

Sohar Port attracts \$29 bn investments

Since inception, SOHAR Port and Freezone has demonstrated robust economic performance, attracting a total of \$29 billion in investments to date. In H1 of 2024 alone, the port and freezone has secured \$3.4 billion in investment, underscoring its appeal as a premier destination for international trade and commerce. The infrastructure has undergone significant enhancements, with the recent expansion of SOHAR Freezone Phase 2, introducing 345 hectares of additional leasable land. **DETAILS ON P14**

SUNRISE - 05:58 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:43 AM

DHUHR - 12:02 PM

ASR - 03:27 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:01 PM

ISHA - 07:11 PM



Established 1981. Editor-in-chief: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

OMAN



www.omanobserver.om

editor@omanobserver.om

P13

NEW NET ZERO
CENTRE TO CHART
OMAN'S CARBON
NEUTRALITY PATHWAY



P12

MAN CITY FEEL
RODRI ABSENCE
IN NEWCASTLE
DRAW



P20

TWO TRAVELLERS,
AN UNFORGETTABLE
ADVENTURE IN
DHOFAR



MUSCAT

LOW PRESSURE TO
BRING RAINS

The Sultanate of Oman will be affected by a low-pressure system, starting from Sunday until Tuesday, with chances of cloud formation over Dhofar Governorate, parts of Al Wusta Governorate, Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas with chances of isolated rain and occasional thundershowers, and may extend to the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman. Cumulus clouds and rainfall of varying intensity (10-40 mm), accompanied by thunderstorms and active downward winds during the evening over Al Hajar Mountains and the surrounding areas, may extend to the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman. In Dhofar and Al Wusta governorates, active downward winds (15-35 knots) will lead to reduced horizontal visibility and the flying of unstable materials during thunderstorms.

'WHITE SAILS'
HELD IN SUR



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism hosted a tourism event titled 'White Sails', in honour of World Tourism Day, celebrated annually on September 27. This year's theme, "Tourism and Peace," is part of the ongoing programme for Sur, which has been named the Arab Tourism Capital for 2024. The event was held at the Al Washar traditional ship factory in the Wilayat of Sur.

DETAILS ON P5

KATHMANDU

NEPAL FLOODS KILL AT
LEAST 66 PEOPLE



At least 66 people have been killed in Nepal since early on Friday as persistent downpours triggered flooding and landslides, closing major roads and disrupting domestic air travel, officials said on Saturday. The death toll could rise, they added, with another 69 people reported missing, and 60 injured since Friday morning, home ministry official Dil Kumar Tamang said. Most of the deaths took place in the Kathmandu valley, which is home to 4 million people and the country's capital, where the flooding brought traffic and normal activity to a standstill. Rescue workers used helicopters and rubber boats to help people stranded on rooftops or elevated ground as some parts of Kathmandu reported up to 322.2 mm of rain over the last day.

S&P upgrades Oman's sovereign credit rating to 'BBB-'

MUSCAT: Standard & Poor's (S&P) has upgraded Oman's sovereign credit rating from "BB+" to "BBB-", marking a significant return to investment-grade status after nearly seven years of being rated below investment grade. The upgrade reflects Oman's improving financial outlook and its success in addressing the economic challenges brought on by the global oil price decline and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The new "BBB-" rating places Oman back in the lowest tier of the investment-

grade category, signalling a safer environment for investors. According to S&P, the upgrade is a direct result of Oman's commitment to economic reforms aimed at strengthening public finances, increasing fiscal surpluses and reducing public debt. The stable outlook associated with the rating suggests confidence in the country's ability to maintain this progress over the medium term.

The report highlights key achievements, including the government's efforts to

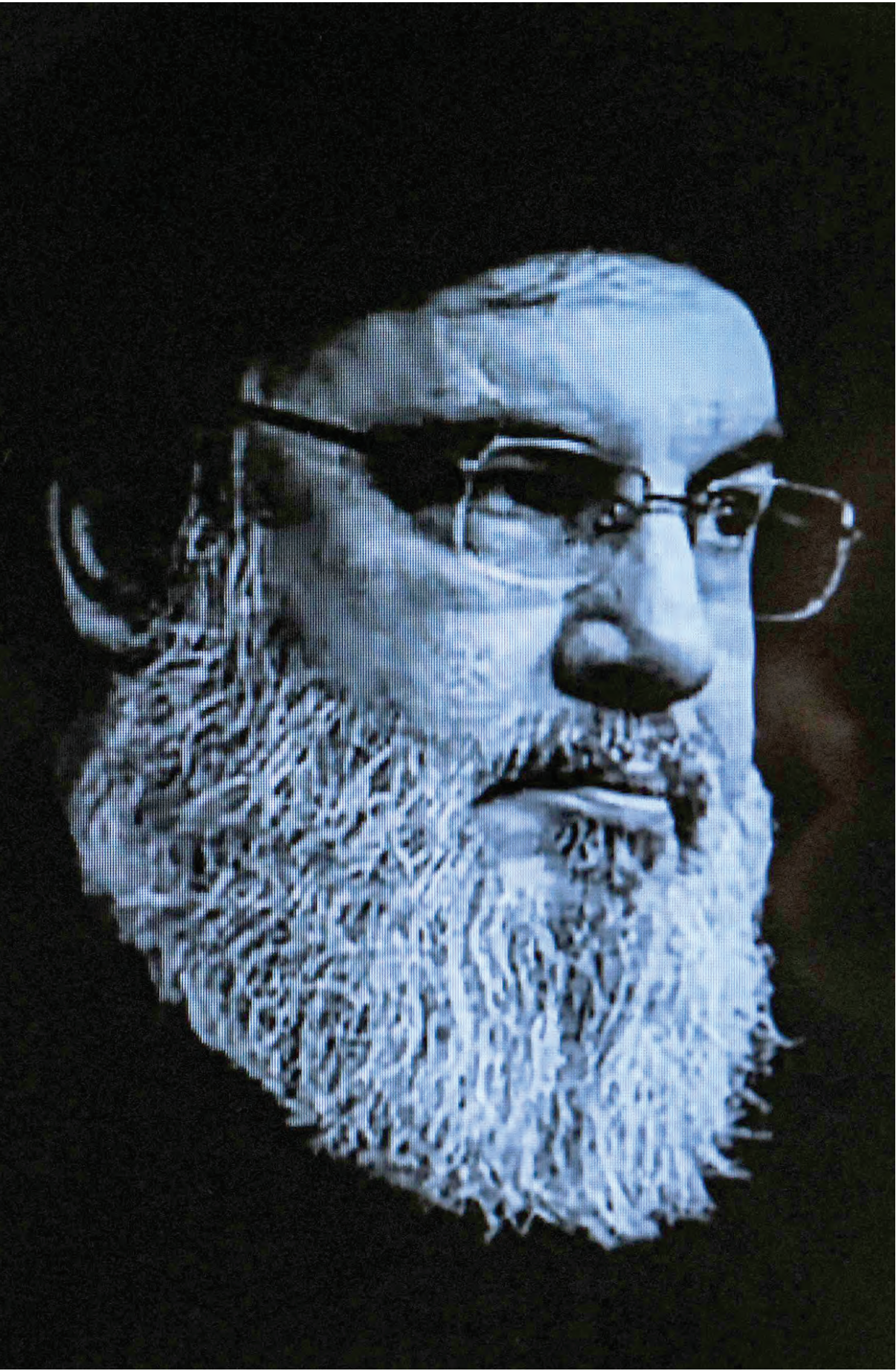
balance revenue and expenditure through a medium-term fiscal plan. Initiatives aimed at reducing the state's public debt and improving governance within state-owned enterprises have played a significant role in bolstering Oman's financial position. The establishment of entities like the Oman Energy Development Company (EDO) and the Integrated Gas Company (IGC) helped streamline the management of revenues and expenses in the oil and gas sectors, making the financial structure more

transparent and efficient.

The agency expects Oman to achieve moderate fiscal surpluses of about 1.9 per cent of GDP annually from 2024 to 2027, assuming an average oil price of \$80 per barrel. These surpluses will enable Oman to continue reducing its public debt levels and build financial reserves, providing flexibility in managing future economic shocks. By 2027, the agency forecasts Oman's total public debt will decrease to 29 per cent of GDP. **DETAILS ON P13**

ISRAELI STRIKE ON BEIRUT
KILLS HEZBOLLAH LEADER

UN CHIEF 'GRAVELY CONCERNED' BY 'DRAMATIC ESCALATION'



BEIRUT: Israel killed Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in a powerful air strike in Beirut, dealing a huge blow to the group. The Israeli military said on Saturday it had killed Nasrallah in the strike on the group's central command headquarters in Beirut's southern suburbs a day earlier. Hezbollah confirmed he had been killed, without saying how. His death is a major blow to Hezbollah.

A senior member of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, deputy commander Abbas Nilforoushan, was also killed in Israeli attacks in Beirut, Iranian media reported on Saturday.

Hezbollah said in a statement that it would continue its battle against Israel "in support of Gaza and Palestine, and in defence of Lebanon and its steadfast and honourable people".

Hezbollah's Al Manar TV aired Quran verses after his death was announced. Bursts of gunfire were heard in Beirut.

Friday's air strike - a succession of massively powerful blasts that left a crater at least 20 metres deep - shook Beirut. Israel carried out further air strikes on the area and more widely in Lebanon on Saturday.

The Israeli military said earlier that Nasrallah was killed in a "targeted strike" on the group's underground headquarters beneath a residential building in Dahiyeh - a Hezbollah-controlled southern suburb of Beirut.

It said he was killed along with another top Hezbollah leader, Ali Karaki, and other commanders.

Nasrallah's death is by far the most significant blow in a devastating fortnight for Hezbollah, starting with a deadly attack on thousands of wireless communications devices used by its members. Israel also

Danger is threatening
us, says Lebanon PM

Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati said on Saturday that his country was facing the threat of danger, after an Israeli air strike the previous day killed Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. Mikati was speaking at an emergency cabinet meeting that he convened upon returning from the United Nations General Assembly in New York. Meanwhile, the US State Department ordered the families of embassy personnel in Beirut to leave the country and authorised the departure of some staff, as the conflict escalates. The department ordered the departure "due to the increased volatility following air strikes within Beirut and the volatile and unpredictable security situation throughout Lebanon," it said.

significantly ramped up air strikes in Lebanon, killing several top Hezbollah commanders and hundreds of other people across wide areas of the country.

Hezbollah gave no immediate indication of who might succeed Nasrallah. Senior Hezbollah official Sayyed Hashem Safieddine has long been regarded as heir apparent. The group has not issued any statement on Safieddine's status or that of any other Hezbollah leaders - apart from Nasrallah - since the attack.

ESCALATION

Meanwhile, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was "gravely concerned" by the "dramatic escalation" seen in Lebanon in the past day as Israel targets Hezbollah in the capital Beirut.

SEE ALSO P6

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 33°C Min 28°C

SALALAH: Max 29°C Min 26°C

NIZWA: Max 34°C Min 23°C



Muscat sees 93% drop in dengue fever cases

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality recently reviewed the work of the task force responsible for the investigation and control of the Aedes mosquito in the governorate, which was chaired by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality and head of the task force.

The meeting covered the results of the executive plan for controlling the Aedes mosquito in 2023-2024 and outlined the plan for 2024-2025. Officials from the Ministry of Health also presented the latest epidemiological indicators.

The outcomes of the 2023-2024 plan highlighted a remarkable reduction in dengue fever cases, with a decrease of around 93 per cent compared to the previous season. This success was primarily attributed to visiting 69,000 homes and establishments to eliminate mosquito breeding sites, significantly reducing the mosquito population.

Additionally, 266 fixed swamp areas, covering 84 square kilometres in Muscat Governorate, were identified as key mosquito breeding grounds. These areas were mapped on an interactive platform to support vector control activities, and the transition to electronic data entry for control operations, using a dedicated mobile application, further streamlined efforts.

A vital feature of the upcoming plan is the focus on raising community awareness.

Thirty-six awareness programmes were conducted in schools and hospitals, educating the public about the dangers of the Aedes mosquito.

Additionally, knowledge-sharing initiatives with other countries were launched, including sending two staff members to Iran for a diploma programme in biological pest control in collaboration with the World Health Organization. Muscat Municipality's



The success was primarily attributed to visiting **69,000** homes and establishments to eliminate mosquito breeding sites, significantly reducing the mosquito population

success in controlling the Aedes mosquito was also showcased at an international conference in the United Kingdom, where it was praised for achieving a significant reduction in dengue cases at the NEW-IPM Emerging Opportunities Symposium.

The meeting also discussed the 2024-2025 work plan, which will build on past successes, maintaining a proactive approach to mosquito control.

The plan will prioritise areas previously affected by dengue outbreaks and engage the community, in partnership with government institutions, particularly educational bodies, to eliminate mosquito breeding sites.

Another innovative aspect of the plan is the deployment of smart mosquito traps to study mosquito behaviour and evaluate the effectiveness of insecticide spraying.

Both electronic and non-electronic traps will be installed in parks, enabling automated control of mosquito populations without the use of insecticides, thus reducing the need for human intervention.

rainfall on Saturday evening. Heavy rainfall was reported in the villages of Wadi Bani Awf, Wadi Al Sahtan, Wadi Bani Ghafir and Wadi Bani Henai in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq. Moderate rains fell in the villages of Al Alia, Al Muhsana, Hadas, Al Hajar, Saniba, Shawah, Thaqb and Stal in the Wilayat of Al Awabi. — ONA

Heavy rains batter Wilayat of Al Rustaq

AL RUSTAQ: The wilayats of Al Rustaq and Al Awabi in Al Batinah South Governorate experienced heavy to moderate

Sayyid Badr reviews cooperation with foreign ministers in New York

NEW YORK: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met with Hussein Awad Ali, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Sudan, during his participation in the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

The foreign minister affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's firm position calling for unity in Sudan without foreign interference to achieve peace and stability and ensure the supreme interests of the brotherly Sudanese people.

The two ministers stressed the importance of enhancing the Sudanese-Sudanese dialogue to achieve security and stability and a return of Sudan to the path of economic and social development in all its regions.

The minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of the Sudan expressed his deep appreciation for the role of the Sultanate of Oman in supporting the stability of Sudan, praising the close relations between the two brotherly countries.

The foreign minister also met with Dr Mohammed Mustafa, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Palestine, on the sidelines of the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

The meeting discussed developments in the Palestinian cause, the strong and growing global momentum in its favour and the need to build on this momentum at the Arab and international levels to achieve justice by ensuring the Palestinian people attain all their legitimate rights and establish their independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Dr Mohammed expressed his deep appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman's supportive stance on the Palestinian cause in various international forums, commending the efforts made by the Sultanate of Oman to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

The meeting also addressed ways to enhance coordination in intensifying the necessary support in order to strengthen Palestinian resilience, build consensus and reconciliation among all Palestinian parties, and empower the institutions of the Palestinian National Authority under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas.

Sayyid Badr also met with Tanja Fajon, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, and Dr Mohammed Mustafa, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Palestine, holding talks



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, meets Mohamed Ali Nafti, Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, holds talks with Tanja Fajon, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Republic of Slovenia



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, and Bassam Sabbagh, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, in talks



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, with Hussein Awad Ali, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Sudan

Affairs of the friendly Republic of Slovenia. He praised her country's honourable position in support of the just Palestinian cause, especially its recognition of the Palestinian state.

The two ministers reviewed bilateral relations between Oman and the Republic of Slovenia and ways to enhance them in various fields including economic, trade and tourism cooperation.

The two sides stressed the importance of regular political consultations between the two countries and coordinating positions in international forums on issues of common interest and their aspiration to continue communication and exchange of official visits between the two countries to foster cooperation and partnership relations in various fields.

Sayyid Badr also met with Mohamed Ali Nafti, Tunisian Minister of Foreign Affairs. They exchanged views on a number of current regional and international issues, stressing the importance of enhancing Arab cooperation and solidarity to confront common challenges and continuing coordination between the two countries in international forums.

The two ministers stressed the deep historic bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Tunisia and ways to enhance them in the economic, cultural and educational fields. The foreign minister met with Bassam Sabbagh, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, on the sidelines of the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

Sayyid Badr expressed his sincere congratulations to the Syrian minister on his recent appointment wishing him success in his duties.

The ministers affirmed the deep ties between the two brotherly countries and their commitment to strengthening the existing positive cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and Syria in various fields. The meeting also included discussions on issues of common interest with an emphasis on the need to intensify joint efforts to promote peace and stability in the region.

Sayyid Badr reiterated the Sultanate of Oman's support for all efforts aimed at achieving peace and stability in Syria through dialogue and diplomatic solutions. — ONA

Korean traditional music band showcased at Muscat concert

MUSCAT: The Korean Embassy in Oman hosted a concert with a theme of 'Heritage in Harmony' by the ADG7 (Ak Dan Gwang Chil), a multi-award winning band of Korea at the Oman Auditorium, Al Bustan Palace on September 25 in a series of activities to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between Korea and Oman.

The ADG7 has gained increasingly wider popularity and reputation with its performances in international stages including the World Music Expo 2019 and the global FEST 2020 since its debut in 2015. The Oman-Korea



A concert by ADG7 band in Muscat commemorated the 50th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between Korea and Oman

Friendship Association and the Korean Association in Oman supported the concert.

The ADG7 presented

traditional Korean folk music in a modern style to the Omani and international audience. Together with the Korean band, the

musicians of the Oman Centre for Traditional Music joined the concert. Both Korean and Omani performers resonated deeply with

the spirit of friendship through music that echoed the shared sentiments of the two peoples.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi,

Minister of Energy and Minerals, graced the concert where Omani dignitaries, representatives from public and private sectors, foreign ambassadors together with members of the diplomatic corps as well as fans of Korean culture attended.

Ambassador Kim Kiejoo of Korea highlighted the significance of this year as a watershed in the five decades of fruitful mutual partnership between Korea and Oman. He emphasised that cultural exchanges will help promote the already-strong solidarity of the people of both nations and reassured that further exchanges will continue to grow.



LOBSTER FISHING SEASON FROM OCTOBER 1

SALALAH: Oman’s fishermen are gearing up for the start of the lobster fishing season, locally known as ‘Sharkha,’ which commences on October 1 and runs through the end of November. This season marks a significant change from previous years, where the fishing period spanned from March to May, shifting for the first time in 2024.

Sharkha, a prized crustacean known for its nutrient-rich meat, holds substantial economic value, with the price per kilogramme reaching over RO 7 in some seasons. Last year, Oman produced approximately 801 tonnes of lobster, with the majority coming from the Al Wusta, Dhofar, Al Sharqiyah South and Musandam governorates.

Eng Musallam bin Salem Rafeet, Assistant Director-General of Fisheries in Dhofar Governorate, emphasised the importance of responsible fishing practices to preserve lobster stocks. He explained that fishing out of season is detrimental to sustainability and that the use of nets for catching lobsters is prohibited. Fishermen are encouraged to immediately release undersized catches and egg-bearing females back into the sea.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources continues its efforts to safeguard this valuable resource by implementing regulations and raising awareness among fishermen. This includes advisory programmes, awareness campaigns and data collection to ensure the sustainability of Oman’s lobster fisheries for future generations. — **ONA**

RAO’s ‘Shield 29’ Exercise concludes

SALALAH: The Sultan Qaboos Military College, part of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), held the final exercise for its Officers Candidates Course titled ‘Shield 29’. The event, overseen by Major General Idris bin Abdulrahman al Kindi, Secretary-General of the National Security Council, took place at the RAO training grounds in Dhofar Governorate, with the participation of senior military officials.

The exercise showcased the tactical skills

and high morale of the officer candidates, who performed live ammunition drills alongside RAO support units and aircraft from the Royal Air Force of Oman. The event also included demonstrations of engineering services provided by the Ministry of Defence. Major General Al Kindi praised the candidates for their professionalism and the course supervisors for their dedication, affirming the importance of such exercises in preparing Oman’s future military leaders. — **ONA**



Sultan Qaboos University Hospital celebrates World Pharmacists Day

Pharmacists’ role highlighted on World Pharmacists Day

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos University Hospital’s Department of Pharmacy held an event under the auspices of Dr Suhaim bint Salem al Sinaniyah, CEO of Medical City, to celebrate World Pharmacists Day on September 25.

This year’s theme, ‘Pharmacists Meet Global Health Needs,’ emphasised the vital role pharmacists play in healthcare worldwide.

The celebration saw participation from various hospital departments, including Medical Supplies, Purchasing, and Radiology and Molecular Imaging. The pharmacy divisions — External and Internal Pharmacy, Clinical Pharmacy, Solution Preparation and Sterilisers, and Drug Inquiries and Warehousing — also actively engaged in the event. The occasion highlighted the pharmacist’s crucial role within the healthcare system as a primary source of health advice

and care, reinforcing their status as integral to addressing the community’s health needs.

Pharmacist Haitham al Balushi, Head of the Pharmaceutical Dispensing Department, said: “We are delighted to participate in World Pharmacists Day. Today, we are educating visitors about the journey medicines take before reaching patients, ensuring they meet the highest standards of quality and safety.”

Tufool al Zadjali, Head of the Pharmacy Purchasing Department, said, “We take great pride in the pharmaceutical factories that have been established in Oman, which will streamline the supply chain and ensure timely delivery of medicines.”

The pharmacists ensure patients fully understand how to use medications properly, explaining dosages, potential side effects and usage timings to provide reassurance and clarity.

Dhofar tourism expands as year-round destination

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 28

Dhofar Governorate is renowned for its breathtaking natural beauty and has steadily evolved into a sought-after year-round tourist destination. While the khareef season, from June to September, brings lush greenery and cooler temperatures, Dhofar offers much more beyond these months, drawing tourists to its vibrant landscapes, rich history and cultural attractions throughout the year.

The governorate stands out for its diverse geographical features, providing an array of tourism opportunities ranging from ecological adventures to heritage tours. Dhofar’s well-established infrastructure enhances its appeal, ensuring a seamless experience for visitors.

As the khareef season winds down, Dhofar transitions into a period marked by milder weather, attracting European and Gulf tourists eager to escape the colder climates of their home countries. This period allows visitors to enjoy Dhofar’s stunning beaches, rugged mountains and historical sites in a comfortable climate, perfect for outdoor activities.

During the recent ‘Marhaba Dhofar’ event, Marwan al Ghassani, Director of Tourism Promotion, Dhofar Governorate, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT), highlighted the growing influx of European tourists during the winter months. Charter flights from countries such as Germany, Italy and



Winter tourism is increasingly important in Oman’s overall tourism strategy

There is a growing influx of European tourists during the winter months which reflects Oman’s strategic efforts to promote Dhofar as a must-visit location

Poland have significantly boosted the governorate’s visibility as a global tourist destination.

Al Ghassani noted that Dhofar expects over 97,749 tourists on 475 charter flights between October 2023 and May 2024. This surge reflects Oman’s strategic efforts to promote Dhofar as a must-visit location, contributing substantially to the country’s economy and aligning with national goals for economic diversification.

Winter tourism is increasingly important in Oman’s overall tourism strategy. Al Ghassani emphasised, “Dhofar offers something for everyone.” Whether hiking in the mountains, relaxing on pristine

beaches, or exploring ancient cultural sites, the governorate caters to diverse interests.

Local tour operators, like Ahmed al Mahri, confirm the growing interest in eco-tourism and desert adventures. Popular activities include mountain hikes, cave explorations and desert camping. “The weather after khareef is ideal for outdoor activities,” Al Mahri stated, noting that visitors seek authentic Omani culture through rural village tours.

These developments in tourism drive significant growth in the local economy, benefiting businesses from large resorts to small family-owned shops. Traditional markets, like Al Haffa Souq see increased demand for Omani goods such as frankincense and handcrafted items. Local shop owner Umm Salem remarked, “Tourists are eager to purchase local products, which helps support our community.”

The MoHT promotes Dhofar through targeted campaigns and international tourism exhibitions.

21st Ishtar exhibition showcases Arab artistic brilliance

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

The vibrant colours of the ‘Ishtar’ exhibition’s participating artists came together to craft paintings that delve into real-life experiences, transforming art into a medium for powerful messages.

The exhibition featured 40 artists from four different countries, fostering artistic exchange between Omani and Arab artists and allowing them to share their unique creative journeys.

The ‘21st International Ishtar Exhibition for Fine Arts’ was organised in collaboration with the Iraqi Embassy in Muscat and the Ishtar Foundation for Culture and Arts.

This highly anticipated event attracted a diverse audience of art lovers eager to explore the exceptional pieces on display from artists representing Oman, Iraq, Palestine and Jordan.

The exhibition showcased a



Artist Hamida Abdul Redha exhibits her works at the exhibition



Opening of the Ishtar exhibition which showcased Arab artistic brilliance featuring 40 artists



wide range of 40 pieces, including paintings and sculptures, reflecting various artistic influences and experiences.

Some works were inspired by Cubism and Realistic Cubism, while others bore traces of Impressionism and Expressionism, utilising vivid and abstract colours to convey emotions. Surreal artworks that blended fantasy with reality also graced the exhibition, capturing

the audience’s imagination.

With a mission to promote cultural and artistic exchange across Arab nations, the exhibition emphasised the unifying power of art in spreading peace and love. It also sought to support emerging talents by providing them with a platform to showcase their skills.

One standout participant was Iraqi artist Zahraa al Tai, whose painting celebrated the

strength of Iraqi women by depicting Zainab Bahrani, an archaeologist and curator at the New York Museum. The artwork presented a powerful image of the global influence of Iraqi women, conveyed through the universal language of art.

Omani visual artist Said al Alawi contributed a piece inspired by Oman’s cultural heritage. His work, titled ‘The Cycle,’ revived memories of an old traditional game where

children played with bicycle tires.

Al Alawi’s piece beautifully blended tradition with modern artistic techniques, reflecting the global evolution of art while staying rooted in Omani identity. He emphasised that Omani artists strive to craft works that resonate globally while preserving their distinct heritage.

Artist Hamida Abdul Redha, another participant, praised

Oman’s creative atmosphere and its public’s deep connection to fine arts.

Through her painting, she illustrated the transformative power of a woman’s artistic touch, demonstrating that women can turn any subject into a work of beauty and precision. Hamida highlighted that every artist has a unique style that helps convey the essence of their homeland while delivering a universal message.



IMPACT OF STUDENT-TEACHER RATIOS ON EDUCATION

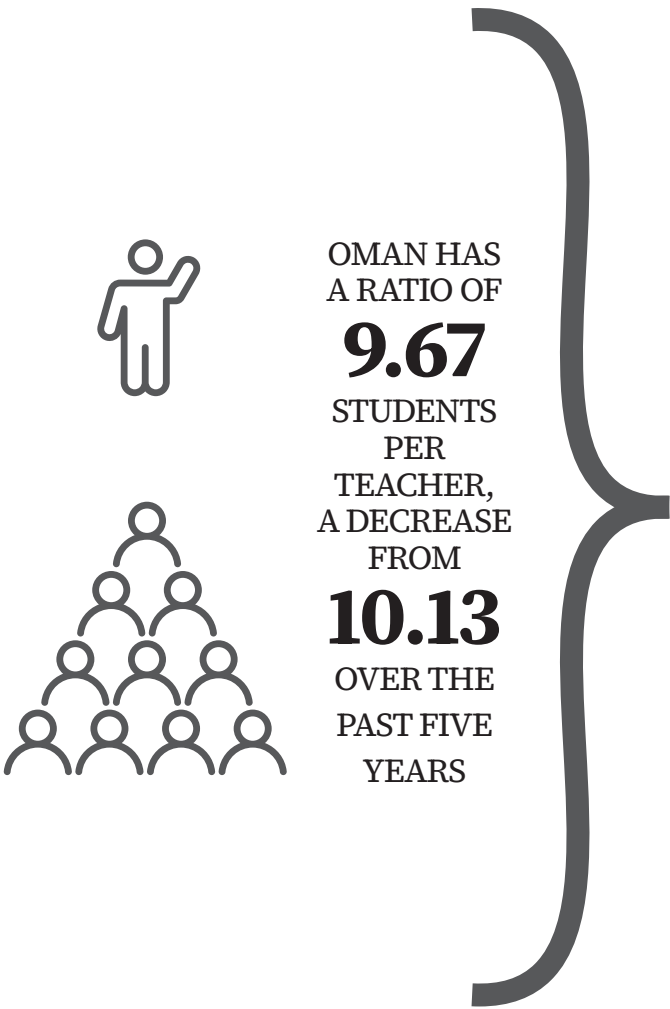


KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

ONE of the cornerstones of effective education, as identified by scholars worldwide, is maintaining a healthy and productive teacher-student ratio. A suboptimal ratio can hinder the personal attention that each child receives, leading to poorer academic performance. Many schools today are grappling with this challenge, emphasising the urgent need for change. When teachers manage smaller groups of students, they can provide individualised support and closely monitor each child's progress. This approach allows educators to identify students who may be struggling in certain subjects, enabling timely intervention and assistance. In contrast, overcrowded classrooms make it challenging for teachers to offer the necessary support and guidance, affecting overall student well-being.

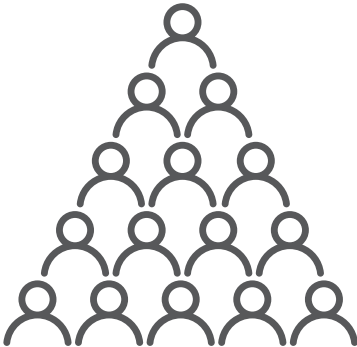
Globally, the average student-teacher ratio stands at 24.26 students per teacher, based on data from 86 countries. However, the ideal ratio for fostering a personalised learning environment is between 1:15 and 1:20. This range not only promotes effective classroom management but also enhances the quality of education. While the student-teacher ratio is critical, it is essential to note that factors such as teacher quality and available resources significantly influence educational outcomes. In Oman, the current student-teacher ratio is 9.67, a slight decline from 10.13 five years ago. Historically, from 1971 to 2018, the average ratio in Oman was 24.84, highlighting the significant strides made in improving educational accessibility in the Sultanate of Oman. Recently, the Al Seeb Parents Council convened under the leadership of Ahmed bin Ali

al Shehhi to address various educational issues, including student overcrowding in schools. This problem has been recognised as one of the foremost challenges affecting educational institutions, leading to diminished student performance globally. To address overcrowding, the council plans to coordinate with the General Directorate of Education in Muscat Governorate to conduct field visits to schools. The objective is to evaluate conditions and propose suitable solutions to any ongoing issues. Overcrowded classrooms can overwhelm teachers, strain resources, and create an environment where students struggle to thrive. Ultimately, achieving an optimal student-teacher ratio is vital for fostering a conducive learning atmosphere, ensuring that all students receive the attention and support they need to succeed academically.



IDEAL RATIOS

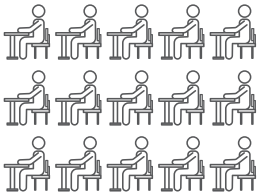
THE GLOBAL AVERAGE IS **24.26** STUDENTS/TEACHER,



WHILE THE IDEAL RANGE IS BETWEEN 1:15 AND 1:20

OPTIMAL CLASS SIZE

THE IDEAL CLASS SIZE RANGES FROM 13 TO 17 STUDENTS, WITH **15** BEING THE AVERAGE



OVERCROWDING CHALLENGE

THE AL SEEB PARENTS COUNCIL ADDRESSED THE ISSUE OF STUDENT OVERCROWDING



NEGATIVE EFFECTS

OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS LEAD TO DISCIPLINARY ISSUES, EMOTIONAL DISTRESS



National drive on weather, tsunami risks begins today

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

The National Emergency Management Committee, through its National Emergency Management Centre, is set to launch a comprehensive awareness campaign on Sunday across all wilayats of Dhofar Governorate.

The campaign, which aims to educate the public on weather hazards and tsunami risks, will run until October 7 in all wilayats of Dhofar Governorate. It aims to raise community awareness about weather, climate and tsunami risks.

The campaign comprises four key components: awareness meetings, seminars, practical



exercises, exhibitions and the distribution of informational bulletins. These activities aim to engage and educate the public on necessary precautions and responses to potential weather-related threats.

This campaign is a collaborative effort involving the Ministry of Information, the Civil Aviation Authority, the

Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA), and several local partners, including the Office of the Governor of Dhofar, the Directorate-General of Education, the Directorate-General of Social Development and the Youth Centre in Salalah. Community participation is encouraged to ensure widespread understanding and preparedness.



Oman Embassy in India launches tourism campaign

NEW DELHI: The Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the Republic of India unveiled its upcoming tourism campaign, ‘A Journey to Explore Oman,’ set to take place from January 10 to 18 next year. The campaign is a collaborative effort between IBEX Expeditions from India and Bait Al Qanoon Foundation in Oman. The Foundation aims to introduce new, off-the-beaten-path destinations each year and create programmes that offer unique and exciting experiences.

The Foundation selects destinations through its Fellowship Committee, which includes members from diverse countries and backgrounds. These fellows, chosen for their interest in the campaign, serve as ambassadors, promoting the countries they visit.

This partnership aims to position Oman as a top tourist destination, particularly among travellers who prioritise sustainable and responsible tourism. — **ONA**

World Tourism Day ‘White Sails’ held in Sur

SUR: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism hosted a tourism event titled ‘White Sails’ on Friday, in honour of World Tourism Day, celebrated annually on September 27. This year’s theme, ‘Tourism and Peace,’ is part of the ongoing executive programme for Sur, which has been named the Arab Tourism Capital for 2024. The event was held at the Al Washar traditional ship factory in the Wilayat of Sur, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

The celebration underscores the vital role tourism plays in promoting global peace, fostering mutual understanding between peoples, and highlighting Oman’s rich maritime heritage. Oman’s long-standing navigation

history has been a beacon of peace and cultural exchange with nations across the globe, further emphasising tourism’s contribution to the spread of goodwill and diplomacy.

A series of immersive activities were presented, including hands-on shipbuilding workshops, a vibrant traditional arts performance at the Sails Theatre, and a symposium on ‘Cultural Tourism Exchange and its Relationship to World Peace.’ The Al Washar Cinema screened films emphasising the significance of tourism, while the Al Washar Gallery showcased relics and photographs that narrate Oman’s illustrious maritime history and its seafaring connections with various countries. — **ONA**



MoHT hosted tourism event ‘White Sails’ to celebrate World Tourism Day in Sur

Scouts and Guides lead Dhofar-wide blood donation drive in Al Dahariz

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

The Department of Vocational Guidance and Counselling through its Scouts and Guides department organised a Dhofar-wide blood donation drive.

The theme for this event was ‘Donating blood is health for the donor and a gift of new life and vitality for others.’ The drive began in Salalah in collaboration with the General Administration of Health Services in Dhofar Governorate.

The camp, held at the Training Centre in Al Dahariz, had participants from the local community as well as members of the Scouts and Guides.

The initiative received an overwhelming response as many donors came forward to donate.

“The campaign’s primary goal is to ensure a safe and sufficient supply of blood to meet the needs of those who rely on it for health-related assistance,” said one of the event organisers.

This effort is part of the ongoing awareness campaigns conducted by the General Administration of Health Services in Dhofar, represented by Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah.



Ali bin Awadh, Head of the Scouts and Guides Department at Dhofar Education, emphasised that ‘donating blood is not only a health responsibility but also a religious duty, one that ensures we can support those in need while also benefiting our own well-being.’ Baghdad bint Bakhit Judi, from the Health Education and Psychological Counselling Department at Sultan Qaboos Hospital, reiterated the critical role blood donation plays in reducing and combating diseases. She highlighted the educational guidance provided to donors about the importance of

their contributions.

Sarah Mohammed al Sayed, a teacher at Al Badiia School, described donating blood as “a humanitarian obligation, one we should all embrace, as it is an essential need for many and an opportunity to screen for illnesses.”

Osama bin Musallam bin Khamis, a Scout and donor, praised the initiative, stating that ‘such campaigns should be a priority across all government sectors and institutions.’ He commended the General Health Services for its efforts in coordinating the event.

Regional seminar in physiotherapy concludes

MUSCAT: A regional seminar on physiotherapy organised by the Oman Special Olympics Association concluded focusing on training specialists to provide the best care for Omani Special Olympics athletes with intellectual disabilities, Down syndrome, and autism. Held at the Al Amal Club, the seminar aimed to elevate the skills of physiotherapists to offer tailored healthcare services



for these athletes. The event culminated in the participation of more than 20 government and private centres, with medical examinations provided to young athletes. The closing ceremony,

attended by Dr Saeed bin Hamad al Rubaie, President of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, highlighted the importance of community partnerships in supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities. Several MoUs were signed between the Oman Special Olympics Association and participating entities to enhance collaboration in providing specialised care. — **ONA**

Fragrant Al Kadhi faces revival after near extinction

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

Al Kadhi, also known as Keedha in Oman and scientifically known as Pandanus tectorius or Screw Pine, is a tropical plant that naturally grew in the western parts of Dhofar in Oman. It was also planted in farms and gardens in the Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South and Al Dakhiliyah governorates. The special feature of this plant is its fragrance.

The fragrant tree faced its own challenges and is now protected. Al Kadhi used to grow naturally in large numbers but became endangered due to being uprooted. “They were affected because of uncontrolled uprooting,” according to Environment Authority officials.

The authority fenced the only remaining site in Dhofar where the trees naturally exist, preserving them. This fenced site



in Dhofar was also used to plant seedlings from the mother trees to regenerate the original ones.

Left alone without human interference, the trees can survive in an arid climate too.

There is even an Omani song about this tree, celebrating its fragrance.

A recent report pointed out that out of 7,000 edible plants worldwide, only 417 are widely grown and used for food.

The pandanus (*Pandanus tectorius*) is a small tree that grows in coastal areas from the Pacific Islands to the Philippines.

The leaves are used to flavour sweet and savoury dishes across much of Southeast Asia, while the pineapple-like fruit can be eaten raw or cooked.

The tree can tolerate challenging conditions, including drought, strong winds, and salt spray, said a research fellow at Kew, Dr Maribel Soto Gomez.

According to her, it is a climate-resilient and nutritious food that is also delicious. “It would be great to diversify our food portfolio to include food that is culturally appropriate, nutritious, and can be grown in challenging conditions all around the world,” she said.

As of now, people can only wait to see the population of this tree come back to normal levels. Two healthy trees are in the Environment Authority’s garden within the compound in Al Khuwair along with other native plants and trees of Oman. But currently, their flowers are dry, as they bloom in January and February every year.



Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on / before 10:00 am Monday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
3678/2024/MOH/NIZH-4	Providing for the transportation of medicines and other materials from the Ministry's warehouses and Nizwa Hospital	17/October/2024	04/November/2024	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	R.O 25,000 Per set

- Tenders should be submitted online on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accept or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: **24402200**, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



This photo shows the flooded Red River in Hanoi, in the aftermath of Typhoon Yagi. — AFP

VIETNAM PUTS TYPHOON LOSSES AT \$3.3 BILLION

HANOI: Vietnam suffered \$3.3 billion in economic losses as a result of deadly Typhoon Yagi, which swept across the country's north earlier this month causing hundreds of fatalities, state media reported on Saturday. Yagi battered northern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Myanmar in early September, triggering floods and landslides that left more than 700 people dead. Officials have calculated that economic losses in communist Vietnam amount to \$3.3 billion, state media said in reports on a government meeting about the consequences and lessons learned from the disaster.

A total of 299 people were killed and 34 reported missing in Vietnam, while officials in Myanmar have confirmed 433 fatalities with 79 still missing.

More than 390,000 houses were damaged or flooded, more than 345,000 hectares of crops were damaged and 5.6 million head of poultry were killed due to Yagi, figures from the Vietnam's agriculture ministry said. — AFP

RUSSIAN ATTACKS IN SUMY KILL 9 PEOPLE



A woman commemorates a fallen serviceman at a memorial wall, in Kyiv, Ukraine. — Reuters

KYIV: Russian forces hit a medical centre in Sumy in northeastern Ukraine on Saturday morning then struck again as the building was being evacuated, killing nine people and injuring 20 others, Ukrainian officials said. Ukrainian prosecutors said that at the time of the attacks, 86 patients and 38 staff members were in the hospital.

“The first attack killed one person and damaged the ceilings of several floors of the hospital,” Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said on Telegram. As people were being evacuated, the Russians struck again, killing a further five people, he said. The State Emergency Service of Ukraine said on Facebook that nine people were killed, including an employee of the national police and 20 others were injured.

“Everyone in the world who talks about this war should pay attention to where Russia is hitting. They are fighting hospitals, civilian objects, and people's lives,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Telegram. “Only force can force Russia to peace. Peace through force is the only right way.” Klymenko did not specify what weapons were used in Saturday's attacks but the regional administration and air forces said the strike was carried out by drones. — Reuters

PIVOTAL JOB

Ishiba to keep Hayashi as chief secretary



Japan's incoming prime minister, Shigeru Ishiba, will likely keep Yoshimasa Hayashi as chief cabinet secretary when he forms his cabinet, the Asahi newspaper reported on Saturday. Hayashi was among eight candidates who lost to Ishiba in an unpredictable race on Friday to be president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. Hayashi has been chief cabinet secretary under PM Fumio Kishida. — Reuters

MIGRANTS TRAGEDY

9 dead, 48 missing in boat off Spain



A boat carrying migrants capsized off Spain's Canary Islands overnight, killing at least nine and leaving 48 missing, the national maritime rescue service said on Saturday. Eighty-four people were on board and 27 were saved after rescuers responded to a distress call received shortly after midnight from off El Hierro, one of the islands in the Atlantic archipelago, a statement said. — AFP

SUPPLIES BREAK

Fire halts work at India iPhone plant



At least 10 people received medical treatment, with two hospitalised, after a major fire on Saturday disrupted production at a key Tata Electronics plant in southern India which makes Apple iPhone components. The fire occurred at the plant in the city of Hosur in Tamil Nadu state which makes some iPhone components. It broke out near another building inside the Tata complex. — Reuters

HURRICANE HELENE LEAVES HUGE SWATHS OF DAMAGE



A couple hugs each other after arriving in their Neighborhood to discover most of the homes there destroyed by Hurricane Helene in the small community of Dekle Beach near Keaton Beach, Florida. — NYT

FLORIDA: Hurricane Helene forged a devastating path of floods and wind damage after slamming into Florida's Big Bend region on Thursday night, submerging much of the state's Gulf Coast before continuing its destructive march through Georgia and into the mountains of Appalachia. More than 40 people were reported dead in four states as the huge storm spawned flash floods and landslides on its way north. In the densely populated Tampa Bay region of Florida, neighbourhoods were underwater on Friday, the result of a powerful storm surge. In southern Georgia, search teams pulled trapped residents, some with injuries, out of damaged buildings. More than 2 million people in North Carolina were under flood warnings, and millions, including some as far north as Virginia, were without power. The destruction stretched at least 800 miles north from where the storm came ashore in a sparsely populated area of Florida called the Big Bend, which sits in the crook of coastline where the panhandle connects to the Florida Peninsula.

Near the town of Newport, Tennessee, concerns about a potential dam collapse triggered a flash flood warning for 20,000 people and led officials to order many in the 7,000-person community to evacuate. In mountainous western North Carolina, landslides threatened homes and blocked major roads. Emergency officials issued an evacuation warning for residents living below a large dam, the Lake Lure Dam, saying its failure was imminent.

Among those who died in the storm, which made landfall on Thursday, just before midnight, as a Category 4 hurricane with winds of at least 130 mph, were at least 17 people in South Carolina, 15 in Georgia and seven in Florida. — NYT

Russia ‘decisively condemns’ Hezbollah chief’s killing

RUSSIA ON Saturday strongly condemned Israel for killing Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah and urged it to immediately cease military action in Lebanon. “We decisively condemn the latest political murder carried out by Israel,” the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement, adding: “we once again insistently urge Israel to immediately cease military action.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Saturday that Israel was committing a “genocide” in Lebanon after Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah was confirmed among hundreds killed in Israeli strikes this week. “Lebanon and the Lebanese people are the latest target of a policy of genocide, occupation and invasion carried out by Israel since October 7,” Erdogan wrote on X, without directly referring to Nasrallah's death.

Slain Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah, whose death was confirmed on Saturday by his movement, wielded great power in Lebanon but led a life in hiding to avoid assassination by his group's arch-enemy, Israel. Lebanon's most powerful man and the only one in the tiny Mediterranean country with the power to wage war, Nasrallah was killed aged 64 in a wave of Israeli strikes on Friday on Hezbollah's main bastion in south Beirut.

The influence he had over Lebanon's institutions and Hezbollah's formidable arsenal, his death is bound to have ripple effects across the country and the wider region. Nasrallah was rarely seen in public since his movement fought a devastating 2006 war with Israel.

Meanwhile, the UN refugee chief said on Saturday that more than 50,000 people had fled to Syria amid escalating Israeli air strikes



Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli airstrike on the Shiyah neighbourhood of Beirut's southern suburbs. — AFP

on Lebanon. “More than 50,000 Lebanese and Syrians living in Lebanon have now crossed into Syria fleeing Israeli air strikes,” Filippo Grandi said on X. He added that “well over 200,000 people are displaced inside Lebanon”.

A UNHCR spokesman said the total number of displaced in Lebanon had reached 211,319, including 118,000 just since Israel dramatically ramped up its air strikes on Monday.

The remainder had fled their homes since Hezbollah militants in Lebanon began low-

intensity cross-border attacks a day after its Palestinian ally Hamas staged its attack on Israel on October 7, triggering war in the Gaza Strip.

Israel has shifted the focus of its operation from Gaza to Lebanon, where heavy bombing has killed more than 700 people, according to Lebanon's health ministry, as cross-border exchanges escalated over the past week. Most of those Lebanese deaths came on Monday, the deadliest day of violence since Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war. — AFP

The New York Times

Nuclear power is the new AI trade



JEFF SOMMER

The author writes on markets, finance and the economy, for The New York Times

WANT to make a wager on the future of artificial intelligence? Nvidia is the obvious bet. It designs the chips and software that make AI run, is the stock market favourite and has gained 144 per cent this year alone. But some stock traders have found a less obvious, backdoor choice: utility shares, specifically those of companies that own nuclear power plants.

Two such companies — Constellation Energy and Vistra — have been top performers in the S and P 500 in September, with returns of more than 30 per cent. Shares of Constellation Energy, the biggest nuclear plant operator in the United States, surged when it signed a deal on Sept. 20 to supply Microsoft’s burgeoning AI data centres with energy from the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

If you were a consumer of news in 1979, or are aware of the history of nuclear power, you will know that Three Mile Island was the site of the worst nuclear disaster in US history. Now, because of AI energy demand, the utility intends to reopen an undamaged part of Three Mile Island that was mothballed five years ago and change its name, to the less evocative Crane Clean Energy Center.

Vistra says it, too, has been in talks with several AI operators. And the Constellation deal with Microsoft followed an AI-nuclear

power agreement in March involving Talen Energy and Amazon. Talen agreed to sell Amazon large quantities of electricity from the Susquehanna Steam Electric Station — a nuclear plant near Berwick, Pennsylvania, in which the utility has a 90 per cent ownership stake.

Inactive nuclear plants, like the Palisades plant in Michigan and the Duane Arnold plant in Iowa, are under consideration for reactivation, an arduous and expensive process that requires major investment and regulatory approval. Nuclear plants that are operating and supplying power for other purposes may be shifted to more lucrative operations with AI data centres down the road.

It’s not just nuclear power plants that may have their lives extended. Old coal-fired power plants scheduled for retirement are being given a new lease on life. Heightened demand for power from AI data centres is outstripping the ability of energy producers to build and operate cleaner power generators using wind or solar power. That comes at a cost in air pollution, including carbon emissions that contribute to global warming.

Nuclear power plants, needless to say, have drawbacks of their own. For one thing, even the best of them produce radioactive waste that can’t be eliminated in a human lifetime. But nuclear plants don’t burn

Heightened demand for power from AI data centres is outstripping the ability of energy producers to build and operate cleaner power generators

carbon or spew tiny, lung-damaging particles into the atmosphere. While it’s hard and costly to build a new one and get it approved by regulators, old nuclear power plants are very much in demand.

Widespread use of AI by consumers is burning up energy — and using other precious environmental resources, like water to cool the power plants and data centres — that would be difficult to justify if people just thought about it, he said. “This is a problem that is getting bigger and bigger.”

It’s a global problem, but also a regional one, because consumers prize quick answers, and there’s less delay when AI supercomputers and their power sources are close to the major metropolitan areas where most consumers live.

We’re way beyond the experimental phase of artificial intelligence, with a handful of researchers performing occasional, energy-intensive searches. The field is mushrooming with millions of people conducting AI searches and new applications coming all the time. That’s why many researchers estimate that the total energy expenditure of AI is moving into globally significant totals — consuming somewhere in the realm of the energy use of a country like Sweden or Argentina now, and maybe, by 2030, more than India. Who knows where AI will end up?

POSSIBLE CLUSTER OF HUMAN BIRD-FLU INFECTIONS EXPANDS

APOORVA MANDAVILLI AND EMILY ANTHERS

A possible cluster of bird flu infections in Missouri has grown to include eight people, in what may be the first examples of person-to-person transmission in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported on Friday.

If confirmed, the cases in Missouri could indicate that the virus may have acquired the ability to infect people more easily. Worldwide, clusters of bird flu among people are extremely rare. Most cases have resulted from close contact with infected birds.

Health officials in Missouri initially identified a patient with bird flu who was hospitalised last month with unusual symptoms. The patient may have infected one household member and six health care workers, all of whom developed symptoms, according to the CDC. Investigators have not yet confirmed whether any of those seven individuals were infected with the virus, called H5N1, leaving open the possibility that they had Covid or some other illness with flulike symptoms.

“We should be very concerned at this point,” said Dr James Lawler, co-director of the University of Nebraska’s Global Center for Health Security. “Nobody should be hitting the panic button yet,

but we should really be devoting a lot of resources into figuring out what’s going on.” There have been 13 other confirmed cases of bird flu in people since the outbreak in dairy cattle was announced in March. Those cases were all acquired from interactions with infected dairy cattle or poultry. Missouri has not reported any infected herds. The hospitalised patient was tested as part of routine flu surveillance. The infection worried experts because the individual had no known contact with cattle or birds.

DR JAMES LAWLER co-director of the University of Nebraska’s Global Center for Health Security

Two health care workers who had contact with the patient also developed symptoms, CDC officials said at the time. One of those workers turned up negative for flu but may have been tested too late to pick up signs of infection.

On Friday, the CDC added four more health care workers to the list of possible cases. Three of the workers developed symptoms after the hospital instituted precautions against respiratory infection, but they were not tested for active infection at the time. Officials are now analysing results of antibody tests that would reveal whether these individuals were exposed to the virus.

Trump criticises Harris on the border and the economy



Former president Donald Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, speaks at a campaign event in Walker.

FORMER PRESIDENT Donald Trump crisscrossed the battleground state of Michigan on Friday, casting himself as an economic protectionist to blue-collar voters while attacking Vice-President Kamala Harris over immigration on the same day she visited the southern border.

Trump used a pair of events to try to blame Harris for inflation and the migrant crisis, tapping into some of the populist themes that helped him win Michigan — and the presidency — in the 2016 election. In 2020, the state flipped for President Joe Biden.

In the afternoon, the former president visited a manufacturing facility near Grand Rapids before holding a town hall event in the Detroit suburbs that started about 90 minutes late and ended after just a half-hour.

At the second event, in Warren, Trump vowed, if Congress did not act, to use executive action to enact protective tariffs to limit the flow of imports from China and other coun-



NEIL VIGDOR

The writer is a reporter for The New York Times covering politics



MICHAEL GOLD

The writer is a political correspondent for The New York Times

tries that he said were killing jobs in the state. “The word ‘tariff’ I love,” he said at Macomb Community College, where he was joined onstage by Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., one of his staunchest allies in the Senate who served as the town hall’s moderator.

Trump fielded a handful of friendly questions from his supporters that set up familiar talking points and lines of attack. He said Americans were forgoing certain comforts because they could no longer afford them under the Biden-Harris administration. Macomb County, a working-class area north of Detroit, backed Trump in 2016 and 2020. His visit to Michigan came one day after voters in the state began receiving absentee ballots.

Harris met with Border Patrol agents on Friday in Douglas, Arizona, her first visit to the US-Mexico border since she became the Democratic presidential nominee. Hours earlier at his first Michigan event in Walker, Trump went on a 25-minute-long diatribe

about the Biden administration’s immigration policy. Trump, who was convicted of 34 felony counts in New York City and whose 2020 election lies spurred an attack on the Capitol, called Harris’ border policy a “crime,” saying “there’s no greater act of disloyalty than to extinguish the sovereignty of your own nation.”

Trump once again broadly depicted immigrants as “killers” bent on invading the United States, a characterisation that border authorities have said ignores that many migrants are families with children. He pointed to Immigration and Customs Enforcement data reported earlier Friday by Fox News that found 662,566 non-citizens with criminal histories on the agency’s national docket. But the data does not bear out many of Trump’s claims about immigration, including his insistence that immigrants living in the country illegally are causing a crime spike in the United States, a contention that available national data does not support.

And at one point, Trump acknowledged that he has made some of his immigration claims — including his continued insistence that other countries are deliberately sending prisoners and the mentally ill across the southern border — without evidence, then maintained that he had not needed it anyway. Trump’s advisers have been eager to get him to focus on policy, particularly around immigration and the economy, two areas where polling has shown dissatisfaction with Democrats.

As he often does in Michigan, he singled out autoworkers and the auto industry, which have long been central to the state’s economy. He criticised Harris’ tax plans and once again promised to impose a tariff of 100 per cent or more on every car coming across the Mexican border, a proposal that could potentially violate the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement negotiated by his administration.

OPINION

Mindful dieting: Prioritising health over numbers



DR HAMED AL SINAWI
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

RECENTLY met a friend who lost twenty kilogrammes of body weight over one year. I was very interested to hear his experience, especially since my previous dieting experiences were far from successful.

He explained that it took him dedication, hard work, and self-discipline to 'keep to the plan.' We discussed how a combination of intermittent fasting, a low carbohydrate-based diet, and regular exercise helped him achieve his goals and, most importantly, keep it up.

It was interesting to hear how fasting made him more focused and energetic and gave him better sleep. My question to him was 'How did you make sure that you are not crossing the line into anorexic behaviour?'

You have probably heard the term anorexia or watched a movie or a documentary about it. Anorexia nervosa is the most commonly described eating disorder that is often reported in children and young adults but can also affect the elderly.

A person suffering from anorexia deliberately loses weight or keeps his body weight much lower than is healthy for his

age and height by adopting behaviours such as missing meals, eating very little, or avoiding eating any high-caloric foods.

Some people with anorexia induce vomiting, take many laxatives, and indulge in rigorous physical exercise even when they are extremely thin. During my practice as a psychiatrist, I came across patients with anorexia from different cultural backgrounds, yet they all share the same fixation of wanting to stay very thin.

So back to my question, how can a person lose weight without developing anorexia nervosa?

Psychologists suggest that when dieting one should focus on health, not body weight by prioritising overall well-being, and energy levels rather than the number on the scale.

Avoid setting weight as the sole indicator of success. Ensure your meals include a mixture of proteins, healthy fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals. Avoid extreme restrictions or elimination of entire food groups.

Pay attention to your hunger and fullness cues. Eat when you're hungry and stop when you're comfortably full. This prevents

Psychologists suggest that one should focus on health, not body weight when dieting by prioritising overall well-being and energy levels rather than the number on the scale

over- or under-eating.

Having a rigid approach to food can lead to an unhealthy preoccupation with eating or not eating so it is important to be flexible when travelling or going out with friends.

Allow yourself occasional indulgences without feeling guilty. Consider a physical activity that you enjoy, rather than as a way to 'burn calories' or control weight.

This would help you maintain a healthy relationship with exercise and body image. If you notice feelings of guilt around eating or body dissatisfaction, consider talking to a healthcare professional to guide you toward a healthier mindset.

Social media and societal standards can create unrealistic body ideals. As a human being, it's natural that we tend to compare our looks to others which can make us feel frustrated and give up on dieting. So instead you should focus on your unique health journey, rather than comparing your appearance to others. Finally, remember that following these steps can help you adopt a healthy, sustainable approach to eating without falling into disordered eating patterns like anorexia nervosa.

BATTLING TO KEEP FLOODWATERS AT BAY IN S SUDAN

PHILIP BUDA LADU

The neat brown rectangle of an airstrip stands out against the vast expanse of floodwater all around – a crucial lifeline in this remote corner of South Sudan. The landing strip in Bentiu has been carefully preserved with huge dykes against the waters that have added another layer of devastation to the world's youngest country.

Alongside is a camp for some 200,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) who have endured multiple horrors — war in their own country and neighbouring Sudan, and now years of flooding that has destroyed homes, schools, crops and infrastructure. More than 700,000 people have been impacted by flooding across South Sudan, the UN's humanitarian agency said recently, and worse floods could be coming next month.

In Bentiu in Unity State, one of the worst affected and most remote areas, a taskforce of Pakistani military engineers with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has constructed a 16-foot wall around the IDP camp to keep the waters at bay. Major Mohi Ud Din, head of the taskforce, said they were working "day and night" to keep the wall intact and had managed to build more than 120 kilometres of dykes. Most crucial is the airstrip. With roads frequently cut off by the floods, it is often the only way to receive food and supplies. Tap Mach Dhieu, 43, fled to the camp from his home in nearby Panyijiar County in 2014, during the civil war.

He receives rations from the World Food Programme but must then hire a canoe to go in search of firewood.

"We survive this way," he said.

"People would not be here if (the UN) did not make this dyke. The lifeline of the people is UNMISS, not the government." He despairs at officials, who he said have done little to help since his home was destroyed and cows stolen during the 2013-2018 civil war.

"The flood situation is a natural disaster, but looting cows and burning houses is man-made and that's the government's responsibility," he added.

David Garang, a UN health volunteer, said the disease was a major problem. "All the latrines are flooding into the shelters. There's no cleaning and no collecting of garbage. The situation is dire. What I see in the near future is an outbreak of many diseases," he said. — AFP



KARIM
EASTERBROOK
k.easterbrook@yahoo.com

The writer is a Former School Principal Cambridge UK



The NHS should be dismantled and replaced with one of the many successful healthcare models, such as those in France or Germany.

THE BRITISH National Health Service (NHS) was established on July 5, 1948, making Britain the first Western nation to offer free healthcare at the point of use to its entire population.

Seventy-nine years later, despite being a cornerstone of the British welfare state, the NHS is teetering on the edge of collapse. It has become a 'sacred cow' for all political parties, and many in Britain still believe they have the best healthcare system in the world.

In every election, political parties promise to 'fix' the NHS, but these promises ring hollow, as they know the system is too far gone to be saved. The British media and politicians have convinced voters that the NHS remains one of the world's best health services, yet none of the parties have the courage to admit the truth: the NHS is crumbling, and acknowledging this could cost them votes.

In a recent World Health Organisation ranking, the UK was placed 18th, well behind Oman at 8th, with France and Italy taking the top spots. Once admired as one of the best health systems globally, the NHS is now one of the worst in Europe.

Successive governments bear responsibility for this decline due to poor planning

and a lack of commitment to sustainable healthcare funding. In 2022, health care expenditure of GDP per capita in Germany was 16 per cent higher than in the UK, and in the Netherlands it was 29 per cent higher. This funding shortfall has severely impacted the NHS, which now struggles with increasing patient demand, staff shortages, and outdated infrastructure.

Key issues like workforce retention and hospital capacity have been ignored, while bureaucratic inefficiencies and weak leadership have deepened the crisis.

However, funding is not the only problem driving the NHS toward collapse.

Many NHS hospitals are led by Directors with little or no clinical experience, which undermines effective management. A study in America showed that hospitals run by doctors or those with clinical expertise perform better, which is common sense.

In any field, organisations are more likely to succeed when led by individuals with relevant expertise - schools by qualified headmasters, supermarkets by seasoned retail managers, and car companies by those with industry experience. Unfortunately, even those hospital Directors with medical backgrounds are governed by

their political masters who are focused on targets and budgets, often at the expense of patient care.

While the NHS has some of the world's best doctors, their complaints about poor practices or negligence are frequently ignored, and those who speak out risk their careers. The Lucy Letby case is a recent example of this mismanagement.

Letby, the worst child serial killer in UK history, murdered seven babies and attempted to kill seven more. Doctors raised their concerns with the Directors of the Countess of Chester Hospital, but in spite of this she was allowed to continue working and murdering for another year.

The hospital's Directors appeared to have protected the hospital's reputation over the safety of newborns, even forcing doctors who had raised their concerns to apologise to Letby. The police were only called in when the situation became impossible to ignore.

The Mid Staffordshire Trust scandal is another glaring example of NHS mismanagement. Between 2005 and 2008, patients at the Trust suffered from neglect, poor hygiene, understaffing, and long waits, with many dying from preventable conditions.

Hospital managers focused on meeting financial targets and achieving 'Foundation Trust' status rather than patient care. Using the Hospital Standardised Mortality Ratio, Professor Sir Brian Jarman's statistical analysis revealed that Mid Staffordshire had alarmingly high mortality rates, far above the national average, which helped to validate the complaints from patients and their families. Following the Mid Staffordshire scandal the 2013 Francis Report recommended reforms such as increasing staffing levels, improving accountability and prioritising patient safety.

Sir Keir Starmer, the newly elected Prime Minister, has made raising NHS standards a priority, promising to deliver many of the reforms outlined in the Francis Report. However, these promises sound all too familiar, and I remain unconvinced.

The NHS is fundamentally broken. It should be dismantled and replaced with one of the many successful healthcare models, such as those in France or Germany.

Your cell phone: Your lifeline... or?



RAY PETERSEN
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

The writer is
a media consultant

OUR MOBILES, our cell phones. I can take or leave mine to be honest. But what about you? Are you a prisoner to your phone? Probably... that's why they are called cell phones. I can hear some of you now, saying "Don't give up your day job Ray." But seriously. Did you know, for instance, that we get a release of dopamine when something good happens to us, and that for most of us, one of those times is when our mobile phones ring?

Those infamous 'men in white coats' have revealed that dopamine, a monoamine neurotransmitter in the brain, is a virtual 'chemical messenger,' linking the brain, nerve cells and body. It is often referred to as the 'feelgood factor,' in most of our lives, and small amounts are released to us when we experience pleasure, thereby leading us to repeat whatever gives us the same 'feelgood' outcomes, whatever makes us feel good.

In terms of social media and mobile use, there is an identified process by where phone and social media users, who predominantly communicate with friends, and about 'good' things, anticipate seeing and hearing the 'ping' notifications, the likes, and comments, on their media devices.

In action, a user will post something, maybe a pic, maybe a status update, a 'like,' or respond to someone else's post. Feeling good about doing so gives one their initial 'shot' of dopamine, and anticipating responses, another. Subsequent

posts, responses and comments can offer hundreds of further 'shots' from what is scientifically recognised as the brain's unique reward system.

This creates a continuous cycle, a 'Short Time Dopamine Feedback Loop,' that creates pleasant, 'Pavlovian' responses, themselves triggering an almost perpetually heightened state of 'readiness,' for the next interaction, and we are encouraged to stay engaged with our phones by that 'good' feeling.

What we know, thanks to the researchers, is that the media giants mobile device manufacturers, industry 'techies' and web and app developers have become not only aware of the dopamine phenomenon, but that many of their modern-day device specifications are engineered to capitalise on it, and to drive even greater consumer use through a sometimes compulsive need to keep checking, scrolling, posting and responding to a global market of similarly 'captured,' cell phone users.

Seeking to capitalise on the phenomenon, TikTok's owners, the Bytedance Investment Consortium, is mainly Chinese, and has already invested in significant dopamine research, and is rumoured to be working on algorithm enhanced content to keep users engaged, while others are looking at gambling style activities and rewards to push cell phone users to even continuous engagement.

Did you know,
for instance, that
we get a release of
dopamine when
something good
happens to us, and
that for most of us,
one of those times
is when our mobile
phones ring?

The question being asked is... Could this lead to a form of addiction for even wider exploitation by media companies? Given their voracious appetites, is it also only a matter of time before advertising agencies develop specific techniques to enable engagement with users, 'piggy-backing' on the dopamine rush to sell their products? There are those who will ask... "What's the problem? So, it makes me feel good. So, I spend a bit more time on my phone? So, what?

And they may have a point. For all of us, what's the harm, and what harm can it do? I guess the reality is that in moderation, very few things can do any harm. Modest amounts of anything we find appealing rewards us in fascinating, almost intangible ways. Yet, unfortunately, excesses can lead to issues of obesity, dependency, and worse.

The dopamine phenomenon has the potential to adversely affect productivity through the workforce being distracted or disengaged from their duties. There could be far reaching economic consequences too, with users spending more time on their devices, costing them more. Users could also be drawn into a spending frenzy, so as to make George Orwell's 1984 a comparatively comfortable read.

Maybe, just maybe... Far from being the 'lifeline' that the media would have you believe. Your cell phone will eventually imprison you in a way that you could never have envisaged... Or more scarily, that someone else... did!

Overworked India

THE TRAGIC death of Anna Sebastian Perayil, a 26-year-old employee at the accounting firm Ernst & Young (EY), from cardiac arrest in July has shone a spotlight on India's intensely competitive work culture. It has also sparked a broader conversation about the pressures faced by young professionals and the need for companies to place a higher priority on employees' well-being.

At the time of her death, Anna had spent four months at EY working gruelling 14-hour days and seven-day weeks. In a heartfelt letter to EY, which has gone viral in India, Anna's mother highlighted the "overwhelming pressure" her daughter was under at work — pressure that she believes contributed significantly to Anna's deteriorating health and eventual death.

There have been no reports indicating that Anna had pre-existing medical conditions. On the contrary, her mother's letter notes, Anna was a healthy young woman, who played badminton and kayaked. But, during her time at EY, she had been experiencing severe anxiety, sleeplessness and stress.

In a heartrending conversation with me, Anna's father recalled painful phone calls, in which a tearful Anna would describe arriving home well after midnight, only to receive a call from her manager with yet more work, to be completed by morning. On the one occasion she protested, her manager allegedly replied: "You can work at night. We all do." In the days leading up to her death, Anna complained of chest tightness, and was told by doctors that she was not getting enough sleep.

For many young Indians, Anna's story is all too familiar. With less than 0.2 per cent of applicants gaining admission to some elite colleges in India, they had to fight hard to equip themselves to succeed in the workforce. As it turns out, however, landing a well-paying job in India is a rare triumph even for those with college degrees: the unemployment rate among university graduates is 29 per cent. Compounding the pressure, many of today's young university graduates with jobs must support their siblings at home.

When there are more qualified young people than jobs, and when failure is not an option, the work culture becomes cutthroat. Far from



SHASHI THAROOR

The writer is a former UN under-secretary-general and former Indian Minister of State for External Affairs and Minister of State for Human Resource Development, is an MP for the Indian National Congress

When there
are more qualified
young people than
jobs, and when failure
is not an option,
workplace culture
becomes cutthroat



Overwork is normalised, and boundaries between people's jobs and personal lives disappear.

discouraging such competition, Indian companies stoke it with their emphasis on meeting goals and deadlines at any cost. Overwork is normalised, and boundaries between people's jobs and personal lives disappear. Stories abound of young employees being denied a day off to attend a sibling's wedding or a close relative's funeral. Stress and burnout are inevitable and widespread.

In her letter, Anna's mother urged EY to take steps to ensure its employees' well-being. EY's chairman in India, Rajiv Memani, responded with a LinkedIn post insisting that EY "has always" sought to "create a healthy workplace" and pledging personally to "champion" the well-being of EY employees. It represented a shift from Memani's earlier — and much-criticised — comments doubting the claim that overwork contributed to Anna's death.

EY has acknowledged the need to improve its workload-management practices before. A 2023 study showed that, despite the intense pressure on young Indians to keep their jobs, more than one-third of the firm's employees were likely to quit within 12 months. According to her father, the same was true for Anna, who joined EY soon after that survey was conducted.

Some sneer that Gen Z is simply unable to handle the work pressures that earlier generations took in stride.

This attitude partly reflects the stigma still associated with mental-health issues, and leaves workers hesitant to seek help for fear of negative repercussions. It does not help that traditional Indian society, much like Japanese society, privileges a hierarchical structure in which respect for authority is deeply ingrained. This can make it difficult for employees to push back against unreasonable demands from superiors.

Given these cultural factors, addressing overwork in India requires a multifaceted approach, whereby firms promote mental-health awareness, encourage open communication and foster a supportive work environment. For example, employers could introduce employee-assistance programmes that provide access to counselling and mental-health services for workers dealing with stress and anxiety. Firms might also offer more opportunities to work remotely or allow for flexible schedules. And there is talk of organising wellness events and activities that promote physical and mental health, such as yoga sessions, mindfulness workshops and fitness challenges.

More fundamentally, firms must foster a culture of open communication, so that employees feel comfortable discussing their workloads and stress levels with their managers. Ensuring that leaders and managers are

trained to recognise signs of stress and provide the necessary support to their team members is also essential.

These steps could create a healthier, more supportive work environment — if companies follow through with them. The risk is that employers will pay lip service to such solutions when scrutiny is intense, but return to business as usual when the news cycle moves on.

When it comes to working conditions, we cannot rely entirely on firms to police themselves. That is why Anna's mother also called for an inquiry into the working conditions at EY. And it is why the Indian authorities, including the Union Labour Ministry, have launched an investigation aimed at ensuring justice in Anna's case and preventing similar incidents in the future.

For the same reason, Anna's father suggested that I introduce legislation establishing maximum working hours for "white-collar" office jobs, backed by strict fines and legal sanctions. (India already has laws protecting blue-collar workers, such as by mandating overtime pay.) I have pledged to raise this issue at the first opportunity when Parliament convenes for its winter session.

It is tragic enough that a high-achieving young person had to die to show India that it needs to change. Let us not compound the tragedy by allowing everything to stay the same.

©Project Syndicate, 2024

SPORTS

DEAL SIGNED



OMAN TO HOST CORPORATE LEAGUE 2024 IN SOCCA WORLD CUP PROMOTION

MUSCAT: As part of the Socca Oman Convoy to promote Socca World Cup 2024, which is being hosted by the Sultanate of Oman for the first time in the Middle East and Asia during November and December this year, a partnership agreement was signed between the Oman Automobile Association and Sports Makers Company.

This will enable to organise the Oman Corporate League OCL 2024 and the events accompanying the Socca Convoy during the period from October 20-30, 2024 at the headquarters of the Oman Automobile Association.

Sulaiman bin Abdullah al Rawahi, Director-General, signed on behalf of the Oman Automobile Association, and Waleed bin Juma al Obaidani, CEO of Sports Makers, signed on behalf of Sport Makers, in the presence of several invitees from both parties and various media.

Sulaiman bin Abdullah al Rawahi, Director-General, Oman Automobile Association (OAA), said: “We are delighted to sign a partnership agreement with Sports Makers to host the Oman OCL 2024 Corporate League and the events accompanying the Socca Convoy after the success achieved in the previous stations in Nizwa and Salalah. The OAA continues to support all youth efforts that would contribute to enriching the sports movement and attracting international sporting events to the Sultanate of Oman. At OAA, we seek to host distinguished sporting events of all kinds, given the infrastructure owned by the association, which contributes to attracting various categories of athletes and various segments of society.”

Waleed al Obaidani, President of the Socca Middle East Federation and CEO of Sports Makers, said: “Oman Corporate League OCL 2024 and its accompanying events are the third stop of the Socca Convoy after the success of the first and second stations in Nizwa and Salalah, which witnessed a crowd of more than one hundred and fifty thousand visitors to the various activities of the convoy and millions of views on social media.

“The tournament matches were broadcasted on Oman Sport TV, Dubai Sport TV, Sharjah Sport TV and Al Iraqiya Sports TV, in addition to the Socca International Federation’s live broadcast channels.”

Al Obaidani added: “The third stop in Muscat Governorate will witness the organisation of OCL 2024, which is the most prominent annual sporting event that brings together employees of companies operating in the Sultanate of Oman in various sectors in an exciting football competition, in addition to organising the Community League and the finals of the Socca Oman Open Team League.”

Oman’s AFC U20 hopes dashed after narrow defeat to North Korea



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

OMAN suffered their second defeat in the AFC U20 Asian Cup 2025 Qualifiers as North Korea edged Oman by 1-0 on Friday at the Republican Central Stadium in Dushanbe.

The win for the Korean side confirmed their spot at the AFC U20 Asian Cup China 2025 Finals from Group E. The victory took North Korea to 10 points while Oman remained at three points from one victory against Sri Lanka in the second game while they lost against Malaysia 2-1 in the opener.

In another game, the hosts Tajikistan earned a crucial win over Malaysia 1-0 in Friday’s later match to revive their chances to qualify as the best five of second placed teams among ten groups.

Red Warriors junior team will conclude their group matches on Sunday as they will meet Tajikistan while Malaysia will face eliminated Sri Lanka in another tie of the group.

Oman was looking for a win against North Korea to vie for a spot in the Asian finals for the fourth time in history. Both teams exchanged opportunities in the opening and deciding half with North Korea just shading ball possession.

The only goal in the match was scored in the 80th minute through RI Jong Dok DOK who delivered an essential three points to his team. Oman’s strikers includ-



Highlights

Red Warriors junior team will conclude their group matches on Sunday as they will meet Tajikistan while Malaysia will face eliminated Sri Lanka in another tie of the group

coach Ahmed al Alawi did five substitutions in the second half by entering Said al Ghanboosi, Shihab Ahmed, Abdul Hadi al Habsi, Ghassan Moosa and Faisal al Hadi.

All the substitutes could not change the result as North Korea benefited from the mistake of the defending line to score and earn three essential points.

Oman’s coming game against Tajikistan will not impact the first two positions as the Red Warriors lost their chances to vie among other teams for the five best second-placed teams.

Bagnaia wins Indonesia Grand Prix sprint to close on Martin

MANDALIKA: Reigning MotoGP champion Francesco Bagnaia won the sprint at the Indonesia Grand Prix in Mandalika on Saturday to make up ground on Jorge Martin in the world championship standings after the Pramac Racing rider crashed while leading.

The Italian Ducati rider’s sprint victory in sweltering conditions at the Mandalika International Street Circuit moved him up to 329 points, 12 behind Martin, ahead of Sunday’s race. Bagnaia turned up the aggression after rocketing off the line to move from fourth to second, and took the lead when Martin, who had taken pole in qualifying earlier in the day with a lap record, crashed in the first lap.

Highlights

The Italian Ducati rider’s sprint victory in sweltering conditions at the Mandalika International Street Circuit moved him up to 329 points, 12 behind Martin



(L-R) Second-placed Enea, first-placed Francesco, third-placed Marc. — AFP

After moving in front, Bagnaia coasted to victory and crossed the finish line ahead of Ducati team-mate Enea Bastianini and Gresini Racing’s Marc Marquez.

“Everybody knows how important it was to gain points. We gained 12, so thanks to the mistake of Jorge, we are close back again,” Bagnaia said.

“From the start of the weekend, it’s not been ideal for us. I’m struggling a bit. But during the qualifying and this morning in FP2, then the race, I started to learn many more things.

“When I saw Jorge crash, I just said, ‘OK, I don’t have to push’. I’m very happy. Thanks to my team that always is doing a perfect job. Tomorrow will be tough, but in any case, happy for today.” Marquez crashed twice in qualifying and started in the fourth row, but got a remarkable start to move up to fifth in the first lap.

“The Q2 is a nightmare for me at the moment, but still we keep work-

ing, we try to understand what’s going on,” Marquez said.

“In the race, suddenly, when the tyres started to drop, I feel better and better and better.

“After that qualifying and practice, the third position on the podium was more than better.”

Marco Bezzecchi of VR46 Racing, who began on the front row, was second for the first half of the sprint but dropped to fourth after he locked up his front tyre and nearly crashed into Bagnaia.

After dropping out of the lead Martin did his best to work his way back up from the bottom but could not secure any points, frantically overtaking a string of riders to finish 10th. — Reuters

STRONG SUPPORT



Italy Jannik Sinner

SINNER ‘VERY DISAPPOINTED’ AS DOPING CASE REIGNITES WITH WADA APPEAL

BEIJING: Jannik Sinner said on Saturday he was “very disappointed” but confident after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) appealed the decision to clear him in his steroid case, seeking a ban of up to two years.

The Italian world number one twice tested positive for traces of the banned substance clostebol in March but was exonerated and allowed to carry on playing.

The 23-year-old went on to win the US Open earlier this month for his second major crown, weeks after the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) found he “bears no fault or negligence”.

The ITIA accepted his explanation that the drug entered his system when his physiotherapist used a spray containing it to treat a cut, then provided massage and sports therapy to the player.

WADA on Thursday appealed the high-profile case to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

“It is WADA’s view that the finding of ‘no fault or negligence’ was not correct under the applicable rules,” it said in a statement on Saturday.

WADA made the appeal announcement as Sinner was on court at the China Open, where the defending champion fought back to beat 69th-ranked Russian Roman Safiullin 3-6, 6-2, 6-3 in Beijing. “WADA is seeking a period of ineligibility of between one and two years,” it added.

Sinner has consistently denied knowingly doping and said after his win: “Obviously I’m very disappointed and also surprised.

Player scepticism

After winning the US Open, Sinner said that the controversy over his failed tests was still on his mind. He defeated Taylor Fritz in straight sets to add the New York title to his Australia Open triumph in January.

“It was not easy, that’s for sure, but I tried to stay focused, with which I guess I’ve done a great job,” he said.

The decision to clear the Italian was met with scepticism by some players in the locker room who suggested that Sinner had benefited from preferential treatment due to his status in the sport

— AFP

Sri Lanka scent series victory as New Zealand 199-5 after follow-on

SRI LANKA were just five wickets away from a crushing second Test and series victory over New Zealand on Saturday, with the tourists 199-5 at stumps (on) the third day, having followed on after collapsing to 88 all out in their first innings.

Tom Blundell was not out on 47 and Glenn Phillips on 32 when bad light forced an early end to play in Galle after debutant off-spinner Nishan Peiris took three top-order wickets.

“Obviously the first innings wasn’t ideal. It was a bitter pill to swallow,” (said) Blundell afterwards.

“Things were happening very quickly. Sri Lanka are a very good team and their spinners bowled really well.”

Devon Conway, battling to save both his team and his place in the side, joined forces with former captain Kane Williamson in a dogged 97-run partnership for the second wicket.

De Silva lured Conway, who had made 61 off 62 balls, into a drive towards the vacant deep cover boundary that was caught by Dinesh Chandimal in a spectacular backward running catch.

Williamson, the world’s second-ranked batsman behind England’s Joe Root, departed when he misjudged a shot off Peiris, with Ramesh Mendis grabbing a tumbling catch at long-on.

Tom Latham had been the first wicket to fall after the follow-on was enforced just before lunch, caught by Pathum Nissanka for a duck at short leg off Peiris, who earlier had taken three first-innings wickets.

DICTATE TERMS

Sri Lanka declared on Friday on a mammoth 602-5 for their first innings, then spinner Prabath Jayasuriya took 6-42 for his ninth five-wicket haul as the visitors failed to reach three figures.

Jayasuriya will need to dismiss all five remaining New Zealand batsmen to equal the record for the fastest bowler to 100 Test wickets, held since 1896 by England’s George Lohmann who reached the milestone in his 16th Test.

“I love bowling in Galle,” he said. “But that milestone looks out of reach now.

“Obviously, when you have runs on the board, you can dictate terms like we did today,” he added. “We will be delighted with a series win.”

Resuming at a precarious 22-2 in their first innings, New Zealand’s batsmen



Sri Lanka’s Nishan celebrates after taking the wicket of Kane Williamson. — AFP

barely put up a fight, and their highest partnership was the 20 added by last pair Mitchell Santner, who top-scored with 29, and William O’Rourke (two).

Captain de Silva took five catches at first slip to tie the record for most in a Test innings by a non-wicketkeeper, a milestone shared with 15 others. — AFP

Royal Oman Stallions crown D10 champion

MUSCAT: A spirited Royal Oman Stallions emerged as deserving champions in the fourth edition of Oman D10 League, which concluded at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat recently.

The fourth edition was played with six teams competing in three round-robin rounds, with the top two playing the finals.

In a thrilling finale at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground, the Royal Oman Stallions emerged victorious, defeating Yalla Shabab Giants by six wickets to claim the Oman D10 League title.

Yalla Shabab Giants, batting first, struggled to gain momentum as key wickets fell early. Mujibur Imran Ali (14 off 14) and Zohaib Amanat (27* off 19) tried to stabilise the innings, but the standout performance came from Zikria Islam, who hammered an unbeaten 36 off just 14 balls, pushing the Giants to 99/4 in their 10 overs. The Stallions’ bowlers, especially



Champions - Royal Oman Stallions

Hasnain Ali Shah (2-17), kept the Giants under pressure, taking crucial wickets at key intervals.

In response, the Royal Oman Stallions started confidently, with Naseem Khushi smashing 18 off 8 balls. Vinayak Shukla (21* off 10) and Karan Sonavale (6* off 5) guided the Stallions to a comfortable chase, reaching 100/1 in just 3.5

overs. The target was made easier by the consistent flow of boundaries, and the Stallions claimed victory with six wickets in hand.

This victory secured the Royal

Oman Stallions’ place as champions of the Oman D10 League, starting off the season on a high.

Chaitanya Khimji, team owner of Royal Oman Stallions and Yalla Shabab, remarked, “The feeling of winning a championship at the start of the season is certainly what we set our goals for. It was a dream come true seeing both Royal Oman Stallions and Yalla Shabab compete for a cup in the finals, which happened for the first time in three years. I wish much more success, and we are hopeful of delivering quality cricket over the season ahead.”

At the post-match presentation ceremony, Mr Madhursinh Jesrani, Secretary - Oman Cricket, presented the honours, as Rafiullah bagged the Player of the Match and Mujibur Ali (Yalla Shabab Giants) was adjudged Player of the Tournament for his all-round performance of 348 runs and 22 wickets.

MAN CITY FEEL RODRI ABSENCE IN NEWCASTLE DRAW



Manchester City's Kyle Walker in action with Newcastle United's Joelinton. — Reuters



Newcastle United's Bruno Guimaraes reacts. — Reuters



Newcastle United's Dan Burn in action with Manchester City's Erling Haaland. — Reuters

MANCHESTER CITY failed to shrug off the absence of Rodri in a 1-1 draw at Newcastle as they dropped Premier League points for the second consecutive game on Saturday.

The Spaniard has been ruled out for the rest of the season due to a serious knee injury picked up in last weekend's fiery 2-2 draw with title rivals Arsenal.

Josko Gvardiol put the visitors in front at St James' Park, but Newcastle were well worthy of the point given to them by Anthony Gordon's second-half penalty.

A point edges City two points clear at the top of the table, but they could be overtaken by Liverpool, Aston Villa and Arsenal by the end of the weekend.

Guardiola described Rodri, who is unbeaten in his past 52 Premier League appearances stretching back to February 2023, as "irreplaceable" but vowed to find a collective solution.

Teenager Rico Lewis was thrust forward into a central midfield role alongside Mateo Kovacic.

But City lacked the control and poise so often provided by Rodri on and off the ball.

Newcastle have lost only one of their opening six Premier League games of the season but until now results have been better than the performances from Eddie Howe's men this season.

The Magpies were also missing key personnel with last season's top goalscorer Alexander Isak out injured.

Neither side had seriously threatened until Gvardiol collected Jack Grealish's pass inside the box and produced a finish Erling Haaland would be proud of by curling a low shot into the far corner.

Guardiola described Rodri, who is unbeaten in his past

52

Premier League appearances stretching back to February 2023

City should have quickly doubled their lead when Nick Pope's clearance fell to Ilkay Gundogan, who mishit his attempted lob of the England goalkeeper rather than picking out Haaland.

Newcastle had to wait till first-half stoppage time to test Ederson.

Joelinton brilliantly took down a Ki-eran Trippier free-kick and fired goal-wards only to be denied by his Brazil team-mate.

Gordon levels for Newcastle

However, Newcastle were rewarded for a bright start to the second half.

Gordon got in behind and was brought down by Ederson as he tried to round the goalkeeper.

The England international picked himself up to confidently slot home the penalty.

Roared on by vociferous home crowd, Newcastle had the champions clinging on.

Referee Jarred Gillett turned down appeals for a second penalty when Kyle Walker challenged Joelinton before Ederson flew off his line to deny Gor-don.

Guardiola responded with the intro-duction of last season's Premier League player of the year in Phil Foden and City turned the momentum around to finish strongly.

Foden had City's best chance to snatch all three points when he fired too close to Pope. And Pope was needed to produce a stunning save from Ber-nardo Silva's volley.

Haaland also headed at the goalkeep-er in stoppage time as the Norwegian was held scoreless for the first time in the Premier League this season.

City could still have suffered their first defeat of the season had Sean Long-staff not pulled a great chance wide in the final 10 minutes. But the dropped points offer more encouragement to City's title rivals that their grip on the title is beginning to loosen. — AFP

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE TABLE

English Premier League table after Saturday's early match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Man City 6 4 2 0 14 6 14
Liverpool 5 4 0 1 10 1 12
Aston Villa 5 4 0 1 10 7 12
Arsenal 5 3 2 0 8 3 11

Newcastle 6 3 2 1 8 7 11
Chelsea 5 3 1 1 11 5 10
Brighton 5 2 3 0 8 4 9
Nottm Forest 5 2 3 0 6 4 9
Fulham 5 2 2 1 7 5 8
Tottenham 5 2 1 2 9 5 7
Man Utd 5 2 1 2 5 5 7
Brentford 5 2 0 3 7 9 6
Bournemouth 5 1 2 2 5 8 5
West Ham 5 1 1 3 5 9 4
Leicester 5 0 3 2 6 8 3
Crystal Palace 5 0 3 2 4 7 3
Ipswich 5 0 3 2 3 8 3

Southampton 5 0 1 4 2 9 1
Everton 5 0 1 4 5 14 1
Wolves 5 0 1 4 5 14 1

Note: Top four qualify for the 2025/26 UEFA Champions League league phase; Bottom three relegated to Championship

BUSINESS

Terms and conitions apply

Empower your future today

With **BankDhofar** Ladies Account

Start Saving with BankDhofar Ladies account!
To know more, visit [www.bankdhofar.com](#)

2479 1111

[www.bankdhofar.com](#)

bankdhofar

S&P upgrades Oman’s credit rating to ‘BBB-’



The agency expects Oman to achieve moderate fiscal surpluses of about 1.9% of GDP annually from 2024 to 2027, assuming an average oil price of \$80 per barrel.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

STANDARD and Poor's (S and P) has upgraded Oman's sovereign credit rating from "BB+" to "BBB-", marking a significant return to investment-grade status after nearly seven years of being rated below investment grade.

The upgrade reflects Oman's improving financial outlook and its success in addressing the economic challenges brought on by the global oil price decline and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The new "BBB-" rating places Oman back in the lowest tier of the investment-grade category, signalling a safer environment for investors.

According to S and P, the upgrade is a direct result of Oman's commitment to economic reforms aimed at strengthening public finances, increasing fiscal surpluses and reducing public debt. The stable outlook associated with the rating suggests confidence in the country's ability to maintain this progress over the medium term.

The report highlights key achievements, including the government's efforts to balance revenue and expenditure through a medium-term fiscal plan.

Initiatives aimed at reducing the state's public debt and improving governance within state-owned enterprises have played a significant role in bolster-

Highlights

Real GDP growth is projected to average around

2%

per year over the same period, driven by higher oil production and growth in the non-oil sectors.

ing Oman's financial position.

The establishment of entities like the Oman Energy Development Company (EDO) and the Integrated Gas Company (IGC) helped streamline the management of revenues and expenses in the oil and gas sectors, making the financial structure more transparent and efficient.

The agency expects Oman to achieve moderate fiscal surpluses of about 1.9% of GDP annually from 2024 to 2027, assuming an average oil price of \$80 per barrel.

These surpluses will enable Oman to continue reducing its public debt levels and build financial reserves, providing flexibility in managing future economic shocks. By 2027, the agency forecasts Oman's total public debt will decrease to 29% of GDP.

Real GDP growth is projected to average around 2% per year over the same period, driven by higher oil production and growth in the non-oil sectors.

Additionally, the report

expects Oman's current account to maintain an average surplus of 1.2% of GDP from 2024 to 2027, further reinforcing the country's financial stability.

S and P also noted that Oman has successfully curbed inflation, which is expected to average just 1.4% annually during the forecast period.

After a low inflation rate of 0.9% in 2023, the country remains on track to keep price increases moderate, thanks to prudent economic management.

Meanwhile, credit growth in the private sector is expected to remain strong, supporting economic expansion through increased lending, which is projected to rise by 5% to 6% annually.

Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, stated that the improved credit rating is a testament to the government's efforts to restore fiscal balance and achieve financial sustainability. He highlighted the positive impact of measures such as the Public Debt Law and the restructuring of government companies, which have improved operational efficiency and enhanced investor confidence.

Al Habsi emphasised that the government remains committed to continuing reforms and utilising financial surpluses to drive broader economic and social gains, with strong cooperation from both the private sector and civil society institutions.

NEW NET-ZERO CENTRE TO CHART OMAN’S CARBON NEUTRALITY PATHWAY

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

A national Net-Zero Centre, currently being established pursuant to the Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, will be tasked with orchestrating the Sultanate of Oman's pathway to Net-Zero by 2050.

According to a key official, the Net-Zero Centre will be formally unveiled shortly once an "alignment" on its mandate, currently ongoing with various ministries and government stakeholder institutions, is completed.

Speaking at the Korea-Oman Green Industry Business Roundtable, which was held in Muscat recently, Mohsin al Jabri of the Oman Net-Zero Centre said the primary remit of the new institution is to develop and execute the country's new zero strategy.

Importantly, the Oman Net-Zero Centre will have a key role in advising the policymaker on Net-Zero and sustainability issues. It will also coordinate and monitor decarbonisation and energy transition projects. Furthermore, in addition to capacity building and awareness development, the centre will also enable business by supporting sustainable finance and innovation advancement.

"One of the things that will be done by Oman Net-Zero Centre to ensure that we will have a pool of projects, which will take us first to 2030 with a 21 per cent (CO2) reduction, and then after that, we're going gradually to achieve our Net-Zero target by



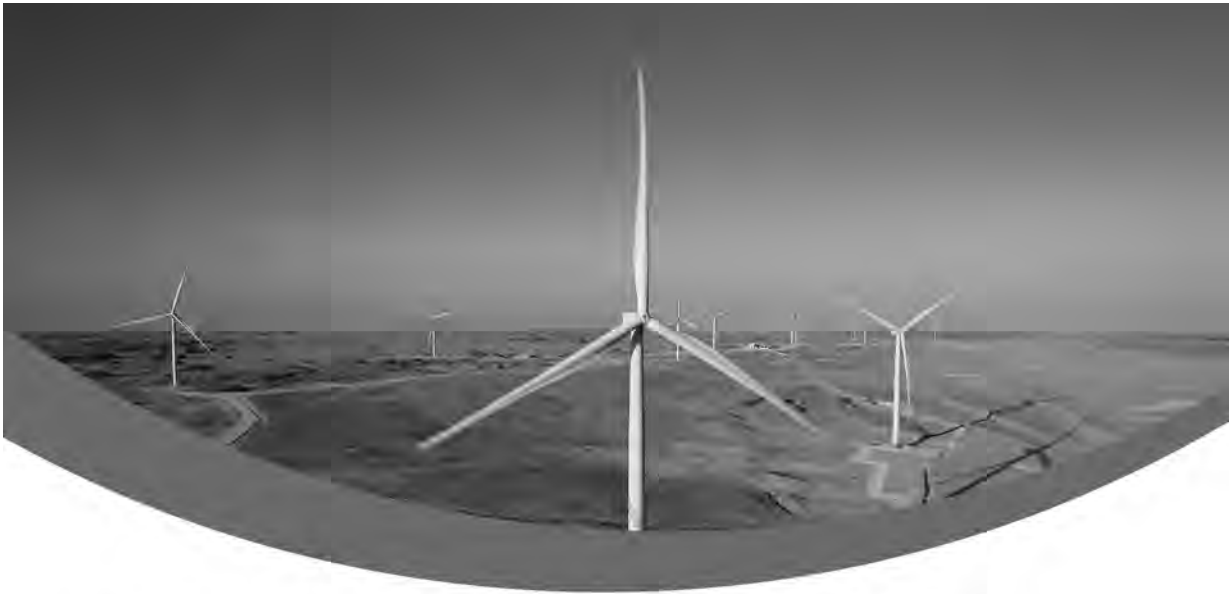
Key government and public sector officials from Oman and Korea attending the Green Energy Roundtable held in Muscat recently.

2050," he noted.

Prioritised for implementation from this pool of projects will be those focused on driving energy efficiency, said Al Jabri. "We will start by executing this kind of projects because we believe that in both the public and private sectors, there are opportunities to reduce emissions by executing energy efficiency projects. When setting our priorities, we will also define what would be potential projects to be implemented with potential financing, which will come during the execution (phase)."

Part of its remit, the official further added, is to develop an ecosystem to attract green and sustainable finance to help fund projects critical to achieving Oman's Net-Zero strategy in a cost-competitive manner, he added.

TURN TO PAGE 15



AUCTION ROUND III

Auction for the Sale of International Renewable Energy Certificates (I-RECs) from Dhofar Wind IPP

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (Company), a member of Nama Group, is commencing its third auction for the sale of International Renewable Energy Certificate (I-REC) from the 50-megawatt (MW) utility-scale wind power project located in Dhofar, the Sultanate of Oman. This auction is a unique opportunity for interested entities to acquire I-RECs, thereby advancing their commitment to renewable energy and environment.

Tender Number	OPWP/2024/28
Auction Publication Date	25 th September 2024
Auction Deadline	27 th October 2024 at 12PM Gulf Standard Time (GST)
Instructions to Auction	The auction instruction documents can be accessed electronically, following a registration process, through the Company website.
Queries	For any queries about the auction process please e-mail: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om
Additional Information	- International and local entities who are interested in bidding for I-RECS will need to register on the Company e-tendering system. - Auction submission is electronic and to be done through the Company e-tendering system.



BUSINESS/ADVERTORIAL



NBO NAMED BEST PERFORMING COMPANY IN LARGE CAPITAL CATEGORY

MUSCAT: Recognising its commitment to excellence in all operations, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has been named Best Performing Company in the Large Capital category at the Alam al-Iktisaad Wal A'mal (AIWA) Awards. The award was announced in a gala ceremony held under the auspices of Shaikh Sabbaa bin Hamdan al Saadi, Secretary-General of the Secretariat-General of National Celebrations, on

September 25, 2024 at the Sheraton Oman. Ali bin Mustafa al Lawati, Assistant General Manager and Head of Private Banking & Segments at NBO, said, "We are delighted to be recognised again as the Best Performing Company at the AIWA Awards. This award reflects our commitment to delivering innovative, customer-centric solutions and continuously pushing the boundaries of

excellence in the financial sector. Our success is driven by our teams' hard work and dedication, and our focus remains on enhancing customer experiences, advancing digital transformation, and building stronger, more lasting connections with our customers. As we look ahead, NBO will continue to pioneer new ways to make banking more accessible and seamless at every touchpoint."

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL
RECOGNISED AS BEST
PERFORMING LARGE
CAP COMPANY



MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman's best bank has been recognised as the 'Best Performing Company' in the Large Cap category at the prestigious Alam Al-Iktisaad Awards 2024. This accolade comes as part of the 16th edition of the annual survey conducted by United Securities, recognising top-performing companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) based on seven key financial performance metrics. Sohar International's exceptional performance across Revenue Growth, Operating Profit (EBIT) Growth, Net Profit Growth, Return on Average Assets, Return on Average Equity, Operating Profit Margin, and Net Profit Margin placed the bank at the forefront of the large cap segment. This recognition reflects the bank's unwavering commitment to delivering sustainable growth, profitability, and value to its stakeholders. Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, stated "We are honoured to be recognised as the Best Performing Large Cap Company on the MSX, an achievement that truly embodies our journey of growth with excellence. This accolade is not just a reflection of our financial strength but also a testament to our strategic vision, the dedication of our team, and our relentless pursuit of innovation and customer-centricity. As we continue to expand our footprint, we remain committed to setting new standards in the industry, delivering sustainable value to our shareholders, and contributing positively to the economic landscape of our nation."

OQEP holds roadshow
in OCCI Suhar

MUSCAT: The second OQEP IPO roadshow took place at the Suhar Branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). The company is transitioning from a closed joint-stock company to a public joint-stock company. This initiative aims to raise awareness about the importance of the initial public offering (IPO), which plays a crucial role in channelling the savings of citizens, residents, and investors into the IPO. Eng Ahmed bin Said al Azkawi, CEO of OQEP, delivered a presentation on the offering process, announcing that 25% of the company's shares are allocated for the IPO, with 40% reserved for individuals. The shares are priced at 351 baisas each for Omani individuals and 390 baisas for non-Omanis, aiming to encourage investment and promote the use of savings in profitable ventures. Al Azkawi emphasised that this offering represents the largest of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman and is a groundbreaking initiative in the production and exploration sector. Al Azkawi highlighted the company's strong operational and financial performance, showcasing a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) in revenues of 14% since 2010, along with a 19% CAGR in earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation. He emphasised that the company's sharp focus on maintaining a high-quality, low-cost operating asset base has allowed it to achieve operating costs of \$9.4 per barrel of oil equivalent (boe) in 2023, compared to an average of \$13.8/boe among peers selected by



Wood Mackenzie II. This low operating cost base, combined with a stable and attractive fiscal regime, supported an Adjusted Free Cash Flow generation of \$16.0 per barrel of oil equivalent (boe) in 2023, which is significantly higher than the average of \$5.9/boe among its selected peer group in the same year. Eng Said bin Ali al Abri, Board Member of the OCCI and Head of the Chamber's Al Batinah North Branch, highlighted the importance of IPOs in stimulating the national economy and broadening the ownership base of government assets. He emphasised that these initiatives are part of economic policies aimed at attracting global

investments and improving corporate governance practices. Al Abri also noted that this offering will enrich the Muscat Stock Exchange with high-capital companies, thereby attracting both domestic and foreign investments. Al Abri pointed out that OQEP is one of the leading companies in oil and gas exploration and production, owned by OQ Group and the Oman Investment Authority. As the only wholly government-owned operator in this sector, the offering of 25% of its shares represents a promising opportunity for investors, given its capabilities and profit generation potential outlined in the issuance prospectus.

SOHAR Port and Freezone celebrates two decades of pioneering Oman's prosperity

SUHAR: Under the auspice of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, SOHAR Port and Freezone celebrated two decades of unparalleled achievements. The event, which was attended by key government dignitaries and partners, showcased SOHAR's legacy and standards of excellence in ports and freezones management. Leveraging Oman's strategic location as a gateway between East and West, SOHAR has become a pivotal player in Oman's integration into the global supply chain, pioneering advancements in the logistics sector while stimulating economic diversification and sustainability. Since inception, SOHAR has demonstrated robust economic performance, attracting a remarkable total of \$29 billion in investments to date. In H1 of 2024 alone, the port and freezone has secured \$3.4 billion in investment, underscoring its appeal as a premier destination for

Highlights

In H1 of 2024 alone, the port and freezone has secured

\$3.4 BILLION

in investment, underscoring its appeal as a premier destination for international trade and commerce.



international trade and commerce. The infrastructure has undergone significant enhancements, with the recent expansion of SOHAR Freezone Phase 2, introducing 345 hectares of additional leasable land. This strategic expansion aligns with the increasing demand for industrial and commercial spaces which is poised to facilitate increased connectivity and economic collaboration on a global scale. "SOHAR Port and Freezone plays a crucial role in the daily lives of people across Oman, as the goods that flow through our facilities ultimately reach the homes of every

citizen. Our performance over the past two decades reflects our commitment to excellence and our strategic importance as a global logistics hub. By continuously enhancing our operations and cultivating strong partnerships, we ensure a steady supply of essential goods that bolster the growth and progress of both local industries and the broader national economy," said Eng Abdullah bin Khalfan al Jabri, Chairman of the Board of SOHAR Port and Freezone. "SOHAR Port and Freezone has transcended traditional infrastruc-



ture; it has become a vital catalyst for commerce and economic growth in Oman. Over the last two decades, we have built a thriving integrated business ecosystem that not only supports local development but also enhances our global competitiveness. As we celebrate our achievements, we remain steadfast in our responsibility to driving innovation and accelerating the discovery of opportunities that will further propel Oman's economic advancements on the world stage," said Emile Hoogsteden, CEO Of SOHAR Port.

OIA boosts Oman Vision 2040 accomplishments

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

THE OMAN Investment Authority (OIA) has made significant contributions to the economic achievements outlined in the latest report of Oman Vision 2040. As a central force in the Sultanate of Oman's economic strategy, OIA's actions have been instrumental in promoting private sector engagement, fostering investment and driving international cooperation.

OIA's efforts have been focused on boosting both domestic and international investments across various geographic regions and sectors, contributing to financial stability and sustainable growth.

The Authority has worked to reduce the debt of companies under its management, which in turn has elevated their credit ratings, allowing them to operate more efficiently in an increasingly competitive global market.

A key component of OIA's strategy has been the promotion of strategic partnerships and joint ventures aimed at attracting foreign investment into Oman.

The report highlights OIA's involvement in 13 international funds, alongside the launch of the Future



OIA's actions have been instrumental in promoting private sector engagement, fostering investment and driving international cooperation.

RO 800 million was injected into the State's General Budget, and assets under OIA's management increased by over

RO 1.7 billion bringing the total to RO 19.2 billion.

Fund Oman, a move designed to safeguard the financial future of Oman. The Authority also completed six major national projects valued at over RO 4 billion, further emphasising its critical role in Oman's economic development.

The 2023 performance of OIA, as reflected in the Oman Vision 2040 report, underscores its impact on the nation's economy.

RO 800 million was injected into the State's General Budget, and assets under OIA's management increased by over RO 1.7 billion, bringing the total to RO 19.2 billion.

Additionally, OIA prepaid RO 300 million of corporate debt, reducing financial burdens for key companies. The Authority attracted RO 180 million in direct foreign investment to Oman, demonstrating its ability to draw international interest into the country's growing economy.

OIA's role in local economic development is further reflected in its capital spending, with RO 2.1 billion directed towards projects in various sectors. These investments have had a positive ripple effect across the country, contributing to growth and enhancing Oman's infrastructure. Furthermore, OIA has been a major supporter of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), awarding contracts and purchase orders to more than 496 SMEs, bolstering local business development and employment.

As Oman continues to navigate the path outlined by Vision 2040, OIA remains a cornerstone of its economic strategy. The Authority's ability to foster sustainable returns, promote strategic investment and create valuable international partnerships places it at the forefront of the nation's journey towards a diversified and resilient economy.

PRICE UPTICK



Key contributors to the rise include food and non-alcoholic beverages

OMAN'S INFLATION RATE RISES 1.1% IN AUGUST 2024

MUSCAT: Oman's inflation rate increased by 1.1% in August 2024 compared to the same period in 2023, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Key contributors to the rise include food and non-alcoholic beverages (up 3.3%) and housing-related costs (up 1.7%).

Notably, transportation costs dropped by 2.7%, while prices for vegetables saw the largest increase at 11.5%. Musandam Governorate recorded the highest inflation at 2.3%, followed by Al Sharqiyah South at 2.2%, and other governorates also experiencing moderate increases. — **ONA**

NEW NET-ZERO CENTRE TO CHART OMAN'S CARBON NEUTRALITY PATHWAY

FROM PAGE 13

Other key roles of the Centre are as follows: To propose and regularly update Net-Zero targets for various sectors, as well as pathways and corresponding roadmaps; Suggest policies norms and standards for Net-Zero across industry and government sectors; Executive the national strategy for Energy Efficiency across all sectors; Set up and manage the system of carbon credit certification; and Manage GHG emission compliance.

Earlier, in opening remarks, Korean Ambassador Kim Kiejoo stated: "This roundtable has three important contributions to our joint work and collective commitment.

"First, it is a platform where the Korean and Omani stakeholders are engaged in pursuing our clearly focused goal of advancing green transition, which is a global imperative.

"Indeed, our two countries are committed to achieving Net-Zero by 2050. This collective goal requires ambitious and innovative approaches as well as collaboration. As such, our two countries are making a lot of efforts to achieve the global goal."

The daylong roundtable attracted a number of entities operating within the green energy and sustainability ecosystem in Oman and Korea. Supporting the event from the Korean side were the Ministry of Environment, Korea Environmental Industry and Technology Institute, and Korea Trade Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA).

PACT SIGNED TO BOOST GREEN HYDROGEN INNOVATION IN OMAN

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

OMAN'S leading solar PV and renewable energy company, Nafath Renewable Energy LLC, and US-based leader in sustainable energy technologies, FuelCell Energy Inc, have signed a collaboration agreement to drive advancements in green hydrogen production in Oman.

The announcement was made during the third edition of IEEE PowerTalks, under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

This partnership positions Oman as a key player in green hydrogen production, focusing on renewable energy and hydrogen technologies. Nafath will leverage its expertise in solar PV and renewable projects, while FuelCell Energy brings its expertise in hydro-



The agreement was signed by Abdullah al Saidi, CEO of Nafath Renewable Energy, and Mathieu Lauga, Director, Business Development at FuelCell Energy.

gen production and clean power generation. Together, they aim to enhance hydrogen production, storage and utilisation through sustainable solutions, advancing Oman's green energy ambitions.

"We are proud to partner with FuelCell Energy, a global leader in green hydrogen technologies. This agreement reinforces our shared vision of developing innovative, sustainable energy systems.

Together, we aim to push the boundaries of green hydrogen production in Oman and beyond," said Abdullah al Saidi, CEO of Nafath Renewable Energy.

Mathieu Lauga, Director, Business Development at FuelCell Energy, said, "We believe our collaboration with Nafath Renewable Energy will expand the impact of green hydrogen production and utilisation in the Middle East.

"We are eager to contribute our expertise to this strategic initiative, which can serve as a model for future projects in the region."

Nafath Renewable Energy is known for its high-performance solar PV and renewable energy projects in Oman. FuelCell Energy, with over 531 fuel cell technology patents, is a global leader in sustainable energy solutions, addressing critical challenges in energy and urbanisation.

Maiden harvest of Omani commercial-scale saffron in November

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, SEPT 28

THE first crop of Omani saffron from the commercial scale cultivation project under way in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is expected to be ready for harvest in November, according to Dr Masoud al Azri, Director-General of Agriculture and Fisheries Marketing at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Speaking to the *Observer* last week, Dr Al Azri said that the Saffron Oman project is currently in its planting stage, and is expected to yield its first harvest by November.

According to the official, the project is a result of the Food Security Lab organised by the ministry in November of 2023, and

has made significant progress in preparing the land for cultivation despite the challenging conditions of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

The project's location, which spans over an area of over 25,000 square metres, was chosen specifically due to its ideal climate.

Speaking to the media, owner of Saffron Oman, Ahmed bin Ali al Hanshi, explained, "The area is ideal for saffron cultivation because saffron is a winter crop that requires low temperatures, below 18 degrees Celsius to start forming bulbs, and then during the flowering phase, it needs a certain temperature for the bulbs to give you a dense flowering yield."

According to the owner, over half a million bulbs of saffron weighing over nine tonnes were imported from the Netherlands for



Local commercial scale saffron production will mark a significant step in the country's efforts to boost agricultural investment and food security.

the initial planting stage. The project will then rely on multiplying those bulbs to avoid future imports and to achieve self-sufficiency.

The owner hopes that commercial saffron production will provide an opportunity to support the local saffron market and expand into regional and global markets.

The project is part of the government's efforts of boosting investments within the agricultural sector, while also establishing food security and diversifying the economy in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

The agricultural market in Oman is currently valued at around \$2.11 billion, according to global market research firm Mordor Intelligence. The figure is expected to grow by 6.16 per cent in five years to reach \$2.84 billion.

OPINION

Stablecoins and CBDC fuel cryptocurrency adoption globally



STEFANO VIRGILLI

stefano@virgilli.com
The author is a member of the International Press Association

THE global landscape of central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) is facing a critical juncture as some nations like Canada and Australia reconsider their retail CBDC initiatives. This shift has raised significant concerns about interoperability, a challenge that plagues both the CBDC and the broader Web3 ecosystem.

Interoperability, the seamless connection and interaction between different systems, is vital for the success of CBDCs.

They need to function smoothly with various stakeholders, legacy systems, and potentially even foreign CBDCs. Similarly, in the Web3 world, interoperability challenges hinder the connection of different blockchains, limiting their potential.

The hesitancy of some countries towards retail CBDCs threatens to create a fragmented CBDC landscape, mirroring the current state of Web3, which is already grappling with numerous incompatible blockchains and layers.

This fragmentation can hinder liquidity and impede the widespread adoption of both CBDCs and Web3 technologies.

However, the countries that continue to develop CBDCs have a unique opportunity to shape the standards for

CBDC interoperability. They can learn from the challenges faced by existing blockchains and design CBDCs from the ground up with interoperability in mind.

This can lead to a more unified and decentralised network of blockchains, fostering greater adoption and innovation.

While there are various technical approaches to achieving CBDC interoperability, the precise path remains uncertain. Collaboration between central banks and experienced developers is crucial to navigate these complexities and develop effective solutions.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is emerging as a significant player in the global cryptocurrency landscape, accounting for 7.5% of the total transaction volume despite less than half of the adult population having access to traditional banking services.

This growth is primarily fueled by institutional investors, who account for the vast majority of transactions in the region. Financial technology companies Robinhood and Revolut are reportedly exploring the possibility of launching their own stablecoins, signaling a growing interest from traditional finance firms in the lucrative stablecoin

Highlights

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is emerging as a significant player in the global cryptocurrency landscape, accounting for

7.5%

of the total transaction volume despite less than half of the adult population having access to traditional banking services.

market.

This move follows the successful forays into stablecoins by companies like PayPal, whose PYUSD stablecoin has reached a significant market capitalisation since its launch last year.

The potential entry of Robinhood and Revolut into the stablecoin arena comes at a time when the European Union's MiCA regulations are set to bring greater clarity and stricter guidelines to the stablecoin industry.

While these regulations could boost stablecoin activity in the region, they also pose challenges, as highlighted by Tether's CEO, who has criticised certain aspects of MiCA.

However, both Robinhood and Revolut have remained cautious in their public statements, with Robinhood stating there are "no imminent plans" for a stablecoin launch and Revolut expressing a desire to "further grow" its crypto offerings without specifically mentioning stablecoins.

Nonetheless, the reports suggest that these companies are actively evaluating the potential of entering the stablecoin market, a move that could significantly impact the competitive landscape and further accelerate the adoption of stablecoins in the financial ecosystem.

BEIJING DIRECTS FISCAL FIREPOWER AT ITSELF

IT'S BEEN a busy week for Chinese officials. The government plans to issue special sovereign bonds worth about 2 trillion yuan (\$284.4 billion), media reported on Thursday, citing sources with knowledge of the matter.

The same day, the country's top leaders pledged to deploy "necessary fiscal spending" to meet this year's economic growth target, following the central bank's sweeping rate cuts and other easing measures a few days ago.

Yet none of this will be enough to alter the \$18 trillion economy's long-term prospects. The special government debt would equal to just 1.4% of last year's GDP - not quite the "whatever it takes" big-bang approach many economists and investors had been hoping for.

To compare, when Beijing unleashed a 4 trillion yuan stimulus programme back in 2009, that was roughly 12% of the economy.

Moreover, it's unclear how much of the proceeds will actually end up in consumers' pockets. As part of the package, 1 trillion yuan will be used to boost domestic spending, according to Reuters, while the other half will be to help local governments tackle debt problems.

Authorities are also considering issuing an additional 1 trillion yuan of sovereign bonds to recapitalise its biggest banks for the first time since 2008, Bloomberg reported earlier this week, citing sources.

Details are scarce, but it appears that the bulk of Beijing's fiscal firepower will be aimed at itself - mainly bailing out local governments and bolstering state-owned banks.

And even the initiatives aimed at consumers look disappointing: the Ministry of Finance will target expanding an existing goods trade-in programme for households and businesses and hand out a monthly allowance of about 800 yuan per child to households with two or more kids.

All in all, the 2 trillion yuan package reported by media could increase GDP by 0.4% over the course of next year, reckons Capital Economics. Anything more substantial and long-lasting, though, will require not only more fiscal spending, but a redirection of the funds to tackle structural issues. Analysts at Morgan Stanley estimate it will take 10 trillion yuan, with most of the funds going toward pensions and healthcare, over the next two years to meaningfully lift growth.

This week's policy salvos have sent stocks soaring, as Beijing finally sends out the right message that it will spend more to boost economic growth. But following through is another matter. — Reuters



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of Oman Observer's Business section



Oman's economic future is being shaped by a bold diversification strategy aimed at reducing its reliance on oil revenues and fostering growth in other key sectors.

OMAN is advancing resolutely towards the aspirations set forth in its Vision 2040, a strategic roadmap designed to position the country as a leader in sustainable development while safeguarding its rich heritage.

The most recent progress report highlights significant achievements across sectors including environmental stewardship, social advancement, educational reform, cultural preservation, and economic diversification.

These strides reflect not only Oman's ambition but also its commitment to a holistic transformation that balances modernity with tradition.

Environmental sustainability stands as a cornerstone of Oman Vision 2040, and the nation's recent leap from 149th to 54th place in the Environmental Performance Index is a strong indicator of its dedication to this cause.

The country's investments in the burgeoning green hydrogen sector mark a bold step in reducing carbon emissions and spearheading energy innovation in the region. Oman is not just following global trends in renewable energy—it is setting an example for responsible resource management, cementing its role as a regional pioneer in sustainable energy solutions.

A robust, inclusive society is crucial to Oman's long-term success, and the nation's upward movement in the Global

Youth Development Index, from 52nd to 33rd, underscores its commitment to empowering the next generation. Central to this progress is the launch of an innovative digital platform designed to support youth-led entrepreneurial ventures.

By equipping young Omanis with the tools to create, innovate, and lead, the platform fosters a culture of social cohesion and progress, ensuring that Oman's future is built on a strong, engaged community of leaders.

Education forms the bedrock of any nation's future, and Oman is determined to ensure its system aligns with the demands of a rapidly changing world.

The country's rise from 79th to 69th in the Global Innovation Index reflects significant advancements in fostering creativity, problem-solving, and technological aptitude within its educational framework.

The inclusion of Omani universities in the prestigious QS World University Rankings further underscores the nation's dedication to developing institutions that will nurture the innovators and thinkers of tomorrow. Oman is not merely educating its youth—it is cultivating a workforce equipped to lead in an increasingly competitive global landscape.

Even as Oman strides confidently into the future, it remains deeply committed to preserving its cultural identity.

The establishment of new museums and the restoration of iconic sites, includ-

ing the Maritime History Museum and the Land of Frankincense Museum, reflect the government's dedication to ensuring that Oman's rich history remains an integral part of its national narrative.

Furthermore, the introduction of new curricula that weave cultural knowledge into the fabric of education ensures that Omani youth will remain connected to their heritage even as they embrace the challenges and opportunities of the modern world.

Oman's economic future is being shaped by a bold diversification strategy aimed at reducing its reliance on oil revenues and fostering growth in other key sectors. A 10% increase in agricultural production is just one of the many tangible results of these efforts.

Moreover, the country's improved credit rating to BBB-, with a stable outlook, highlights international confidence in Oman's fiscal prudence and economic vision. These developments not only strengthen Oman's economic resilience but also signal the emergence of a more sustainable and diversified economy capable of weathering global market fluctuations.

In response to the evolving demands of the global economy, Oman is taking decisive steps to transform its labour market. The introduction of a new Labour Law under Royal Decree 53/2023 represents a significant milestone in creating a more agile and adaptive workforce.

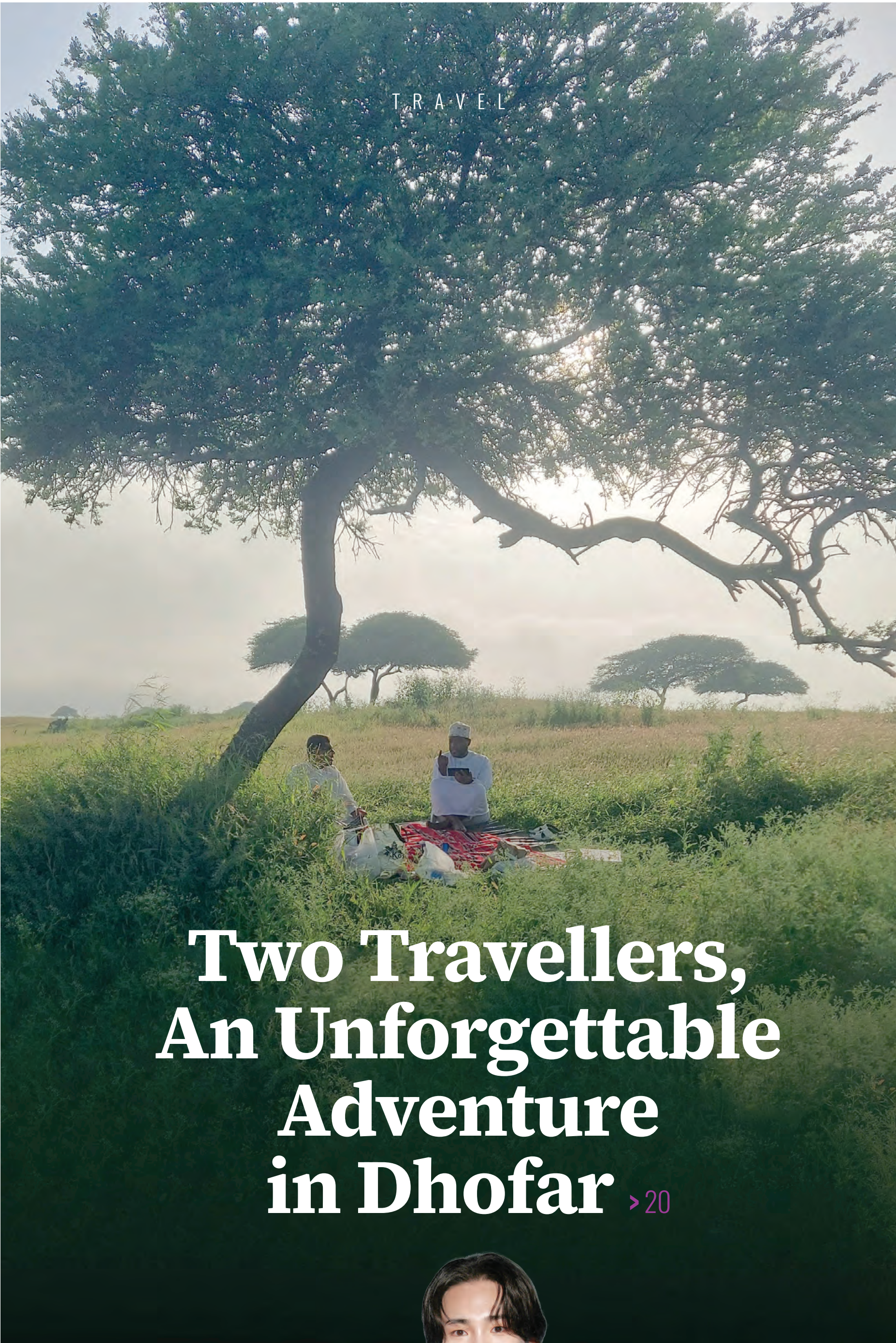
With 67% of employees now engaged in continuous professional development, Oman's workforce is becoming more competitive, skilled, and prepared to contribute to the nation's economic diversification efforts. This forward-thinking approach ensures that Oman's labour market is not just keeping pace but actively shaping the future of work.

Oman's Vision 2040 is a testament to the nation's unwavering commitment to creating a sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous future.

From environmental innovation and social empowerment to educational excellence and economic reform, Oman is laying the foundation for a vibrant economy and a cohesive society that honours its past while embracing the future.

The path ahead is clear, and with each achievement, Oman moves closer to realising its bold and transformative vision—one that promises a brighter and more sustainable future for generations to come.

ART/LIFE



Two Travellers, An Unforgettable Adventure in Dhofar >20



LIFESTYLE

A pedestrian walks past a wall mural along a street in Mumbai, the capital city and financial capital of the Indian state of Maharashtra. —AFP

MUSIC

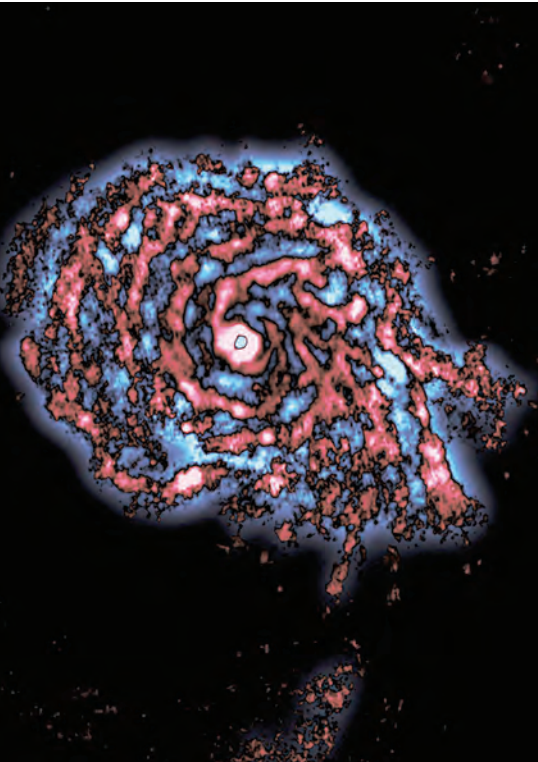
Member of K-pop group SHINee's KEY poses for photographs during a press conference on his new album 'Pleasure Shop' in Seoul, South Korea. —Reuters



TRENDS

Visitors interacting with a game during a media preview of the new Nintendo Museum, located inside a renovated old factory, in suburbs of Kyoto. —AFP

DISCOVERY



There Might Be More Than One Way to Make a Planet

WHEN IT comes to making a planet, astronomers have long-subscribed to what Cassandra Hall, an astronomer at the University of Georgia, refers to as the “bottom up” approach: The gas and dust swirling around a young star slowly clumps together over millions of years, and its gravity shapes it into a rounded object.

But a discovery by Hall and her colleagues, published in the journal Nature, suggests that the picture might be more complex.

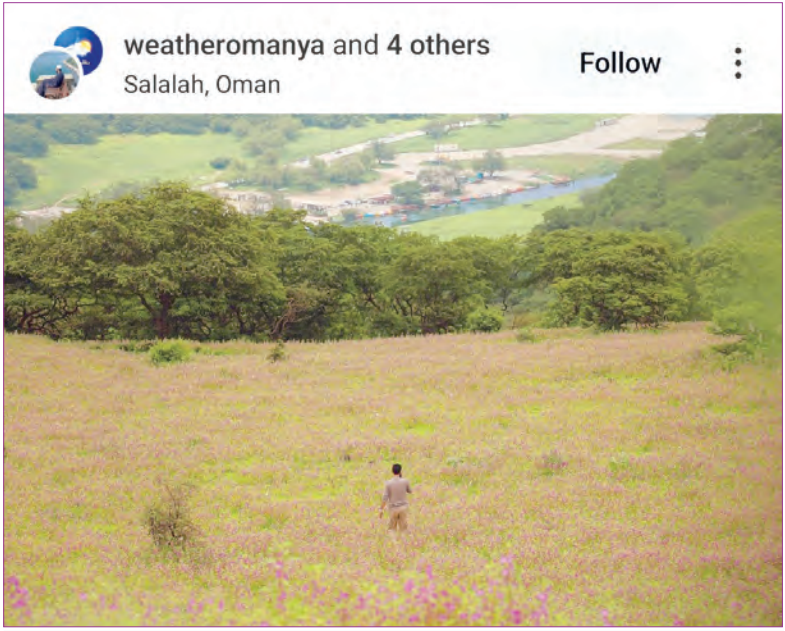
In a star system 508 light-years from Earth, the researchers found conditions that support an alternative “top down” approach to planet formation, in which the fertile material circling a young star rapidly collapses into a planet. The mechanism, known as gravitational instability, could explain the existence of mysterious worlds known to follow wide orbits around relatively young stars.

The cosmic matter stirring around an infant star is ripe with planet-forming potential. The matter is known as a protoplanetary disk, and its rotation is generally driven by the gravity of its host star. But if that disk gets large enough, it can be influenced by its own gravity, causing the young star system to become unstable. Regions of higher density in the disk emerge in the form of spiral arms.

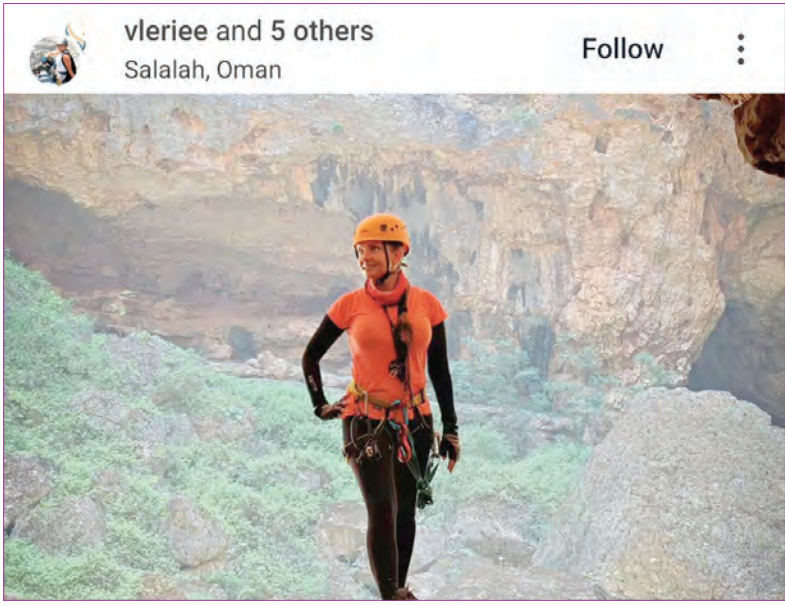
If those arms pull in enough material, they can fragment into clumps, which could further collapse into giant gas planets, said Jess Speedie, a graduate student in Canada who led the study under the supervision of Ruobing Dong, an astrophysicist. And this could happen in only a few hundred years, rather than the millions of years theorised for the “bottom up” approach known as core accretion.

Gravitationally unstable disks might be the wombs of planets too enormous and distant from their host stars to be explained by core accretion. In 2022, astronomers reported the discovery of a protoplanet with nine times the mass of Jupiter around AB Aurigae, a star that is no more than 4 million years old. — KATRINA MILLER/NYT

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



The Beauty of Lush Foliage



Adventure Calls

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

Want to be featured? Every day, we select the best photos for our Top Picks of the Day! Simply follow us, upload your stunning shots, and don't forget to tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver for a chance to be featured!"

Just a really fantastic fashion show

It's not often you see a designer crying backstage after a fashion show. But there was Francesco Risso, creative director of Marni, on the opening day of Milan Fashion Week, having to take a minute to collect himself. The surprising thing was, you could understand the feeling. After all, it's also not often that fashion shows, which have become a form of serial and often cynical content creation focused on which celebrity can be contracted to sit in the audience and what moment can be engineered to be the most viral, can instead become a reminder about what unites us, rather than what drives us apart. Or at least what segments us into market groups. But that's exactly what Risso created. It was like a treatise on the

humanities, performed at the multimedia dell'arte and writ in cloth. One you actually wanted to wear. He had filled the cavernous space of the Marni headquarters with a seemingly random array of old wooden chairs — a little story about a white rabbit running through a “deep green” forest under “fractal moons” had been tucked in origami folds and dropped on each seat — all of them scattered like a random collection of molecules around a trio of baby grand pianos. Composer Dev Hynes, a longtime Risso collaborator, and two accompanists sat down to play. And out came models who wove their own ways through the labyrinth of seating, only to come together at the end. Kind of like the clothes themselves, which wove through history and memory, beginning with skinny

cotton leggings that looked sort of like a cross between long johns and workout pants. Well, we all have to start somewhere. He added shrunken jackets or boxy little capes created by knotting the sleeves together at the neck, 1950s prom dresses in bright rose prints and 1980s power shoulders and blouson tops tied into turtlenecks over trumpet skirts. A big rose print and the occasional photo of a Renaissance-esque painting or a page ripped from a book — things that, Risso said backstage after the show, had meaning to him. Everything was left relatively undorned, so each piece resembled a sketch, dashed off; an aesthetic echo, open to personal interpretation, rather than a literal reference. There were not a lot of accessories, save for little hats that looked like children's sailor hats (or millinery for Napoleonic jesters) but were actually bucket hats that had been upsized, decorated or other-

wise wrenched into a new shape, and some giant boas that seemed to be made of shredded paper leaves. The same garlands snaked around the skirts of full-skirted dance dresses covered in crystal roses. The leis turned out to be made of cotton, as were the fancy frocks. It was the only fabric used in the entire collection. “To me, the thread of cotton is like a tool of resistance,” Risso said backstage. That came after he had talked about “Léon,” the 1994 Luc Besson film about a hit man who adopts a preteen girl whose entire family has been killed, and its tension between violence and tenderness. Which in turn reminded him of “the world now — it's so cruel somehow and so inhuman.” And how the antidote to that is beauty. Yup: The thread came round again. Because, as he pointed out, it is also the thread that connects us,

and connects past to present and future, and the thread of conversation and the thread that allows you to find your way out of a maze. That's a lot of threads, but Risso tugged on them all. In part because cotton is also a material with complicated resonance in multiple cultures. It may be the most accessible, universally fraught material there is. Since arriving at Marni in 2016, Risso has been one of fashion's most entertaining experimentalists, albeit one who often seemed more beguiled by his own wackadoodle concepts than actual clothes. Somewhere along the way, however, after an immersive show in 2021 in which every audience member had to wear Marni, and a “world tour” that saw him bring his work on the road to New York, Tokyo and Paris, he has turned into a great designer. And a generous one, at a time when generosity often seems in short supply. —NYT

These Monkeys Call One Another by Name



THE common marmoset, a small, South American monkey, uses an array of chirps, whistles and trills to defend its territory, flag the discovery of food, warn of danger and find family members hidden by dense forest foliage. Marmosets also use distinct calls to address different individuals, in much the same way that people use names, new research suggests. Until this year, only humans, dolphins and parrots were known to use names when communicating. In June, however, scientists reported that African elephants appeared to use names, too; researchers made the discovery by using artificial intelligence-powered software to detect subtle patterns in the

elephants' low-pitched rumbles. In the new study, which was published in Science, a different team of researchers also used AI to uncover name like labels hiding in the calls of common marmosets. “I think what it's telling us is that it's likely that animals actually have names for each other a lot more than maybe we ever conceived,” said George Wittemyer, a conservation biologist at Colorado State University who led the recent elephant study but was not involved in the marmoset research. Marmosets produce whistle like “phee calls” to communicate with other marmosets who might be hidden among the treetops. “They start to exchange phee calls when they lose eyesight of each other,” said

David Omer, a neuroscientist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who led the new study. The researchers studied 10 captive marmosets, analysing the phee calls they made. Two monkeys at a time were brought to a study room and placed in separate enclosures. The marmosets were allowed to see their conversational partners briefly before a curtain was placed between them. The researchers recorded the phee calls the marmosets made after the curtain came down. They then fed the calls into a machine learning system, which detected differences between the calls directed at individual monkeys. — EMILY ANTHERS/NYT



Cristina Collodel and Corinna Hartmann, two seasoned travellers, rediscover Dhofar's hidden beauty during the khareef season. From exploring new waterfalls to experiencing Omani culture, their journey through Salalah's misty mountains showcases the governorate's stunning transformation and the allure that keeps drawing them back



Two Travellers, An Unforgettable Adventure in Dhofar



BY LIJU CHERIAN
@lijucherianoman

FIVE years ago, Italian traveller Cristina Collodel and German blogger Corinna Hartmann met through social media, drawn together by their mutual love for Oman. This year, Cristina invited Corinna to experience the khareef season in Dhofar Governorate, where misty mountains and lush landscapes transform the region into a natural wonderland. Over a two-week adventure, the pair explored hidden waterfalls, and scenic trails, and shared in the delight of Salalah's magic before the season ended.

Cristina, who has called Salalah home since 2018 and works in tourism, explains how the khareef unveils new wonders every year. "Each year brings something different," she says. "The waterfalls shift depending on where the rain falls, and my guides and I search for hidden gems each season." Among their discoveries this year were Wadi Sheik, Ain Ayoon, Ain Rub, Ain Jarziz and Eftalquot Cliff. Cristina highlights how drones have made it easier to uncover secret spots, like new waterfalls at Ain Jarziz. "Everyone knows the lower part of Ain Jarziz, but now, thanks to drones, we've found beautiful waterfalls higher up."

For Corinna, who has visited Oman 15 times in just three years, the khareef season remains endlessly captivating. "It's like stepping into another world," she says. "Mountains wrapped in clouds, gentle rains — Salalah transforms into a lush, green paradise." One of her favourite finds was Wadi Sheik, with its series of waterfalls that offered a perfect escape after long-treks. "Khareef is truly magical, with hidden treasures around every corner."

Cristina and Corinna's experiences reflect different sides of their shared adventure. Cristina, always seeking new and undiscovered spots, speaks of Ain Rub, where they found a natural pool after a hike through rugged trails. "Ain Rub is perfect for adventurers. It's a tough hike, especially when the ground is slippery in the height of khareef, but the reward is a refreshing dip in crystal-clear water."

On the other hand, Corinna's focus is on the sheer beauty of Dhofar's landscapes. "Ain Rub is a hidden gem, with an infinity-like natural pool. It feels like you're swimming in nature's embrace," she says. Corinna also treasures the cultural side of khareef, particularly the traditional Omani festivals and the local cuisine. "The weather, the people, the food — everything during khareef is special."

Both travellers rave about Shaat, a coastal area with a stunning view where visitors can see either the sea or a blanket of clouds depending on the weather. "Shaat is one of

those places that feels otherworldly," Cristina shares. "One minute you're looking at the sea, and the next, you're floating in a sea of clouds," Corinna adds that Shaat and other hidden spots, like Jibjat, offer perfect locations for nature walks, picnics, or a peaceful retreat.

Cristina believes the biggest surprise for visitors is Dhofar's unexpected charm. "Most people think of Oman as desert," she says, "but Dhofar in the khareef season is a revelation—lush greenery, cool weather, and waterfalls everywhere. It's a shock to the senses." Corinna agrees, noting how this transformation makes Salalah irresistible. "Khareef is unlike anything else. The landscape comes alive, and there's something new to discover each time you visit."



For Cristina, Salalah's pull is strong, and she finds herself returning to its beauty time and time again. "There's something about Dhofar that gets into your blood," she says. "It's the peacefulness, the kindness of the people, and the wild nature. Once you've been here, it stays with you."

As Cristina and Corinna continue their journey through Dhofar, they encourage others to explore the governorate during khareef, when nature reveals its best-kept secrets and offers an unforgettable experience. Whether it's trekking to hidden waterfalls or soaking in the culture, Dhofar in the khareef season is a discovery that leaves visitors longing for more.

They plan to reunite before the 'Sarbi' season, or spring draws to a close in December.

