnam.

The slide was triggered by heavy rains and high winds after Yagi made landfall on Saturday, but authorities are yet to attribute the deaths to the storm.

"We found the six bodies, including a one-year-old boy and a newborn in the landslide," a local official from the Sapa people's committee said.

While Vietnam's weather agency downgraded the storm on Sunday, several areas of the port city of Hai Phong were under half a metre of flood waters, and electricity was out, with power lines and electric poles damaged.

— AFP



Damaged buildings and debris on a street after Super Typhoon Yagi hit Ha Long, in Quang Ninh province. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

SEOUL

N Korean leader stresses building naval power

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un underscored the importance of strengthening naval power as he toured a naval base construction site.

"Now that we are soon to possess large surface warships and submarines which cannot be anchored by the existing facilities for mooring warships, the construction of a naval base for running the latest large warships has become a pressing task," Kim was quoted saying.

Kim stressed the need to



build a naval port capable of operating weapons systems of the warships and revealed military measures to deploy anti-aircraft and coastal-defence systems for defending the port. — Reuters

NAIROBI

Fire breaks out at another Kenyan school

A fire broke out at a girls' boarding school in a town in central Kenya, leaving at least three students injured and destroying property.

The fire follows the death of at least 21 students in a blaze at a boarding primary school, Hillside Endarasha Academy, in Nyeri, also in central Kenya, early on Friday.

"A fire incident has been reported at Isiolo Girls High School, Isiolo County," the Kenya Red Cross said in a post on



the X platform late on Saturday.

Early on Sunday, it said the fire had been contained and that three minor injuries had been recorded.

— Reuters

TEHRAN

Iran's president to visit Iraq on first foreign trip

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian will visit neighbouring Iraq on Wednesday, state media reported on Sunday, in what will be his first trip abroad since he took office in July.

Pezeshkian will head a high-ranking Iranians delegation to Baghdad to meet senior Iraqi officials. The visit comes at the invitation of Iraq's premier, Mohammed Shia al Sudani.

The two countries will sign memoranda of understanding on cooperation and security,



Sadeqh said, without elaborating. He said the agreements were to have been signed during a planned visit to Iraq by Iran's late president, Ebrahim Raisi.

— AFP



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In brief

■ BUCHAREST



ROMANIA CONDEMNS AIRSPACE BREACH BY RUSSIAN DRONE

Romania on Sunday said a Russian attack drone targeting civilian infrastructure in neighbouring Ukraine overnight had entered its airspace, strongly condemning the “renewed violation” brought on by Moscow’s “illegal attacks.”

Early on Sunday, Romania’s army radars detected a drone that had entered its airspace before it “left the national territory towards Ukraine”, the country’s defence ministry said in a statement.

Romania air force planes monitored the situation, and phone alerts were sent to the residents in Tulcea and Constanta counties near the border of Ukraine. — AFP

■ BERLIN



GERMANY’S SCHOLZ RULES OUT VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN SUMMER

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has ruled out holding a vote of confidence in parliament ahead of elections next year. Scholz said his coalition government continues to have a majority in the Bundestag.

Scholz admitted that Germany’s fractured political landscape could make governing the country even more difficult.

“I fear that whatever happens in the next few years, we will continue to have situations in Germany in which it is very complicated to form governments,” the chancellor said. Scholz defended his government’s record, despite the three parties languishing in polls for next year’s elections. — dpa

■ ANKARA



CHILD FOUND DEAD IN TURKIYE AFTER SEARCH EFFORT

The body of an eight-year-old girl who had been missing in Turkiye for 19 days has been found after an enormous manhunt, the interior minister said.

The body of Narin Guran was found in a bag in a river in the southeastern province of Diyarbakir, around one kilometre from the village, Diyarbakir governor Murat Zorluoglu told reporters.

“Unfortunately, the lifeless body of Narin, who went missing in the village of Tavsantepe... has been found,” Turkish interior minister Ali Yerlikaya said. She disappeared on August 21. — AFP

Russia takes Ukrainian town on Pokrovsk

MOSCOW: Russia said on Sunday that its forces had taken full control of a town in eastern Ukraine as Moscow’s forces advance on the strategically important city of Pokrovsk and seek to pierce the Ukrainian defensive front lines.

Russian forces, which control about a fifth of Ukraine since attacking in February 2022, are advancing in eastern Ukraine in an attempt to take the whole of the Donbas.

Russia’s defence ministry said its forces had taken the town of Novohrodivka, which lies 12 km from Pokrovsk, an important rail and road hub for Ukrainian forces in the area. The town had a population of 14,000 before the war.

Yuri Podolyaka, an influential military blogger, published maps showing Russian forces attacking beyond Novohrodivka in at least two places less than 7 km from Pokrovsk.

President Vladimir Putin said last week that a Ukrainian incursion into the Russian region of Kursk had failed to slow Russia’s own advance in eastern Ukraine and had weakened Kyiv’s defences along the front line in a boost to Moscow.

Ukraine’s top military commander said on Thursday that Kyiv’s incursion into the Kursk region was working and that there had been no Russian advances on Pokrovsk for the previous six days.

He said that one of the objectives of the Kursk incursion



Artillerymen fire towards Russian troops at a front line, near Pokrovsk, Donetsk region, Ukraine.

— Reuters

was to divert Russian forces from other areas, primarily Pokrovsk and Kurakhove. Russia had diverted large numbers to Kursk, but was also strengthening the Pokrovsk front, he added.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has said the Kursk operation was also to prevent Russian forces from crossing the border in the

opposite direction.

Russia currently controls about 80 per cent of Donbas. Given the speed of recent Russian advances in the east, some Russian war bloggers have raised concern about the army overreaching itself.

Putin ordered tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine in February 2022 in what he calls

a special military operation.

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called for a renewed effort to bring peace to Ukraine, adding that he and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had both agreed in recent talks on the need for a new peace conference that would include Russia. “I believe that now is the time to discuss how

to arrive at peace from this state of war, indeed at a faster pace,” Scholz told broadcaster ZDF in a televised interview. Zelensky said in July he aimed to have a plan ready in November to enable Kyiv to hold a second international summit on peace in Ukraine, and that representatives of Russia should attend. — Reuters

Le Pen urges Macron to hold referendum to break deadlock

PARIS: French far-right leader Marine Le Pen on Sunday urged President Emmanuel Macron to hold a referendum on key issues such as immigration, suggesting that giving the French a direct vote might help break the political deadlock.

Last week, Macron appointed the centre-right Michel Barnier, a 73-year-old former foreign minister who acted as the European Union’s Brexit negotiator, as prime minister, seeking to move forward after June-July snap elections that resulted in a hung parliament.

But analysts say the country is set for a period of instability, with Barnier’s hold on power seen as fragile and dependent on support from Le Pen’s eurosceptic, anti-immigration National Rally (RN) party, which is the largest party in the new National Assembly.

A left-wing coalition, which emerged as France’s largest political bloc after the elections, although short of an overall majority, is also piling pressure on Barnier.

More than 100,000 left-wing demonstrators rallied across France on Saturday to protest against his nomination and denounce Macron’s “power grab”.

On Sunday, she urged Macron to conduct a referendum on key issues such as immigration, healthcare and security to give the people a direct vote.

The RN “will unreservedly support any approach aimed at giving people the power to decide directly”, Le Pen said, speaking in the northern town of Henin-Beaumont, the far-right’s



National Rally deputy and former president of the French far-right Rassemblement National (RN) parliamentary group Marine Le Pen delivers a speech during her political re-entry, in Henin-Beaumont, northern France. — AFP

“If, in the coming weeks, the French are once again forgotten or mistreated, we will not hesitate to censure the government

MARINE LE PEN

French far-right leader

traditional stronghold.

“Emmanuel Macron himself, in the chaos he has created, has levers to keep our democracy live,” she added.

To prevent the RN from having an absolute majority and forming a government, around 200 candidates stood down

ahead of the final round of the snap legislative polls in July, sparking the far-right’s outrage.

“If, in the coming weeks, the French are once again forgotten or mistreated, we will not hesitate to censure the government,” she added.

Speaking to reporters, Le Pen, 56, also said she expected France to hold new legislative elections “within a year”. “This is good because I think that France needs a clear majority,” she said.

According to a poll released on Sunday, the French are largely satisfied with the appointment of Barnier as prime minister, but believe he will not last long in his new post.

Fifty two per cent of people polled said they were satisfied with the appointment of Barnier, according to the Ifop poll for the Journal du Dimanche. — AFP

The benefits of value-based education



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

As the new academic year begins this week, calls to introduce value-based education in primary, secondary and higher education sectors are being renewed in many parts of the world. This is an important reminder that education is much more than transmitting knowledge, facts and figures. At the end of an educational journey, learners take with them the values learned as much as the skills imparted. Significant work on values in primary schools identifies self-direction, universalism, tradition and benevolence as important universal basic human values. Sufficient research exists to show how these are implemented through educational systems, from the primary to the secondary and higher education stages. Most often, human values are transmitted “in a variety of social contexts and involve different instances of socialisation such as the parental home, peers or schools”. Thus, schools must play a significant role in transmitting human values as part of their educational goals. There is a specific reason why schools and other

educational institutions are better at this task than other platforms. By their very nature, schools are public spaces where different people come together for a common purpose — to learn and discover together. One of the challenges in inculcating values in education is that, by its very definition, the concept of values is too general and its outcomes difficult to assess. It is also difficult to test and measure the extent to which such values have been successfully conveyed in class time. Another limitation is the understanding of values-based education, what it entails and must include. Value-based education (VbE) is defined as “a range of experiences that are used to develop values based to the curriculum”. This is seen to be different from having ‘values’ in that they are not explicitly taught but guide the general philosophy of an educational institution. The teaching of value systems is important because learners are not often aware of the qualities and soft skills when they are being implicitly taught. Articulating these values, priorities and systems of thinking makes youngsters more conscious and

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION GIVES LEARNERS THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TO UNDERSTAND AND ENGAGE WITH THEIR SOCIETY IN MEANINGFUL AND RESPONSIBLE WAYS

aware of social responsibility, cultural awareness and the potential for dialogue. The same is true of education on citizenship and identity. In general, “citizenship education gives learners the knowledge and skills to understand and engage with their society in meaningful and responsible ways”. This includes creating awareness of social responsibility towards issues like climate change and social responsibility. Learning about social responsibility, in the larger framework, gives young learners confidence about their role in their society. This agency also gives them pride in their nation and a commitment to positive contributions. Identity construction is another important aspect of education. There is no better way of creating identity awareness than an educational system that aids individuals to navigate and articulate their personal and social selves in a larger context. Value-based education benefits the individual, the institutions, the community as well as the nation. Despite the challenges of consciously inculcating such values, it is well worth the effort.

US election prompts cities to get a grip on fake news

CAREY L BIRON

Running US elections has always been a complicated job for local officials, requiring the corralling of hundreds of volunteers, staying on top of ever-changing legal requirements, and now also combating misinformation and disinformation. Running elections “has become one of the most high-profile responsibilities that county government does,” said Jennifer Liewer, deputy elections director for communications for Maricopa County in Arizona. Maricopa, one of the country’s most populous voting jurisdictions, has been a hotbed of electoral scrutiny in recent years, weathering 50 lawsuits since the contested 2020 election, Liewer said. “There have been a lot of allegations, false information and narratives that aren’t factually accurate that we have had to combat,” she said. For Maricopa County, this has meant new staff, extensive fact-checking efforts, online cameras in tabulation centres — even an “official ballot” mascot that attends local professional basketball games. “Our office has been working toward improving and communicating in a manner that we haven’t done before,” Liewer said. “That’s probably being seen around the country.” Such work is part of a deeper trend that has emerged since the pandemic, with local officials increasingly forced to address false information about public health, migration and urban planning strategies. False information has not only changed every aspect of election administration, but local officials often bear the brunt of it given their visibility in their communities, said Amy Cohen, executive director of the National Association of State Election Directors. “False information is one of the greatest challenges going into November,” she said, referring to the US national elections. “That is the thing that keeps a lot of us up at night, because you can’t predict the narrative that will take off.” Across the globe, local officials are a key, untapped resource in addressing rising false information, said Paul Costello, a senior manager with the German Marshall Fund’s cities programme. Previously, cities did not tend to address false information as a topic itself, said Costello, who in recent months has been talking with local officials for a new disinformation response “playbook”, released last week. “I had an increasing number of city officials coming to me and saying, ‘What can we do?’” said Ika Trijsburg, a researcher with the Melbourne Centre for Cities in Australia, which led on the playbook’s development. Disinformation, she said, was blocking policymaking and even prompting threats.

—AFP



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Shift in Germany: Far-right gains signal rising discontent

The political landscape in Germany is undergoing a seismic shift, as evidenced by the recent state election in Thuringia. For the first time since World War II, a far-right party has emerged victorious in a German state election, marking a significant moment in the nation’s post-war history. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) secured a staggering 32.8 per cent of the vote, outpacing the centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which managed only 23.6 per cent. This victory for the AfD signals a deepening discontent with Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s government, whose popularity continues to wane. Adding to the complexity, a newly established party founded by a prominent leftist also made notable inroads, underscoring the public’s appetite for change across the political spectrum. The results have delivered a severe blow to the traditional parties, which are now grappling with the implications of these historic gains by anti-establishment forces. Germany’s regional elections in Saxony and Thuringia, typically low-profile affairs, have suddenly become a focal point of concern, not just for the country but for the European Union as a whole. The results, which saw extremist parties gaining significant ground, are rattling an already uneasy EU. The rise of populist disruptors is no longer confined to fringe movements; it’s now a full-blown political reality across Europe, especially in the EU’s eastern, ex-communist regions. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) is at the forefront of this upheaval, securing substantial votes in both Saxony and Thuringia. Despite other parties refusing to join them in coalition, the AfD’s strength is poised to make the formation of new state governments a formidable challenge. The emergence of the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) with nearly 12 per cent of the vote in Saxony and 15.8 per cent in Thuringia



The leader of Germany’s Christian Democratic Union party Friedrich Merz, CDU party’s top candidate for Brandenburg’s regional state elections Jan Redmann and the CDU’s top candidate for regional elections in Thuringia Mario Voigt (R), during a campaign event ahead of Brandenburg’s regional state elections in Brandenburg an der Havel, eastern Germany. — AFP

GERMANY’S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IS SHOWING SIGNS OF FRAGMENTATION THAT COULD SPELL TROUBLE FOR CHANCELLOR OLAF SCHOLZ FROM THE RECENT STATE ELECTIONS

adds another layer of complexity to an already fractured political landscape. The discontent fuelling these populist gains is rooted in deep dissatisfaction with a national government mired in infighting, coupled with anti-immigration sentiment and skepticism about Germany’s military aid to Ukraine. The AfD has capitalised on these issues, stoking fears with a campaign centred on anti-migration rhetoric and sensationalised claims of government failure. In the recent state elections, Germany’s political landscape is showing signs of fragmentation that could spell trouble for Chancellor Olaf Scholz. While his centre-left Social Democrats managed to cling to representation in Thuringia’s legislature, their allies in the national coalition, the Greens, were less

fortunate, losing their seats entirely. This loss mirrors the fate of the pro-business Free Democrats, who have now vanished from the state legislatures in both Thuringia and Saxony. The upcoming election in Brandenburg on September 22 will be crucial, especially with Germany’s national election just over a year away. The recent losses for Scholz’s coalition partners suggest growing disenchantment among voters, particularly in the eastern states, which could challenge the stability of the current government. The ramifications of this shift extend beyond Germany’s borders, threatening to exacerbate instability within the European Union at a time when the bloc is already facing significant challenges. With Europe still reeling from the effects of Russia’s war of Ukraine, the rise of populist forces in Germany could further destabilise the fragile equilibrium within the EU, adding another layer of uncertainty to an already volatile geopolitical landscape. The political landscape in Europe is shifting, and the ripples from these regional elections will be felt far beyond Germany’s borders.

Time that counts not the wristwatch

How do people determine what time is? Is it defined by the cycle of the seasons, the sun and the moon, or the ticking of the second hand on a noisy wall clock or a wristwatch? Does time restrict our lives or help us keep them more organised? Sometimes, time seems too short, while at other times, during idle waiting, it seems interminably long.

Everyone has the same amount of time in life, so time cannot be stocked up. Each day is a set number of hours, and once those hours have passed, they cannot be recovered. This unique characteristic of time means that every moment counts. Whether it is spending time with loved ones, pursuing personal goals, or simply enjoying leisure activities, how we use our time shapes the quality of our lives.

However, the real meaning of time differs from person to person. Time is the most valuable thing a person can spend, and a lifetime is like a clock ticking down to its last minute. Time is more precious than anything in life, but what truly matters is how we spend it. When we talk about spending, money often comes into the discussion. A mistake in spending money can often be corrected, but time spent without a purpose is lost forever and never returns. Leonardo da Vinci, one of the most prominent figures in the history of Western art, said, “Time stays long enough for anyone who will use it.”

Indeed, it is challenging to define time because its significance depends on how people perceive it. The world’s view on time is as diverse as its population, influenced by feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and cultures. However, planning is one of the most effective tools to understand the true value of time and achieving effective time management. It is also crucial for meeting people’s needs, as daily actions are closely tied to both time and money. With careful planning, it is much easier to adjust plans and



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EVERYONE HAS THE SAME AMOUNT OF TIME IN LIFE, SO TIME CANNOT BE STOCKED UP. EACH DAY IS A SET NUMBER OF HOURS, AND ONCE THOSE HOURS HAVE PASSED, THEY CANNOT BE RECOVERED

avoid problems rather than dealing with them in an unexpected and uncontrollable manner. At times, you might feel stressed out by a hectic routine and seek ways to do less and enjoy your time more. Everyone wants to feel more focused on time management rather than being caught in a relentless rush from one activity to another, feeling exhausted both day and night. Benjamin Franklin, an American scientist, inventor, statesman, philosopher, and economist, once asked, “Do you love life? Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff that life is made of.” We see people wearing very expensive watches, yet they seem indifferent to time. They often care more about the price of their watches than about the time itself. It’s a curious phenomenon!

Many people wear watches that cost thousands of dollars merely for prestige or to show off. On the other hand, there are those who don’t wear watches or perhaps don’t even own one, yet they are very punctual and genuinely value time. They manage their time effectively without the aid of a fancy device on their wrist. It is their consciousness, not their watch, that upholds the value of time.

Punctuality is not something tangible that we can see in electronic devices like watches, clocks, or even mobile phones. It is a value and a principle that many people today disregard because they do not appreciate the real value of time. With good time management, you can have better control over your time and life, maintaining a balance between work, personal life, and family responsibilities.

We all have the same number of hours in a day as the great personalities and world celebrities like Helen Keller, Michelangelo, Mother Teresa, Leonardo da Vinci, and Albert Einstein. As the adage states, “Time and tide wait for no man.” It is your perception, not watches, that values time and keeps it ticking and clicking!

LITTLE MOTORING ENTHUSIASTS



Children take part in the Settrington Cup Pedal Car Race as motoring enthusiasts attend the Goodwood Revival, a three-day historic car racing festival in Goodwood, near Chichester, Britain. – Reuters

The European Green Deal is already benefiting consumers...

It has become something of a cliché to interpret the results of June’s European Parliament elections as a rejection of the European Green Deal and the policies associated with it. It’s also wrong: in her political guidelines for the next European Commission, President Ursula von der Leyen reaffirmed her commitment to the Green Deal, saying, “We must and will stay the course on all of our goals.”

This is the right approach. Europeans want a more sustainable future, and the Green Deal is a necessary – and highly beneficial – first step. For example, the European Union’s ban on sales of gasoline- and diesel-powered cars, which will come into force in 2035, is expected to deliver significant health benefits and could save hundreds of thousands of lives annually by improving air quality. Moreover, this deadline is likely to accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs).

While it has been argued that the 2035 deadline should be scrapped, doing so would fuel consumer uncertainty and undermine the green transition. Instead, the EU should focus on encouraging more consumers – with the right incentives and under competitive conditions – to choose EVs over internal combustion engines. This, in turn, would ensure that used EVs are available at affordable prices by the time the ban goes into effect.



Agustín Reyna

The writer is Director-General of the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC)

SOME OBSERVERS HIGHLIGHT THE COSTS OF DECARBONISING EUROPE’S ECONOMY, THE COSTS OF CLIMATE INACTION ARE FAR HIGHER, AND THE GREEN POLICIES ALREADY IN PLACE ARE PROVIDING CLEAR BENEFITS

Regrettably, misleading claims about the unpopularity of green policies have already led to the withdrawal of legislation aimed at halving pesticide use across the EU by 2030. Similarly, EU institutions have rolled back some of the climate-related requirements farmers must meet to receive subsidies under the bloc’s Common Agricultural Policy.

Slowing the EU’s green transformation would harm consumers. In fact, contrary to conventional wisdom, surveys conducted by the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) and the 44 independent consumer groups within our network show that Europeans are eager to embrace more sustainable lifestyles.

But, as BEUC’s 2023 survey finds, while most European consumers want to reduce their environmental impact, they often feel lost in a maze of misleading green claims and labels, underscoring the need for reliable information sources. The survey revealed that most consumers believe that polluting companies should be banned from making any green claims. Clearly, realising the Green Deal’s full potential requires meeting consumer demand for genuinely sustainable products. Reversing course now would

jeopardise this progress. While there is still much work to be done, we must recognise that the Green Deal is already benefiting European consumers. Two of its key components — the Right to Repair and Ecodesign for Sustainable Products — are intended to enhance product longevity and efficiency, thereby reducing costs for consumers. This is especially important for low-income consumers as Europe continues to grapple with a persistent cost-of-living crisis. In 2022, as energy prices skyrocketed, consumer groups found that the most energy-efficient appliances

could save households up to €2,450 (\$2,700) on their annual energy bills. Even in more “normal” times, with energy prices back to more reasonable levels, European households can save between €650 and €1,800 every year on their energy bills thanks to eco-design and energy labelling. To mitigate high energy costs, the EU also adopted rules that protect those who cannot pay their bills from having their electricity or gas disconnected. Likewise, well-crafted policies like the EU’s tough auto-emissions standards have already improved air quality in towns and cities

across the bloc, increased vehicle efficiency, and paved the way for clean-air zones. But fostering a green, prosperous economy is a long-term project that requires additional legislation and the preservation of existing measures to guide consumers toward more sustainable choices. To promote sustainable and healthy food options, for example, policymakers must ensure that both domestic and imported goods meet the EU’s product requirements and that free-trade agreements align with the standards and values embodied by the Green Deal. Accelerating the shift to zero-carbon transportation is essential. In a market dominated by large and heavy vehicles, the growing demand for smaller, more efficient, and affordable EVs among low- and middle-income consumers creates a unique opportunity for domestic manufacturers. To make these cars accessible to more people, improving the secondhand market should also be a priority. This can be done by setting binding EU-level zero-emissions-vehicles targets for large corporate fleets (which will hit the secondhand market much faster than privately-owned cars).



Slowing the EU’s green transformation would harm consumers.

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Al Shabab club player, Hatim al Roushdi

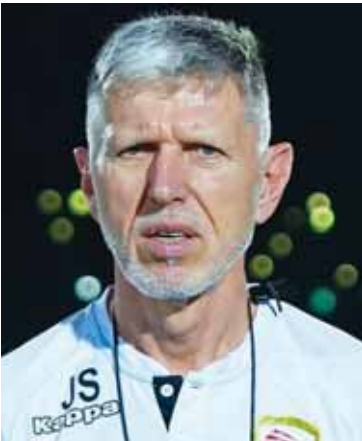
Coach Silhavy calls Hatim ahead of South Korea match

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

Oman head coach Jaroslav Silhavy called Hatim al Roushdi to join the team’s squad as a replacement for Mohammed bin Mubarak al Ghafri, who suffered an injury to his right leg. Al Roushdi will begin his training sessions with the national team players on Monday and may be part of the crucial game against South Korea on Tuesday at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Hatim took part with the national team during the previous round of the AFC Asian Qualifiers against Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur last March, as the match ended 2-0 in favour of the Red Warriors.

The Red Warriors will have their final training session on Monday at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, where the Czech coach will finalise the starting line-up ahead of the key game. It is expected that the head coach and his assisting team will review the team’s initial presence in the Asian qualifiers, focusing more on the attacking side and enhancing the team’s capability to score. Oman national team players reported back to daily training sessions on Saturday at Royal Court Affairs Stadium in Al Khoudh. The Red Warriors will aim for a strong bounce back after the shocking loss in the opening round against Iraq, which ended 1-0 in Basra. In the same venue, the Korean opponent will hold their main training session after two sessions at Seeb Stadium.

Oman’s striker Omar al Malki said that the main objective in the coming encounter is to secure a positive result that will



keep Oman’s hopes alive in the qualifiers. “It is not important whether I am in the starting line-up or on the substitutes’ bench. Our main target as players is for the national team to progress further in the qualifiers and achieve the desired results. We are looking forward to the fans’ support in the forthcoming key match against South Korea. Their attendance will act as vital support for us to show our outstanding performance,” he said.

Oman will look to secure a win against South Korea to revive their chances in the qualifiers ahead of their third game, which will be against Kuwait on October 10 in Muscat. This will be followed by a clash with Jordan on October 15 in Amman. The concluding first-leg matches will be against Palestine on November 14. The second-leg matches will begin with Oman hosting Iraq in Muscat on November 19 before travelling to Seoul to face South Korea on March 20, 2025, and then Kuwait on March 25, 2025. Oman will return to play a home game against Jordan in Muscat on June 5, 2025, with the concluding game against Palestine scheduled for June 10, 2025, in an away match.

Omani sailors celebrate strong showing in Turkiye

MUSCAT: Oman Sail’s youth sailing squad concluded this year’s International Suleymanpasa Optimist Cup in Tekirdag, Turkiye, with a top 10 placement and four sailors finishing in the top 20. The team competed alongside 274 sailors in one of the most prestigious youth events in the sailing calendar, racing for five days against teams from 12 nations, including a strong local Turkish contingent and sailors from Southern Europe, North Africa and West Asia.

Tamim bin Sulaiman al Balushi, one of Oman Sail’s top-performing youth sailors this year, finished 10th, just ahead of his teammate Saud bin Talib al Shaqsi, team gold medallist at the 2023 Arab Games, who came 11th.

Firas bin Haitham al Nabhani, also a team gold medallist at the 2023 Arab Games, finished 16th, and Hood bin Saad al Nofali, gold medallist at the 2024 Gulf Youth Games, placed 19th. Khamis bin Nasser al Mashikhi, another gold medallist at the 2024 Gulf Youth Games, ended in 32nd position.

Boran Öden, from the host club in Tekirdag, claimed the gold medal with three wins from six races. His teammate Hayrettin Eren Çakir secured the silver, while Georgi Karagiozov from Bulgaria took home the bronze. Of the top 50 sailors, 33 were from Turkiye, including five of the top 10, representing Tekirdag.

Abdulaziz al Shidi, Oman Sail’s Acting Director of Sailing, remarked, “We are very pleased with the progress our squad has made, especially against more experienced sailors.

Participation in international events is a crucial step in our performance pathway and provides our



Oman Sail’s Optimist team competes in the International Suleymanpasa Optimist Cup in Turkiye 8

sailors with valuable opportunities to develop and gain experience in challenging conditions. We now look forward to Mussanah Race Week and hope for a strong finish to this season.”

Speaking on the team’s performance, Sultan bin Abdulaziz al Zadjali, Oman Sail’s Assistant Youth Head Coach, said, “Finishing in the top 10 demonstrates the high standard of our sailors and our ability to compete internationally. Having

four sailors in the top 20 further highlights the growth of youth sailing in Oman. The International Suleymanpasa Optimist Cup featured a large Turkish contingent, with several sailors competing on their home waters, so to end the event with all our sailors in the top 50 is a very positive result.”

The next event in the Optimist team’s calendar is the 13th edition of Mussanah Race Week, from October 1-8, 2024, at Barceló Mussanah Resort.



Sailors from across the region will compete in Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6, ILCA 7 and the Para Inclusive RS Venture Connect class, in one of Oman Sail’s signature events. Preparations will soon commence at Oman Sail’s Sailing Schools in Mussanah, Sur and Al Mouj Muscat, where the team will analyse their performance in Turkiye, work on technical and tactical elements and ensure the sailors are ready for the next challenge.

Khalfan al Naabi re-elected OBA President

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

Eng Khalfan al Naabi, representing Nizwa Club, has been re-elected as the President of the Oman Basketball Association (OBA). He received 6 votes, compared to 3 votes for his competitor Asaad al Hosani.

Additionally, Abu Bakr al Jahwari, representing Oman Club, earned the trust of the General Assembly with 6 votes, electing him as vice-president of the Association.

For the mandatory women's seat, Hiba al Naabi won with 7 votes. The General Assembly also endorsed the council members Ahmed al Routani, Alaa al Hadhrami and Salem al Yafie.

The meeting of the General Assembly of the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) began with a speech by Eng Khalfan al Naabi, the newly re-elected President of the Association, in which he expressed his deep appreciation for the significant role played by the clubs in supporting the OBA and the fruitful cooperation that extended throughout the 2021-2024 board of directors.

Al Naabi emphasised the support to develop the performance of the Association and implementing its annual programs according to the established plans.

Al Naabi also added, "We have worked as a united team during the past period, focusing on improving performance based on available



resources. We succeeded in some areas, while others require more time to achieve the desired results, reflecting the nature of sports work."

He thanked the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, for the great support the ministry provides to various sports federations.

Al Naabi elected for second term

Following this, the election committee called on representatives from the nine clubs eligible to attend the meeting and participate in the election. These clubs included Ahli Sidab, Al Seeb, Oman, Al Bashayer, Qurayat, Salalah, Nizwa, Dhofar and Al Suwaiq, to elect candidates for the positions of president, vice-president, and the women's seat, while other members were endorsed by default due to only three candidates running for these

positions.

After the election process concluded, Eng Khalfan al Naabi, who was re-elected as President of the OBA for a second term, expressed his gratitude for the efforts made during the previous period, noting that it was filled with progress and achievement.

He added, "The past period was full of accomplishments. We were able to work on several key areas, most notably the development of youth levels, which represent the

future of basketball in Oman, in addition to supporting the women's sector, which achieved success both locally and at the Gulf level. We also focused on developing technical staff, including referees and coaches, which are essential factors for continued development and achieving the aspirations of basketball enthusiasts in Oman."

Regarding the presence of only nine clubs at the General Assembly meeting, Al Naabi clarified that the Association

had successfully attracted new clubs to practice basketball and participate in the youth league and the general league. He added that the system would allow these clubs to participate in the General Assembly in the upcoming periods, pointing out that increasing the number of clubs participating in the league is one of the main goals the Association aims to achieve.

Abu Bakr al Jahwari, the newly elected Vice-President of the Association, stated, "I started my journey as a player, then a coach, and finally as a board member, giving me a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and difficulties facing the sport. We will work hard to develop basketball and achieve tangible progress in the upcoming period."

In the same context, Hiba al Naabi, who was elected to the women's seat, said, "In previous periods, we worked on building strategic partnerships with the International Basketball Federation, which contributed to the allocation of special programmes for women's basketball in Oman. We also established fixed tournaments for this sport. In the coming period, we will work on creating women's basketball leagues and developing a strategic plan to promote women's sports in collaboration with the School Sports Association and relevant entities to advance women's sports."

Dutch score five against Bosnia in Nations League campaign

EINDHOVEN, Netherlands:

The Netherlands endured some nervy moments but in the end proved too strong for Bosnia as they began their Nations League campaign with a 5-2 triumph on Saturday.

Joshua Zirkzee scored on his first start for the Dutch to give the hosts a 13th-minute lead in their League A Group 3 encounter but they were caught by a swift counter-attack 14 minutes later that saw Ermedin Demirovic equalise.

Tijjani Reijnders restored the home side's lead on the stroke of half-time and Cody Gakpo made it 3-1 some 11 minutes into the second half.

Veteran Edin Dzeko pulled one back 17 minutes from full-time to offer Bosnia hope of getting something out of the game but Dutch pinch hitter Wout Weghorst and Xavi Simons scored in the closing stages to wrap up the victory. It was the first game for the Dutch since reaching the semifinals of the European Championship in Germany in July and coach Ronald Koeman refreshed his side with an eye on the 2026 World Cup.

Zirkzee, who made his debut as a substitute at the European Championship after a late call-up to the squad, grabbed the opportunity for a place in the starting line-up with Memphis Depay absent.

UNORTHODOX

He found the net with an unorthodox header, with his back to goal, as he steered a looping ball into the net after Xavi Simons's shot had been blocked and spun high into the air.

Bosnia's equaliser was expertly finished by Demirovic



and came from two passes from deep in their defence, cutting through the middle of the Dutch line-up.

Reijnders struck the crossbar with a sweeping shot in the 42nd minute and then found the net two minutes into stoppage time at the end of the first half with a left-footed finish after a pass from Zirkzee put him in on goal.

Reijnders turned provider for Gakpo's goal, with a cutting pass across the face that Gakpo slid home in the 56th minute.

It looked an easy assignment for the Dutch after that until Bosnia's teenage substitute Esmir Bajraktarevic, who has switched his international allegiance from the US to Bosnia, provided a long, and inch-perfect, pass for the 38-year-old Dzeko to score his 66th goal on his 136th appearance for Bosnia.

— Reuters

OOC takes part in assembly meeting of Asia Council in India

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

Taha bin Sulaiman al Kashri, Secretary-General of the Oman Olympic Committee, participated in the 44th General Assembly Meeting of the Olympic Council of Asia, which was held on Sunday, in the Indian capital, New Delhi, in the presence of the presidents and representatives of 45 National Olympic Committees.

The meeting witnessed the announcement of Randhir Singh



as President of the Asia Olympic Council, as he is the only candidate for the position.

The General Assembly also included the election of vice-presidents of the Olympic

Council of Asia for the five geographical regions, divided into East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia.

The reports and visual

presentations were reviewed for the latest preparations of the organising committees for the upcoming Asian Games, represented by the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games (Riyadh 2025), the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin, China, which will be held in February 2025, the 2025 Asian Youth Games in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, the 20th Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan in 2026, and the latest presentation by the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC).

England batting collapse leaves third Test nicely poised

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, SEPT 8

With the England second innings suffering an astonishing collapse on the third day of the third Test against Sri Lanka the Test appears to be wide open for a result with Sri Lanka two Tests down in the series. Shortly before tea — at the time of going to press — England are 104 for seven with an overall lead of 166 with three wickets remaining. With Sri Lanka's second innings to come, the Test is poised for an exciting finish with two days play remaining.

With a first innings lead of 62 after Sri Lanka had been dismissed for 263, England suffered an extraordinary collapse in their second innings which began just over half-an-hour before lunch. Ben Duckett fell in the third over, mistiming his drive to the off and was held for 7 off Asith Fernando.

The next two wickets went to Lahiru Kumara with Ollie Pope playing-on with an inside edge for 7 and dan Lawrence managing 35 before edging behind and that was 36 for three. The next four suffered an inexplicable collapse on the total of 66 and 69 Joe Root and Harry Brook were trapped lbw.

A run later Chris Woakes went without scoring and Gus Atkinson, a centurion in the previous Test had one run before becoming



England's Jamie Smith reacts. — Reuters

the third to be pinned in front of his stumps and England were 82 for seven.

Earlier, Sri Lanka resumed their first innings on the third morning 114 runs behind England's total of 325 on a score of 211 for five and with the sixth wicket unbroken stand worth 118 at that stage the momentum was with Sri Lanka. Both overnight batsmen had already completed their half centuries, Dhananjaya de Silva was on 64 and Kamindu Mendis on 54.

England wasted little time in striking early and in the third over of the day, with an addition of just nine runs to the overnight total, captain Dhananjaya de Silva was dismissed for 69. He had faced 111 balls and

44 of his runs had come from fours. He had top-edged his pull shot off Josh Hull for a catch at deep backward square leg, giving the Test debutant his second wicket for 35 in 6.1 overs.

Chris Woakes then accounted for Kamindu Mendis having the left-hander edge to first slip as he played form the crease at a ball that came into him and Sri Lanka were down to 233 for seven.

The tourists' middle order was clearly uncomfortable and Hull struck, five runs later, for his third wicket of the innings as he trapped Vishwa Fernando leg before with a ball that he brought into the batsman. The third umpire rightly decided that ball would have hit top of leg stump.

Ollie Stone, who was to drop a catch later from Lahiru Kumara, which would give the Test debutant his fourth wicket, then removed the ninth wicket having Milan Ratnayake snapped up behind for seven.

Ollie Pope then brought on Shoaib Bashir for the 58th over on 248 for nine, an hour and a half after the start of the day's play and the off-spinner struck with the wicket of Asith Fernando who was held behind off his gloves and wrist band for 11 with the last pair adding 15 to take the total to 263 all out. Sri Lanka had lost their five wickets for 43 in a space of 13.1 overs.

SABALENKA SURVIVES PEGULA STORM TO WIN US OPEN WOMEN’S TITLE

NEW YORK: Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka hoisted the trophy in New York at last after years of close calls, as she outplayed American sixth seed Jessica Pegula 7-5 7-5 in the US Open women’s final on Saturday.

Sabalenka won her first title at Flushing Meadows a year after coming up short in the final. Twice before, she reached the semi-finals. On Saturday, she blocked out the wild cheers for the hometown favourite at Arthur Ashe Stadium to break Pegula in the final game.

“So many times I thought I was so close to get US Open title. Finally, I get this beautiful trophy,” said the second seed, who fought back from a breakdown in both sets to claim victory and fell to the court in her moment of triumph.

Pegula, 30, had waited a long time to reach her first major final and came to New York in fine form after winning in Toronto. But she could not match her opponent’s raw power despite the noisy backing of the New York crowd.

“To be standing here in my first Grand Slam final and then coming off such a hot summer, I mean I didn’t expect it so I’m just really grateful for the last few weeks of tennis,” said Pegula.

The roof on Arthur Ashe Stadium was closed due to heavy rain and the players traded breaks twice as they settled into the stormy affair in front of a celebrity-packed house.

Sabalenka held her serve through a four-deuce 11th game and fought through a spine-tingling 12th, mixing precision at the net with her usual power from the baseline before breaking her opponent on the fifth set point.

Pegula struggled with her rackets throughout the match, complaining to her coaches as she seemed unable to find the right tension on her strings, and it looked as though she would not put up a fight in the second set when Sabalenka went up 3-0.

The American found another level and brought fans to their feet when she won the next five games in a furious fight back, a month after Sabalenka denied her the title in Cincinnati.

Sabalenka levelled when she sent over a forehand winner that just kissed the line on break point in the 10th game and sought to bring a swift end to the contest, holding serve and then applying pressure from the baseline in the final game.

Sabalenka’s backhand return of Pegula’s 30-40 serve ignited a desperate six shot rally, ending with a break as the American’s forehand sailed out.

“Honestly, after me leading

3-love I didn’t really expect her to come back with such a high level,” she said.

“I’m really glad that I was able to hold my serve in that 5-3 down. Then to break her back, it gave me so much belief that I can close this match in two sets.”

Tears flowed immediately for Sabalenka as she claimed her third Grand Slam title after winning the Australian Open twice. She high-fived fans as she ran up the stands to share a joyful celebration with her team.

“I remember all those tough loses in the past here and you know, it’s going to sound cheesy but never give up on your dream and just keep trying,” she said.

The Belarusian dropped only one set in New York on her way to the final as key contenders including defending champion Coco Gauff and top seed Iga Swiatek crashed out.

The performance was particularly sweet after injury sidelined her midway through the season, and she missed both Wimbledon and the Paris Games.

“I’m super proud of myself, super proud of my team that no matter what, no matter what situation we were facing this season and in the past we were able to go through it,” she said.

FANS EMBRACE

Sabalenka has had an up-and-down relationship with the Flushing Meadows crowd after she found herself across the court from another home hope, Gauff, a year ago in the championship.

She jokingly offered the boisterous ticket-holders a free round of drinks if they would support her after she sent another American, Emma Navarro, packing in the semi-final this time around.

There was no sign of her picking up the bar tab on Saturday — even as she collected a cool \$3.6 million with the win - but the New York crowd gave her proper credit as she lifted the trophy she had craved for so long.

“Of course I expected you to cheer for Jessica. That wouldn’t be normal if you would cheer for me,” she told the fans in her post-match remarks.

“Thank you so much for all the support throughout these two incredible weeks. You guys are really amazing and you make this place very special.”

The US fans have another home hope to cheer for on Sunday, when Taylor Fritz aims to end a 21-year American men’s major drought against Italian top seed Jannik Sinner in the men’s final. — **Reuters**



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Potential for coastal carbon capture: Study

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

A POTENTIALLY landmark study supported by Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has uncovered lab-based evidence to enhance natural sequestration of climate warming carbon dioxide through a process known as ‘Coastal Carbon Capture’ (CCC).

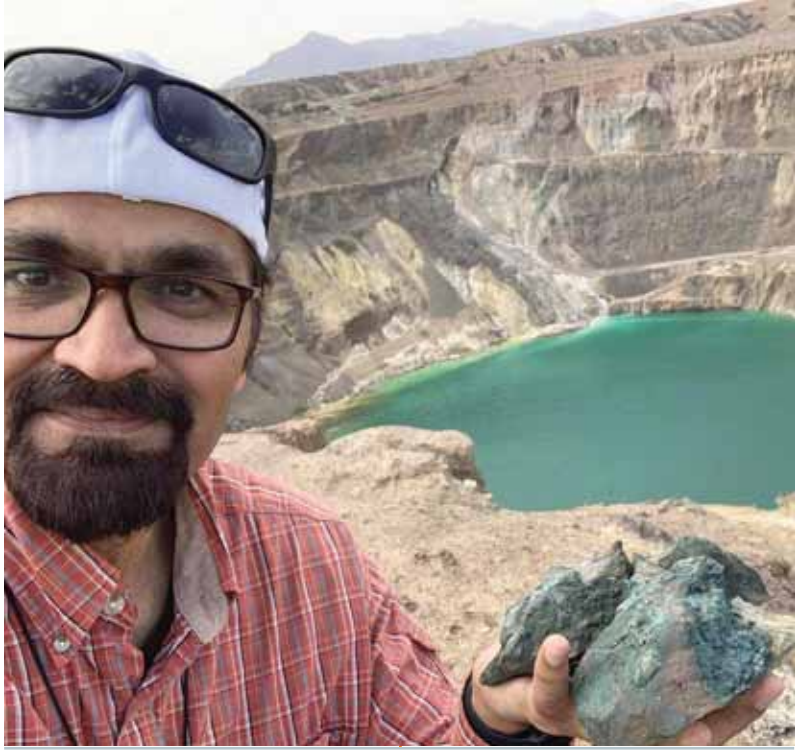
According to the multi-national scientists behind the study, carbon sequestration can be accelerated by spreading a type of crushed rock – found in abundance in the Sultanate of Oman – along the country’s shores. These olivine-bearing rocks, when spread out as crushed particles along the country’s expansive coastline, can trap CO2 through mineralisation, potentially capturing millions of tonnes of the greenhouse gas annually.

“This study is a major step forward,” said Dr Arshad Ali, Lead Researcher on the project. “While our research is currently laboratory-based, more large-scale studies are needed, and it may take years before it is widely adopted. However, with Oman’s rich deposits of deep-earth rocks, formed 95 million years ago, and its extensive 3,165 sq-km coastline, it is an ideal location for a pilot project.”

Dr Ali, a geochemist at SQU, was also joined in the study by scientists from the University of Baluchistan (Pakistan), and Kagoshima University (Japan). In remarks to the Observer, he said the Coastal Carbon Capture study promises to bring “optimism to environmental stakeholders worldwide” working jointly to achieve climate mitigation goals set out in the Paris Agreement.

“This research could be crucial in addressing the harmful effects of CO2 on our climate, as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that 310 billion tonnes of CO2 must be removed by 2100 to meet global warming targets and limit temperature rise,” the geochemist noted.

The study, he said,



Dr Arshad Ali is a geochemist at Sultan Qaboos University.

Highlights

This research could be crucial in addressing the harmful effects of CO2 on our climate, as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that 310 billion tonnes of CO2 must be removed by 2100 to meet global warming targets and limit temperature rise,” the geochemist noted.

outlines a process that involves combining rocks, water, and CO2 to combat rising atmospheric CO2 levels and its absorption by oceans. “By grinding certain rocks into sand, scientists can increase their surface area, allowing them to interact more effectively with water and CO2. This interaction transforms the rock’s minerals into new minerals that incorporate water and CO2. These secondary minerals can continue absorbing CO2 as the sand interacts with both the atmosphere and seawater, creating a long-term solution for carbon storage,” Dr Ali explained.

CARBON CAPTURE

Importantly, the Coastal Carbon Capture approach also has the potential to mitigate CO2 absorption in seawater – a natural process that also contributes

to ocean acidification.

Acidic water, the scientist warns, hampers the development of marine organisms’ skeletons and affects their reproduction, resulting in fewer catches and a reduced food supply. If not addressed now, Ocean Acidification has the potential to impact the livelihoods of billions of people who directly or indirectly rely on ocean resources, he adds.

“When rock sand is introduced, the opposite effect occurs. This indicates that enhanced coastal weathering using rock sand can capture CO2 while lowering seawater acidity by forming secondary minerals. This research could serve as a model for applying enhanced coastal weathering, given the global availability of suitable rocks and the presence of coastal and open ocean environments.”

To help validate these nascent findings, Dr Ali has appealed for government and stakeholder support in conducting a full-fledged pilot here in Oman. “We’re excited about the possibility of launching such a project in Oman if academia, government, and industry collaborate to provide the necessary funding, infrastructure, and permits. Now is the time to act if we want to achieve the ambitious net-zero goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040,” he added.

Barka Water and Power restores full plant capacity in Barka

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

Barka Water and Power Company (BWPC) has announced the successful restoration of its full power plant capacity. This significant milestone, achieved on September 5, 2024, marks the culmination of a recovery process initiated following a technical fault in June. Publicly-listed Barka Power and Water Company said in a filing to the Financial Services Authority (FSA) that its plant is now capable of dispatching 412 MW, contributing significantly to the nation’s



Barka Power and Water’s plant.

energy grid.

While the technical fault in June resulted in financial losses of approximately RO 2.2 million, BWPC has demonstrated its capacity to swiftly address challenges and ensure

uninterrupted service. The company’s leadership has expressed gratitude to its stakeholders, including Nama Power and Water Procurement Company, the Authority for Public Services Regulation, the Board of Directors, shareholders, and employees, for their support during this period. BWPC’s achievement is a positive development for Oman’s energy sector. As the country continues to prioritize energy security and sustainability, the company’s contribution to the national grid is increasingly vital.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tender:

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Site Visit	Tender Price (OMR)
NESC/ 2024/006	Provide Cleaning Services for Nama Electricity Supply Building for a Period of Two Years.	18/09/2024	01/10/2024	Specialized Companies	23/09/2024 at 10:00 am at NESC office	52.5

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit https://supply.nama.om, under NESC vendor / E Tender.
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to Tender@supply.nama.om, using the inquiry form found in the tender document (05) Five working days before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER and supplier guidelines available at NESC Website https://supply.nama.om, under NESC vendor / E Tender.
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. - The hard copy of the bid bond should be deposited in the Tender Box at the Nama Electricity Supply Company Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 10:00 AM on the day specified for bid submission or any extended deadline. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - A certificate confirming 30% Omanization within organization - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.
Incentives and exemptions	- Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.



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QUICKTAKES



MOODY’S REVISES
OAB’S LONG-TERM
DEPOSIT OUTLOOK

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) announced that the international credit rating agency, Moody’s Ratings (Moody’s), has changed its outlook on the Long-Term Deposit Ratings from “Stable” to “Positive”. Moodys’ affirmed the long-term local and foreign currency deposit ratings at Ba1 and the bank’s Baseline Credit Assessments (BCA) at ba3 and the Adjusted BCA at ba2. This change follows the recent change of outlook of the Government of Oman’s issuer rating from “Stable” to “Positive”.

Commenting on the report, Sulaiman al Harthi, Chief Executive Office of Oman Arab Bank said, “This change of outlook reflects the positive impact of the improvement in Oman’s debt burden and prudent fiscal management which increases the government’s capacity to absorb fluctuations in the global energy market and interest rates.

He added, “The affirmation of OAB’s ratings reflect the bank’s solid revenues and the importance of OAB to the local financial system, given its strong market share and its Islamic foot print in the country via its full ownership of Alizz Islamic Bank, the second largest fully fledged Islamic bank in Oman. The strong position we enjoy demonstrates our strong presence in the market paved by following a customer-focused culture and focused approach to risk management, as we look forward to further development and growth.”

SOS OMAN ACHIEVES
API Q2 CERTIFICATION

MUSCAT: Special Oilfield Services Co LLC Oman (SOS) announced the achievement of prestigious API Q2 certification. Founded in 1986 as a joint venture between Mohsin Haider Darwish LLC (MHD) Oman and AMPS (AMPS is a wholly owned subsidiary of TAQA an international company that offers leading well solutions for the energy industry with HQ in Saudi Arabia), SOS is one of the oldest, well-established, and reputed local services provider to the energy sector in Oman.

The API Q2 certification, granted by the American Petroleum Institute (API), demonstrates that SOS has met the stringent requirements of API Spec Q2, signifying its commitment to delivering consistent quality and exceeding customer expectations in the oil and gas sector. These standard outlines comprehensive requirements for service supply organizations operating in the oil and gas industry. Zahar al Busaidi, CEO of SOS stated that achieving API Q2 certification provides clients with assurance that SOS delivers services with the highest levels of quality, safety, and environmental responsibility.

Abraj, OPAL to launch HSE practitioner programme

ABRAJ Energy Services, Oman’s leading oil and gas services provider, is pleased to announce its partnership with the Oman Energy Association (OPAL) to launch the HSE Practitioner Programme. The groundbreaking initiative aimed at advancing health, safety, and environmental standards in the energy sector.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been inked by Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services, and Eng Mohammed al Naabi, CEO of OPAL.

The collaborative partnership marks a significant step toward enhancing industry standards and aligns with Abraj Energy Services’ commitment to fostering in-country value. By advancing Oman’s strategic development priorities, Abraj is dedicated to enhancing local capabilities and contributing to the sustainable growth of Oman’s social and economic development.

Commenting on the MoU, Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services, said, “Our partnership with OPAL reflects our shared commitment to building a safer and more sustainable future for the energy sector. The HSE Practitioner Program will not only develop skilled professionals but also align with Oman Vision



2040 by fostering operational excellence and sustainable growth.”

Eng. Mohammed al Naabi, CEO of OPAL, stated, “We are thrilled to collaborate with Abraj Energy Services on this important initiative. The MoU signed today highlights our dedication to empowering the next generation of energy professionals with the knowledge and best practices essential for advancing safety and efficiency in our industry.

Over the next 18 months, 32 candidates will receive practical training at Infitech, Abraj’s training center. The program will focus on providing these future professionals with the essential skills and knowledge to excel in the energy sector.

The HSE Practitioner Programme aligns with Oman Vision 2040 by preparing future Omani professionals to contribute to the country’s economic development, drive innovation, and support sustainability in the energy sector. Abraj Energy Services is proud to contribute to Oman’s strategic objectives and looks forward to the positive impact this program will have on the energy industry and the broader community.

Abraj Training Center (Infitech) has a proven track record of delivering successful training programs that contribute to a well-trained workforce in Oman. To date, Infitech has completed similar programs for 18 candidates under the OPAL HSE Apprenticeships program and 109 candidates in Electrical and Mechanical Engineering disciplines in collaboration with major oil and gas companies in the industry.

These efforts demonstrate our ongoing commitment to developing national talent and enhancing the capabilities of Oman’s workforce.

BankDhofar opens new branch in Al Ghashab

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its efforts to be closer to its customers, BankDhofar recently celebrated the official opening of a new branch in Al Ghashab – Al Rustaq within Al Batinah South Governorate. The strategic opening, marking the addition of the 128th branch to BankDhofar and Dhofar Islamic expansive network across the Sultanate of Oman. The branch’s official inauguration was held under the auspices of Shaikh Humaid bin Salim al Tabaai - Deputy Wali of Al Rustaq and attended by key members of the executive management team, and notable community figures.

Talib Mohamed al Hajri, AGM-Interior Branches at BankDhofar, expressed his enthusiasm, stating, “We are delighted to expand our presence in Al Batinah South Governorate. The inauguration of our 128 branch in Al Ghashab aligns with our strategy to bring our services closer to customers, inviting them to explore the offerings at

BankDhofar customers may access financial services through its branches network across the Sultanate of Oman, including account management, deposits, loans, foreign exchange, trade finance, investment solutions, and more.



the new branch. As part of our ongoing commitment, we anticipate further branch openings across various governorates, exemplifying our dedication to providing an exceptional banking experience.”

The inauguration of Al Ghashab branch marks a milestone in BankDhofar’s expansion initiative, with several new branches planned for unveiling in the upcoming months. The bank’s expansion aims to cater to customers across the Sultanate, in addition to the comprehensive services provided by its existing 128 branches. Situated conveniently for acces-

sibility, Al Ghashab branch offers an extensive array of banking services, meticulously designed to ensure convenience and customer satisfaction.

BankDhofar customers may access financial services through its branches network across the Sultanate of Oman, including account management, deposits, loans, foreign exchange, trade finance, investment solutions, and more. In addition to a wide network of 360 ATMs, CDMs & FFM around the Sultanate that work round-the-clock with high efficiency. For added customer convenience, the Bank offers smart banking at the fingertips through its mobile banking App.

Customers may conduct a wide range of instant mobile banking services. The services include instant transfer 24/7 to any local bank account, cardless cash, and instant international money transfer service with Western Union, among other services.

BMW Group and Toyota to offer FCEV options for passenger cars

MUSCAT: BMW plans to launch its first-ever series production fuel cell electric vehicle (FCEV) in 2028, thereby offering customers an additional all-electric power-train option with zero local emissions in a BMW. The BMW Group and the Toyota Motor Corporation are pooling their innovative strength and their technological capabilities to bring a new generation of fuel cell powertrain technology to the roads. Both companies share the aspiration of advancing the hydrogen economy and have extended their collaboration to push this locally zero-emission technology to the next level.

The BMW Group’s leading development expertise in electric drive technologies is once again demonstrated by its relentless efforts to advance hydrogen fuel cell technology and its embracing of a ‘technology-openness’ approach in order to provide customers with a range of mobility solutions for the future.

“This is a milestone in automotive

Highlights

The BMW Group’s leading development expertise in electric drive technologies is once again demonstrated by its relentless efforts to advance hydrogen fuel cell technology and its embracing of a ‘technology-openness’ approach in order to provide customers with a range of mobility solutions for the future.



history: the first-ever series production fuel cell vehicle to be offered by a global premium manufacturer. Powered by hydrogen and driven

by the spirit of our cooperation, it will underscore how technological progress is shaping future mobility,” said Oliver Zipse, Chairman of the

Board of Management of BMW AG. “And it will herald an era of significant demand for fuel cell electric vehicles.”

Koji Sato, President and Member of the Board of Management (Representative Director) Toyota Motor Corporation, said, “We are pleased that the collaboration between BMW and Toyota has entered a new stage. In our long history of partnership, we have confirmed that BMW and Toyota share the same passion for cars and belief in ‘technology openness’ and a ‘multi-pathway’ approach to carbon neutrality. Based on these shared values, we will deepen our collaboration in efforts such as the joint development of next-generation fuel cell systems and the expansion of infrastructure, aiming for the realization of a hydrogen society.”

“We will accelerate our efforts together with BMW and partners across various industries to realize a future where hydro-gen energy supports society.”

TALENTGROWTH



OIA has included ‘Talent Management’ within its recruitment department. (Picture courtesy: OIA)

TALENT DEVELOPMENT
KEY TO GROWTH: OIA

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

In the latest issue of its newsletter, *Enjaz and Eejaz*, the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) provides an in-depth look into its ongoing efforts to foster growth and align with Oman’s national objectives. The report underscores the importance of human resources in driving the Authority’s strategic goals and reflects a broader commitment to the nation’s development.

Saud al Yahmadi, Assistant Deputy President for People and Change at OIA, emphasizes the organization’s commitment to creating an ideal work environment for top talent. “Our goal for OIA is to be a destination for the best talent,” says Al-Yahmadi. “We aim to provide an environment where employees can achieve OIA’s strategic goals and contribute to Oman’s Vision 2040.”

Abdulsalam al Murshidi, President of OIA, echoes this sentiment, noting that the Authority’s greatest assets are its people. “Our employees are the bedrock of our accomplishments,” he states. “We are dedicated to training and investing in our human resources, believing that they are indispensable to Oman’s development journey.”

The report details OIA’s vision for its Human Resources Directorate, which aims to be a model of excellence and a hub for developing competent leaders. The Directorate’s goal is to create programmes that maximize performance and efficiency, aligning with OIA’s strategic goals and Oman Vision 2040.

To achieve this vision, OIA has expanded its focus to include ‘Talent Management’ within its recruitment department. The Authority’s commitment to attracting and nurturing top talent is evident in its rigorous recruitment process and the high caliber of its employees. Notably, more than half of the CFA certificate holders in Oman are employed by OIA, and 392 out of 408 employees hold university degrees. These efforts have led to notable achievements, including winning the 2023 Institutional Ejada Prize for institutional excellence.

OIA’s recruitment strategy is also highlighted, with a focus on precision and digital innovation. The digital Jadarah platform, launched at the end of last year, plays a crucial role in managing recruitment, training, and evaluation.

The platform, which utilizes AI and machine learning, has advertised over 840 positions, registered more than 52,000 accounts, and collaborated with over 65 companies.



Oman invites investors
for AI innovation studio

JOMAR MENDOZA

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology invites investor to establish an Artificial Intelligence (AI) innovation studio designed to enhance skills and creativity among students and innovators. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to strengthen the integration of AI solutions across various sectors to meet organisational goals.

The ministry’s tender, open to both local and international firms, seeks proposals for the development of programmes that foster AI competencies. This includes workshops, training sessions, and collaborative projects tailored to equip the next generation with essential skills in AI technologies. The ministry emphasises that these programmes will not only serve to educate students but also support existing innovators in optimising their AI applications.

In addition to educational initiatives, the studio aims to facilitate partnerships with different sectors, ensuring that AI solutions are effectively aligned with industry-specific needs. By fostering collaboration, the ministry hopes to create a dynamic ecosystem where innovative ideas can flourish and translate into practical applications that drive economic growth.

A key component of the initiative involves promoting AI knowledge across the community. The ministry plans to offer consultations on generative AI applications, enabling businesses and individuals to leverage AI technologies for enhanced productivity and creativity.



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individuals to leverage AI technologies for enhanced productivity and creativity. This focus on knowledge sharing is crucial as it empowers stakeholders to navigate and harness the potential of AI in their respective fields.

Financial sustainability is paramount for the studio’s long-term success. The ministry is committed to ensuring that the project not only meets immediate educational and collaborative needs but also establishes a self-sustaining model that can adapt to the evolving landscape of AI technology.

Interested companies have until September 18, 2024, to purchase the tender documents, with the final submission deadline set for

October 15, 2024. As of September 8, four companies have already expressed interest in participating: Siemens Industrial LLC, GIS Hub, Ernst & Young Global Ltd, and Khatib and Alami and Partners Consulting Architects & Engineers and Services.

This tender represents a pivotal step toward positioning the region as a leader in AI innovation and education, ultimately contributing to a more skilled workforce and a robust technological infrastructure. The ministry’s proactive approach demonstrates a commitment to fostering a future-ready economy that embraces the transformative power of artificial intelligence.

SILAL MARKET AIMS TO CUT FRUIT AND VEGETABLE WASTE

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

Silal, Oman’s central fruits and vegetables market operating at Khazaen Economic City, aims to make an impact in reducing the current waste and destruction rates of fruits and vegetables, which stand at 30-35 per cent. This advanced market, majority-owned by OIA subsidiary Rakiza, promises to exceed these figures through its state-of-the-art facilities and strategic focus on improving food supply chain efficiency.

This ambitious initiative was recently highlighted in the latest issue of the newsletter ‘Enjaz and Eejaz’ by the Oman Investment Authority (OIA). The report highlights that



Fruit and vegetable spoilage currently stands at 30 – 35 per cent, which Silal plans to reduce through improvements in food supply chain efficiency.

Silal Market will contribute by providing new investment opportunities for SMEs in areas such as ground handling, business centers, and various sales kiosks. Additionally, it will

play a key role in revitalizing agricultural marketing for local products.

One of Silal’s key goals is to address the high spoilage rate of vegetables and fruits, currently estimated at 30-35 per cent. By offering advanced storage and distribution facilities, Silal aims to drastically cut down on this loss, thereby boosting food security and sustainability in Oman.

Silal also seeks to transform the agricultural marketing landscape for local products, providing a strong platform for Omani farmers and local agricultural companies. The market supports a variety of logistics services tailored for the food sector, such as central refrigeration, wholesale market areas,

dry storage, and specialized workshops for sorting vegetables and fruits.

Silal covers 500,000 square meters with plans for future expansion and represents a total investment exceeding RO 50 million.

The market is designed to be more than just a marketplace; it is an integrated hub for the marketing, distribution, import, storage, and export of fruits and vegetables, with cutting-edge technologies and facilities to support these functions.

With its advanced infrastructure, including cold storage, inspection areas, and modern logistics facilities, Silal is poised to also enhance local and international trade.

First phase of Oman Drone Competition attracts 120 participants

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, SEPT 8

The Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology announced the conclusion of the first phase of the Oman Drone Competition last week. The competition and training programme is part of the Ministry’s Makeen initiative to enhance the skills of cadres of the local digital economy, and is conducted in collaboration with the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

Speaking to the Observer, Dr Said al Abri, Assistant professor at the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at SQU, highlighted the aim of the competition. “Our objective is to train and qualify either



Dr Said al Abri addresses the start of the first phase of the Oman Drone Competition.

senior college students or recent graduates who don’t have a job, with the intention of helping these graduates and students the opportunity to create their own business in this very developing field.” He added, “Drones have so many applications in Oman, and the market is actually growing. So we want to qualify these participants to create an industry here in Oman.” According to Dr Al Abri, the use of drones is widespread in Oman. “Drones have already proven to be applicable here in Oman. They have so many applications, starting from entertainment, like in media, drone shows, or just personal videography. But they also have many applications in industry, for example, in the oil and gas industry for inspection, as well as in agriculture, security, patrolling,

and self-defence.” The first phase of the competition included 120 trainees, split across six batches of 20 each. According to Dr Al Abri, the intensive training programme covered various aspects about drones: including applications, regulations, assembly and configuration and drone flying.

The next phase of the competition, which begins in October, will integrate the use of artificial intelligence. The use of AI will enable drones to operate autonomously without human intervention, both in flying and in processing the data they collect. This will in turn, result in an advanced post-analysis that will make a wide range of applications possible, he explained.

Following the AI integration stage, the competition will progress with

an intensive camp for the qualified participants, followed by a final stage at Sultan Qaboos University in February next year.

Launched in 2021, the National Initiative for the Rehabilitation of Digital Cadres ‘Makeen’, has trained around 5,000 individuals in the fields of information technology.

The initiative includes five main tracks: the technical boot camps track, the advanced nano-degree track, the professional specialised qualification track, the technical competitions track, and the technical certificates support track. Last month, the initiative launched a tech certificate reimbursement initiative, which will allow individuals who acquired specialised technology certificates to be suitably compensated.

OPINION

E-commerce landscape in Oman



DR MYTHLI KOLLURU

he author is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat and a member of Knowledge Oman.

E-COMMERCE IS the buying and selling of goods and services over the Internet. E-commerce operates through digital platforms, allowing enterprises and consumers to engage without physical interaction. E-commerce platforms are available 24/7, allowing businesses to reach a global audience. E-commerce is experiencing growth globally and is estimated to reach \$8.8 trillion by 2024. It is projected to reach \$18.81 trillion by 2029. The increasing use of mobiles as a preferred channel for online sales, emerging technologies enhancing the online shopping experience, and the increase in eco-friendly packing and sustainable practices as consumer preferences contribute to the rise in global e-commerce transactions.

North America is the largest e-commerce market, while Asia Pacific shows significant growth. The Middle East is an emerging e-commerce market that accounts for 4% of the total retail revenue, lower than the 15% seen in more developed regions. E-commerce in the Gulf region is expected to grow nearly 11% annually from 2023 to 2027, reaching \$49.78 billion by 2027.

Oman, in general, prefers a more personalised shopping experience. This unique consumer preference is critical to Oman's e-commerce market dynamics. Consumers must feel and try the products before purchasing them, especially clothes and personal care products. Despite the high internet penetration rates of over 80%, only 8% of the population in Oman

engages in e-commerce, primarily through mobile phones.

E-commerce accounts for 1% of the total retail sales in Oman. However, e-commerce is growing. In 2023, the size of the Oman e-commerce market was estimated at \$0.57 billion, indicating a significant growth potential. The e-commerce market serves the B2C and B2B sectors and spans electronics, fashion, groceries, and home appliances, attracting Oman e-commerce companies. The market size is expected to reach \$0.66 billion in 2024 and grow at a CAGR of 13.54% to reach \$1.24 billion by 2029, further underlining the promising investment opportunities. Electronics accounts for the lion's share at 23%, followed by fashion at 18%, homeware at 12%, personal care products at 9%, grocery at 8%, and DIY at 8%.

The major players in Oman's e-commerce landscape are Amazon, eBay, AliExpress, Namshi, Talabat, Royal Oman Police, InvestEasy, Bayan Customs, local grocery delivery websites and apps, Oman Post (Matjar), and Asyad Express. Cross-border e-commerce plays a significant role in Oman's e-commerce market.

These players contribute significantly to the growth and development of the e-commerce market in Oman. Cross-border e-commerce is seen in airlines, hotels, commercial infrastructure, and services. The Oman government's Vision 2024 and the National Digital Economy Program include initiatives to promote cross-border e-commerce. Oman's strategic location gives it the potential to become a regional

Highlights

The market size is expected to reach \$0.66 billion in 2024 and grow at a CAGR of 13.54% to reach \$1.24 billion by 2029, further underlining the promising investment opportunities. Electronics accounts for the lion's share at 23%, followed by fashion at 18%, homeware at 12%, personal care products at 9%, grocery at 8%, and DIY at 8%.

e-commerce center. The e-commerce market has experienced significant growth over the years. Various factors have contributed to the development, like Covid-19, which has influenced the shift to online purchases, increased usage of the internet, the growing young Omani population, and the rise in smartphone ownership.

The government of Oman has played a significant role in promoting e-commerce, particularly with the national e-commerce plan launched in 2020 and the implementation of new e-commerce regulations under ministerial decision No. 499/2023 in 2024. As of April 2024, 3,316 e-commerce licenses have been granted, underscoring the government's commitment to fostering a conducive environment for e-commerce growth. The e-commerce plan focuses on improving logistics services, building national skills, and promoting a conducive environment for e-commerce growth, providing reassurance about the sector's support and potential for further development.

The e-commerce landscape in Oman is in its early stages, but it holds significant potential for growth. Major growth and regulatory efforts were initiated from 2022 to 2024, indicating that this sector's formal recognition has occurred with substantial developments. With a population exceeding 4.6 million and mobile subscriptions surpassing a penetration rate of 150%, increasing disposable income, and a growing urban population, the Oman e-commerce landscape is poised to become a burgeoning market.

CHINA'S GLOBAL BATTERY RAM WILL BE HARD TO STOP

BY KATRINA HAMLIN

China's electric cars have zoomed into a new era of battery-powered driving. Now models such as BYD's Seal and Great Wall Motor's Funky Cat face an international backlash. The US is quadrupling duties on imports of electric vehicles from the People's Republic to more than 100%, while the European Union is lifting total tariffs close to 50% for some marques. The Chinese-made batteries that power the vehicles are an obvious next target for trade restrictions. But that battle will be even harder for the West to win.

China is a battery powerhouse. The \$115 billion Contemporary Amperex Technology and its smaller compatriots accounted for two-thirds of the global market for power cells used in electric cars in the first half of 2024, Bernstein analysts reckon. Companies from the People's Republic are also growing faster: installations by SVOLT Energy Technology more

than doubled in the period from January to June, while those from rivals CALB, Guoxuan, CATL and BYD all grew by more than a fifth compared to 2023. They're profitable too, with CATL raking in more than 40 billion yuan (\$5.6 billion) in earnings last year.

Much of that output is exported: the total volume of lithium battery units leaving China roughly

doubled between 2015 and 2023, according to the International Trade Centre. The US and Europe have become major buyers of Chinese cells, squeezing local operators like Sweden's Northvolt.

Now Western policymakers are pushing back. President Joe Biden in May laid out plans to hike tariffs on imports of batteries and their parts to 25%, from the previous 7.5%. His flagship Inflation Reduction Act, which subsidises electric cars by up to \$7,500, from 2025 explicitly excludes vehicles for which battery materials were extracted, processed or recycled by a "Foreign Entity Of Concern".

That term covers companies headquartered or incorporated in China, and firms where the government holds 25% or more of its equity, voting rights or board seats. Chinese manufacturers are also excluded from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's \$6 billion of credits for batteries and the critical minerals required to make them.

Nestle's new CEO may have to offer investors a sweet treat to keep them on side. — Reuters



J BRADFORD DELONG

The author is a Professor of Economics at the University of California, Berkeley, is a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research.



A worker cuts a piece from a steel coil at a steel mill in Farrell, Pennsylvania.

BY THE end of the 1970s, the US economy appeared to be in serious trouble. Years of inflation had caused deep discontent; measured productivity growth had fallen from its post-World War II pace of 2% per year to almost zero; and America's resilience in the face of geopolitical and geoeconomic shocks seemed to be waning. The proposed solutions to these problems fell into two categories: neoliberalism and activist industrial policy. The neoliberals won.

Neoliberalism called for shrinking the state, deregulating as much as possible, curtailing antitrust enforcement, and accepting higher economic inequality as a reasonable price to pay to reinvigorate private enterprise and motivate "job creators." The central assumption was that markets would always deliver better outcomes than government programs could. Yet the consensus today is that this approach failed spectacularly. Nothing played out the way neoliberalism's advocates had envisioned, unless you count the sharp increase in wealth and income inequality over the past four decades. While many wealthy people with large megaphones see this feature of our Second Gilded Age as a sign of success, I do not, and I suspect that most Americans share my view. As for activist industrial

policy, it arrived stillborn, because the main argument against it proved to be quite convincing. The argument was not that markets always get things right, or that governments had never successfully engaged in pro-development industrial policies in the past. On the contrary, there was a consensus that government "interventions" to create and fund schools, banks, and railways, and to introduce the right kind of tariffs and other barriers to protect genuine "infant industries," had enabled countries to grasp the economic opportunities generated by industrial technologies.

Nor was anyone seriously arguing that America's post-WWII prosperity was the result of an overarching laissez-faire policy. The big exception was the school of ostriches at the University of Chicago, who studiously ignored the role played by the US government, since 1933, in directing and subsidizing investment, stabilizing demand and markets, and committing huge amounts of resources to scientific and technological research and development. But they could only pretend that US prosperity did not rest on the public sector's role in creating and orchestrating scientific knowledge and technological expertise, and in nurturing the communities of engineering talent needed to make the rubber

hit the road.

No, the only convincing argument against activist industrial policy in the 1980s (and the only one ever since) was that post-1970s America lacked the state capacity to undertake it. As Charles L. Schultze, a former chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, wrote in the Fall 1983 issue of The Brookings Review:

"Not only would it be impossible for the government to pick a winning industrial combination in advance, but its attempt to do so would almost surely inflict much harm. There are many important tasks that only governments can do – and, with constant effort and watchfulness, they can do those tasks passably well. But the one thing that most democratic political systems – and especially the American one – cannot do well at all is to make critical choices among particular firms, municipalities, or regions, determining cold-bloodedly which shall prosper and which shall not. Yet such choices are precisely the kind that would have to be made – and made explicitly – for an industrial policy to become more than a political pork barrel."

This argument was broadly convincing. The sense at the time was that too many government decisions were driven not by considerations of the public interest, but by the fact that, as Senator Barbara Boxer once said, in a slip of the tongue: "the B-2 carries a large payroll [in my state]" (she meant payload). Too many of the agencies that would manage and direct economic development seemed to have been captured by investors, managers, or oligopolies of one sort or another. Too many glass-and-steel buildings on K Street (the Washington lobbying industry) were funded by too many interest groups and staffed by too many former legislators and their aides. How could technocratic cost-benefit analysis in the public interest ever be more than a sham? Now, however, the United States has three overwhelming reasons to go all in on industrial policy. First, there is the looming disaster of runaway global warming, which requires action on a scale much larger than Al Gore correctly called for nearly a half-century ago. Second, there is the need to reorient the US economy from coastal finance and plutocracy to middle- and working-class prosperity nationwide.

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DOTO Mohamed Mbonde has lost Tanzanian Passport No TAE377453. Finder, please handover to ROP.

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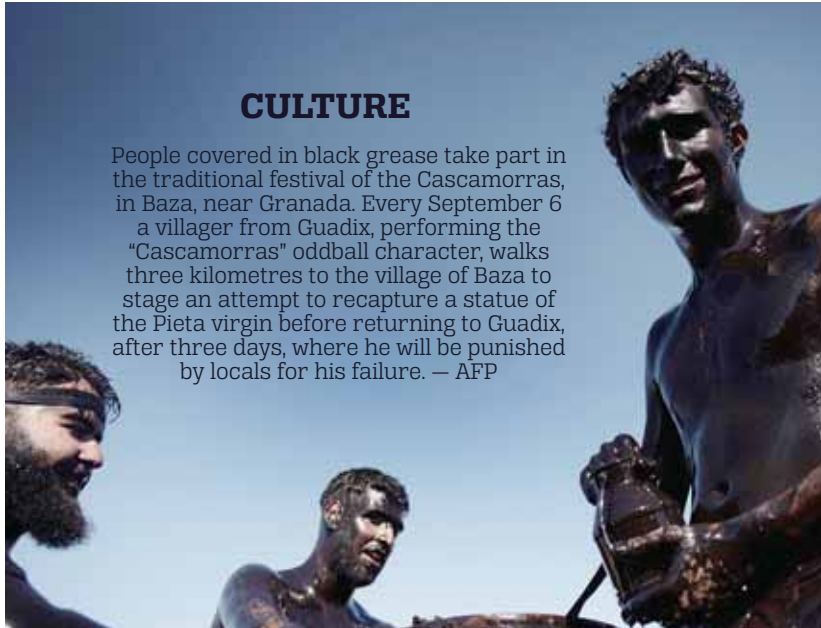
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LIFESTYLE

Children interact with a buffalo in the marshes of Chibayish in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province. —AFP



CULTURE

People covered in black grease take part in the traditional festival of the Cascamorras, in Baza, near Granada. Every September 6 a villager from Guadix, performing the "Cascamorras" oddball character, walks three kilometres to the village of Baza to stage an attempt to recapture a statue of the Pieta virgin before returning to Guadix, after three days, where he will be punished by locals for his failure. — AFP



TRAVEL

A student dressed as a "Escaramuza Charra" (woman on horseback) performs the Punta Raya with her wooden stick horse during a class at the Charrería Sports Academy Caballito de Palo, in Ameca, Jalisco state, Mexico. — AFP



ART

A dancer performs in the sand on the Poniadowka island of the Vistula River during the Vistula Festival in Warsaw, Poland. — AFP



CHANGING WORLD

Climate activists of Extinction Rebellion, a global environmental movement, block an entrance to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam to protest against the museum's main sponsor ING. — AFP

art & life

MONDAY | SEPTEMBER 9, 2024 | RABEE AL AWWAL 5, 1446 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om

THE GREAT CAVE CANYON EXPLORATION

Ever the explorer, this writer chronicles his exploration of canyons in Oman accompanied by two French canyoners and their Omani friend, Dr Said. They discovered and navigated through various canyon formations, including "The Great Cave Canyon" and "The Bayonet Canyon," facing challenges and marvelling at the stunning landscapes while documenting their adventure... **P20**



Ralph Lauren takes fashionistas to the Hamptons for spring show

VETERAN DESIGNER Ralph Lauren chose the upscale Hamptons seaside resort for his Spring 2025 fashion show on Thursday, inviting fashionistas, celebrities and US First Lady Jill Biden to his "home away from home". The designer, 84, presented his Ralph Lauren Collection, Purple Label and Polo Ralph Lauren lines for men, women and children at the show held in Bridgehampton on the eve of New York Fashion Week. Actors Naomi Watts, Justin Theroux, Colman Domingo, Tom Hiddleston and Jude Law as well as singer Usher were among the famous faces seated in the front row and models Naomi Campbell and Christy Turlington took to the runway. "The Hamptons is more

than a place. It's a natural world of endless blue skies, the ocean, green fields and white fences, rusticity and elegance.. It has been home, my refuge and always an inspiration," Lauren said in a statement. Models wore blazers paired with loose trousers, tailored suits as well as floaty white and pale blue dresses. There were plenty of stripes and fringes on designs, some crochet outfits and shimmering sparkles for evening-wear in a colour palette of mainly white, blue and khaki. Bright colours — green, red, yellow and orange — featured in the Polo Ralph Lauren collection with outfits nodding to the Hamptons' equestrian history. New York Fashion Week kicks off on Friday and runs until September 11. — **Reuters**



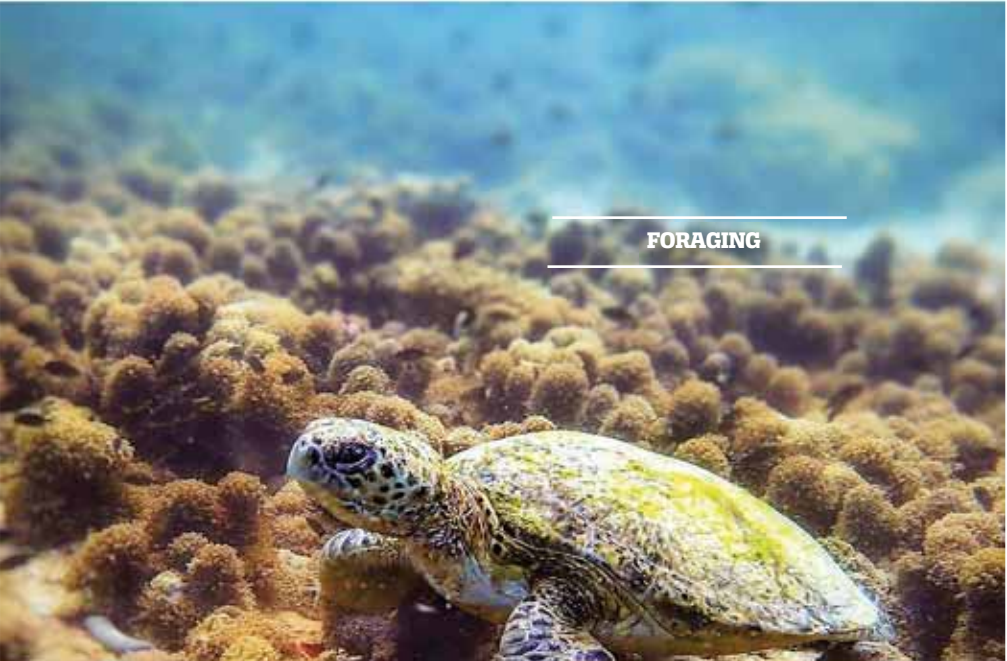
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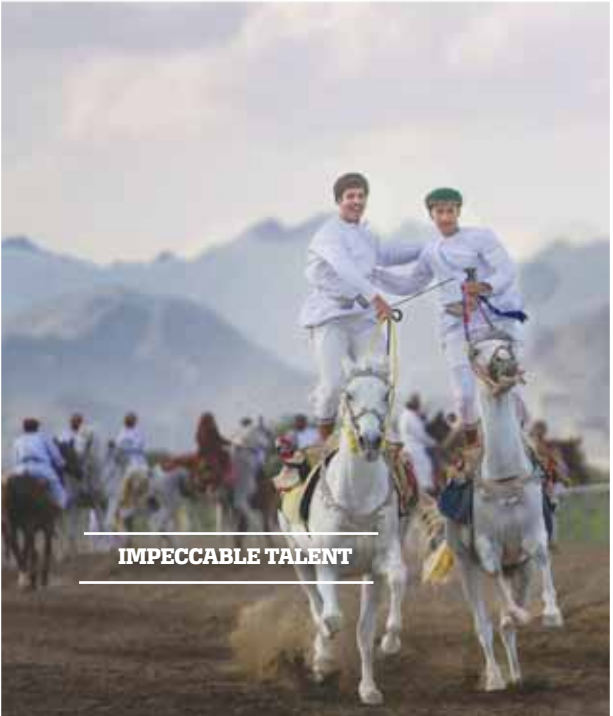
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IRAQI DATE FARMERS FIGHT DROUGHT TO PROTECT NATIONAL TREASURE

BARE FEET PRESSED against the rough trunk of a palm tree, his back supported by a metal and fabric harness, Ali Abed begins the climb to the dates above.

In Iraq, the date palm and its bounty are national icons, but they are being battered by drought.

Once known as the country of “30 million palm trees”, Iraq’s ancient date-growing culture had already suffered from upheaval, especially during the 1980-88 war with Iran, before climate change became a major threat.

In the still lush countryside of central Iraq, near Janajah village in Babylon province, hundreds of date palms stand tall and majestic, surrounded by vines and fruit trees.

During harvest season, the branches are heavy with clusters of yellow and red dates.

Rising at dawn to avoid the

searing heat, harvesters climb the palms using only their upper body strength, aided by a harness and rope wrapped around the trunk.

“Last year, the orchards and the palm groves were thirsty; we almost lost them. This year, thanks to God, we had good water and a good harvest,” said Abed, a 36-year-old farmer from Biramana, a village a few kilometres from Janajah.

Once at the top, they pick the ripe dates, filling baskets that are lowered to the ground and emptied into basins, which are then loaded onto lorries.

Abed noted, however, that the harvest is much smaller now — about half of what it used to be. He once collected more than 12 tonnes but now brings in just four or five.

Abed criticised the lack of government support, saying aerial insecticide campaigns are not enough.

USED TO BE PARADISE
Iraq has spent over a decade trying to revive the date palm, a vital economic asset and national symbol.

Authorities and religious institutions have launched programmes and mega-projects to encourage tree planting and growth.

An agriculture ministry spokesperson told the official INA news agency last month that,



“for the first time since the 1980s”, the number of date palms had risen to “more than 22 million”, up from a low of just eight million.

During the Iran-Iraq War, palm groves were razed in vast areas along the border to prevent enemy infiltration.

Today, dates are Iraq’s second-largest export product after oil, which dominates export revenues and generates more than \$120 million, according to the World Bank.



In 2023, Iraq exported around 650,000 tonnes of dates, official statistics show.

Yet around Janajah, many palm trees lie dead and decapitated.

“All these palm trees are dead due to the drought; the whole region is suffering”, said 56-year-old farmer Maitham Talib.

“Before, we had water. People irrigated abundantly. Now, we need complicated machinery”, he said, observing the harvest.

The United Nations has labelled Iraq one of the five countries in the world most vulnerable to some of the effects of climate change.

The country has endured four consecutive years of drought, though this year saw some relief with winter rainfall.



Alongside rising temperatures that have hit 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit) in summer and declining rainfall, Iraq also faces falling river levels, blamed on dams built upstream by Iran and Turkey.

Kifah Talib, 42, lamented the slow devastation wrought by the drought.

“It used to be paradise: apple, pomegranate, citrus trees and vines — everything grew here”, he said. —AFP



Garfield, Pugh charm Toronto in new romance ‘We Live in Time’

OSCAR NOMINEES ANDREW
Garfield and Florence Pugh are both hard-pressed to explain exactly how on-screen chemistry is created, but they have oodles of it in their new tearjerker romance “We Live in Time,” which debuted at the Toronto film festival.

The movie tells the story of Michelin-starred chef Almut (Pugh) and Tobias (Garfield), an employee of cereal company Weetabix, who meet-cute in perhaps the most awkward way possible — she hits him with her car.

Director John Crowley takes the audience on an intimate journey of their love story, from dating and steamy sex to building a family to confronting cancer, through snapshots of their existence — all presented out of order.

For Pugh, that process allowed the two actors to learn more about their characters and each other as the shoot went on.

“It was such a magical experience,” the 28-year-old British actress said on Saturday, not long after the movie’s warmly received premiere late on Friday at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF).

“We’ve been trying to talk about what chemistry is and where it comes from, and ultimately, we don’t know other than the fact that we both were willing to jump together, and that’s probably why it feels so mad and raw.”

Indeed, there are brutal moments of anger between the couple, but also paralysing sadness and, before that, the wild thrill of having a child — an emergency delivery in a gas station bathroom.

“I’m so happy that I did it and I got to do it with Florence,” Garfield said.

“I don’t think it was meant to be with anyone else,” added the 41-year-old, who was taking a break when he received Nick Payne’s script, and quickly jumped at the chance to work with Crowley, who had directed him in “Boy A” (2007).

The British-American actor said on Saturday the film was “like a sacred healing ritual,” allowing him to handle “certain losses that I

experienced, and with certain longings that I was experiencing.”

OLD SOUL
For Crowley, Payne’s nonlinear structure offered a “playful invitation to the audience to begin putting this together.”

He said that the shoot was of course out of order, though the crew did not want Garfield and Pugh “schizophrenically jumping too far” between time periods on any given day.

On the few days with scenes in three time periods, “that was a real head-wrecker for them,” he said.

“It was a very interesting technical and emotional exercise.”



After working on last year’s huge hit “Oppenheimer” and sci-fi epic “Dune 2,” Pugh said she was thrilled with the genre shift for “We Live in Time,” which will open in limited release in the United States on October 11.

“I’ve been wanting to do a love story for a while,” she said.

Once her character Almut is diagnosed with ovarian cancer, she struggles to balance her limited time left between her family and her professional goals.

“The things that she’s going through in the story are the things I see in my friends, in my sisters and my mum, in myself now,” Pugh said, referring to the hectic juggling of career, love, motherhood and health. When asked about the 13-year age difference between the actors, Crowley said it quickly became irrelevant because of the pair’s palpable connection.

“Florence is an old soul,” the director said. “She carries more weight on her and in a way, Andrew, who’s also an old soul, carries a kind of boyishness — he always has.” —AFP



BY DR KHALED ABDUL MALAK

In February 2020, just before the Covid-19 lockdown, two experienced canyoneers from France travelled to Oman to immerse themselves in the distinct beauty of its wadis. This was not their first visit to Oman, nor would it be their last.

During their third visit in 2023, we embarked on an ambitious undertaking: exploring a significant canyon that begins at Jabal Al Sarah and concludes in Yiqā, a quaint village from Al Rustaq to Ibri. In addition, we discovered a couple of new canyons upstream from the renowned Snake Gorge, ultimately leading to the village of Hat. Having previously identified two potential canyons through Google Earth, I undertook a solo reconnaissance trip one weekend to confirm their starting and ending points.

On the morning of February 21, my two visiting companions, Guillaume and François, along with Dr Said, an esteemed radiologist and long-time Omani friend, set off towards Wadi Bani Awf. We reached our starting point at the farthest canyon around 9:30 am, greeted by clear weather and favourable forecasts for the days ahead.

We planned to make one of the two canyons accessible first, where we would spend the night with Guillaume and François, as Dr Said needed to return to Muscat due to his professional commitments at the Royal Hospital.

After equipping ourselves with all necessary tools for the canyon opening — such as a drill, drill bits, anchors, hammer, and ratchet spanner — as well as standard

porous limestone structures formed by the deposition of dissolved calcium carbonate by local flora. It is common to see calcified plant roots embedded within these tufa formations, which, while beautiful, are never utilised for anchoring.

In many locations, we needed to establish anchors to facilitate our progression. François consistently volunteered to descend first, as he was responsible for setting the next anchors while the rest of us followed. This approach allowed us to move efficiently through the canyon.

One particularly challenging drop required us to navigate under an arch during

AFTER REACHING THE MAIN CANYON, OUR PROGRESS WAS SWIFT DUE TO THE ABSENCE OF FURTHER DROPS REQUIRING ABSEILING. THIS SECTION OF THE WADI IS NOTABLY WIDE AND, AFTER ABOUT 30 MINUTES OF WALKING, WE DISCOVERED A REMARKABLE UNDERCUT IN THE MOUNTAIN ON THE LEFT BANK, FORMING AN IMPRESSIVE CAVE. WE DECIDED TO NAME THIS WADI “THE GREAT CAVE CANYON.”

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THE GREAT CAVE CANYON EXPLORATION



canyoning gear, including harnesses, ropes, slings, descenders and carabiners, we filled our bags with food and drinks and commenced our exploration around 10 am. We travelled through the bed of a tributary wadi to reach the main canyon.

Shortly after beginning our descent, we encountered an initial drop of approximately 20 metres. We utilised the trunk of a large acacia tree (Talh) to set our abseiling rope. François was the first to descend, followed by Dr Said, myself, and finally Guillaume. Upon landing in the first pool, we were grateful for our wetsuits, as the water was quite cold for this time of year.

After reaching the main canyon, our progress was swift due to the absence of further drops requiring abseiling. This section of the wadi is notably wide and, after about 30 minutes of walking, we discovered a remarkable undercut in the mountain on the left bank, forming an impressive cave. We decided to name this wadi “The Great Cave Canyon.”

We took a brief break at this scenic point to capture a few photographs, then continued on our journey.

As we advanced, the wadi narrowed significantly, revealing stunning geological formations and abundant tufa deposits, which are

our abseil. The wadi was quite aquatic, necessitating our passage through numerous small pools, as most of our drops concluded in water.

After approximately three hours, we arrived at a section where the canyon widened once more, necessitating Dr Said's climb out of the wadi to retrieve his vehicle for his return to Muscat.

We paused for a brief rest atop a large boulder in the middle of the wadi before parting ways with Dr Said and continuing downstream.

Once again, the canyon narrowed, and we encountered the first drop, landing in water, followed by five additional drops, none exceeding 20 metres in height.

While standing on a boulder admiring the breathtaking surroundings, I noticed a captivating formation hanging from the mountain on the left bank that resembled a bayonet. Consequently, we decided to name this particular section of the wadi “The Bayonet Canyon.”

By 3:30 pm, we reached the beginning of the falaj at Hat, where we had parked our car.

We then returned to our campsite at the starting point of the second canyon, which we planned to explore the following day.

TO BE CONTINUED...