

Low pressure in Arabian Sea

A low-pressure system has formed, centred northwest of the Indian subcontinent, with expectations of moving westwards towards the northeast of the Arabian Sea on Friday or Saturday evening, according to Oman Meteorology. There will be no impact on the Sultanate of Oman during the next four days.

SUNRISE - 05:47 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:30 AM

DHUHR - 12:13 PM

ASR - 03:40 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:34 PM

ISHA - 07:46 PM



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DJOKOVIC SHINES UNDER THE LIGHTS



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OMAN FISHERIES WITNESSES INCREASE IN REVENUE FOR Q2



P20

WADI DAYQAH, HOME TO EXCEPTIONAL GEOLOGY AND "PRIVATE" NATURAL POOLS



MUSCAT

FOOD CITY PROJECT PLANNED AT KHAZAEN

A high-level delegation representing government and public sector entities responsible for delivering Oman's national food security strategy visited Khazaen Economic City to conduct a first-hand assessment of the Food City planned within the hub. Led by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the team visited the hub. The purpose of the visit was to assess Khazaen's contribution to food security projects, including the Central Fruit and Vegetable Market (Sila), the industrial bakery of Salalah Mills Company, the Oman Bio-Products factory and the food industries centre of Jasmine Oriental Company. **DETAILS ON P13**

CRUDE PRICE AT \$79.22 A BARREL

The Oman oil price for October delivery, on Tuesday, reached \$79.22, reflecting a rise of 52 cents compared to Monday's price of \$78.70. The average price of Oman oil for August delivery stabilised at \$82.50 per barrel, which is \$1.39 per barrel lower than the July delivery. World oil prices took a breather, with Brent crude futures 0.6 per cent lower at \$80.95 per barrel, while US crude futures eased 0.7 per cent to \$76.89 per barrel.

HM GREETINGS CONVEYED TO NEPAL PRESIDENT



President Ram Chandra Poudel of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal on Tuesday received Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, at the Presidential Palace in Kathmandu. The minister conveyed the greetings and sincere sentiments of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the President, along with His Majesty's wishes for further progress and prosperity for the friendly Nepalese people. He also conveyed His Majesty's hopes for continued development and advancement in relations between the two countries. On his part, President Ram Chandra asked the foreign minister to convey his heartfelt greetings to His Majesty, along with his sincere wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people. He expressed his hope that relations between the two friendly countries would continue to grow and flourish. **SEE ALSO P2**

RO 750m recovered by audit institution

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH @lakshmioman

The financial impact of the State Audit Institution's recommendations has resulted in the government recovering more than RO 750 million during the period from 2016 to 2022. Citizens have actively participated by raising complaints and reports to the authority.

Said bin Salim al Hajri, Senior Specialist and Director of the Communication and Media Department at SAI, said that the institution has received and handled 951 complaints, 87 per cent of which have been finalised.

SAI's objective is to protect the state's public funds, expose cases of financial irregularities, draw attention to deficiencies in financial and administrative laws, and evaluate the performance of entities subject to its audit. Citizens have participated through various communication channels of the institution, with one of the major tools being the Mobile App, Complaints and Reports Window.

"One can also report or place a call using the landline or visit the headquarters or branches of SAI,"



said Al Hajri, speaking on the *Observer's* Podcast, Mosaic.

Entities subject to audit by SAI include the administrative apparatus of the state, public authorities, establishments, pension funds, investment funds, state-owned companies where the government holds 40 per cent or more of the capital share (unless exempted by a Royal Decree), as well as companies to which the government has granted concessions. These entities total more than 600.

"We do not wait until the report of our observations is issued. We try to rectify issues as soon as possible because the objective is to correct them," pointed out Al Hajri.

Forms of corruption vary, including bribery, embezzlement, theft, etc., and if SAI has any indication and is able to collect sufficient evidence, it proceeds with the Public Prosecution.

"The Public Prosecution will go through their mandates, and if they find enough evidence, they will raise it to a specific court, at which point it becomes a case," said the senior specialist.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) announced the inclusion of the State Audit Institution's Complaints and Reports Window among the best distinguished Arab practices within the ESCWA-launched ENACT project.

ENACT aims to accelerate the use of technology and innovation to enhance operations in Arab public institutions by collecting successful and distinguished studies from various Arab states regarding innovative technologies and initiatives to develop and improve government services.

The window was chosen from among 60 distinct initiatives from 12 Arab countries listed in the ESCWA Arab Open and Innovation Government Portal.

Israeli strikes kill 22 people in Gaza

CAIRO/GAZA: Palestinians displaced by fighting in the Gaza Strip crowded onto the seashore as Israeli forces continued to battle fighters in central and southern areas, freeing one hostage in an operation in the south of the enclave on Tuesday. Gaza's health officials reported that at least 22 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli military strikes across the territory.

As ceasefire talks were continuing in Cairo with little sign of a concrete breakthrough over key issues separating the sides. Israel said it had rescued Qaid Farhan Alkadi, taken



A Palestinian youth pulls salvaged items in Deir Al Balah in the central Gaza Strip on Tuesday. - AFP

hostage on October 7, after a "complex operation" in southern Gaza. It said his medical condition was normal.

In recent days, Israel has issued several evacuation orders across Gaza, the most since the beginning of the 10-month war, prompting an outcry from Palestinians, the United Nations, and relief officials over the reduction of humanitarian zones and the absence of safe areas.

Residents and displaced families in the southern city of Khan Yunis and Deir Al Balah, in central Gaza, where most of the population is now concentrated, said they have been pushed to live in tents now packed on the beach.

SEE ALSO P6

Zelensky says dialogue with Putin would be 'empty'

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Tuesday said peace talks with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin would be "empty" and "meaningless." "The world is waiting for Ukraine to present a compromise plan on how to end the war tomorrow," he said at an event in Kiev.

"It's not that there are no compromises with Putin, but with Putin the dialogue today is empty, meaningless because he doesn't want to end the war diplomatically," argued Zelensky.

"We will not play along with him," added Zelensky.

The Ukrainian president said his forces' advance into the southern Russian region of Kursk has silenced Kyiv's critics.

Ukraine presented its own pathway to peace at a summit in Switzerland in June.

The plan envisages the withdrawal of Russian troops from all areas of Ukraine, including the Crimean peninsula.

Russia would also agree to pay reparations and make its political and military leaders accountable to an international court. **SEE ALSO P7**

Strategy unveiled to market Dhofar as year-round destination



A 3-phase strategy seeks to promote Dhofar Governorate as an all-season destination.

QASIM AL MAASHANI SALALAH, AUGUST 27

Recognising the need to diversify Dhofar's tourism offerings and extend its appeal beyond the peak khareef season, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has unveiled a marketing strategy to promote Dhofar as a year-round destination. This is to be achieved by highlighting Dhofar's diverse attractions, including its historical sites, natural landscapes and cultural heritage. By encouraging visitors to explore Dhofar beyond the

khareef season, the ministry hopes to stimulate the local economy, create new job opportunities and improve the quality of life for residents.

100-DAY CAMPAIGN

Marwan al Ghassani, Director of Promotions at the Directorate-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, said the 100-day campaign aims to capitalise on Dhofar Governorate's unique appeal, particularly during the khareef season, while extending its reach to other periods of the year. The

ministry's strategic approach is divided into three phases, each tailored to maximise visitor engagement. Phase I coincides with the onset of the khareef season. During this period, the ministry is collaborating with the tourism sector to create enticing travel packages that showcase Dhofar Governorate's cooler temperatures, affordable pricing and diverse attractions. A specific focus is placed on regions such as the wilayats of Rakhyout and Dhalkout, where the khareef season often begins earlier.

TURN TO P3



Oman, Nepal explore means of boosting bilateral relations



Sayyid Badr on Tuesday met with Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. – ONA



The two countries also reiterated the importance of exploring new cooperation opportunities in various fields. – ONA

KATHMANDU: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister on Tuesday met with Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal at the capital city of Kathmandu.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and highlighted means of tapping new vistas of cooperation in various fields of interest to the two countries.

They also highlighted opportunities to boost economic and trade cooperation, particularly in the fields of tourism, mining, agriculture

and cultural exchange. Both sides reiterated the importance of exchanging expertise and supporting joint investments.

Further, the two sides underscored the importance of firm mutual cooperation to tackle joint challenges and promote peace and stability in the region and the world.

The meeting was attended by Issa bin Saleh al Shaibani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of India and non-resident ambassador to the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.

It was also attended by several

officials from both sides.

Meanwhile, the Sultanate of Oman and the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal reviewed means of augmenting bilateral relations. The two countries also reiterated the importance of exploring new cooperation opportunities in various fields.

This came during the meeting of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister with Arzu Rana Deuba, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nepal, which was held in Nepal's capital city of Kathmandu.

Moreover, during the meeting

the two side touched on regional and international developments of mutual interest. They also underscored the importance of cooperation and coordination between the two countries in order to achieve joint objectives, as well as support peace and development in the region and the world at large.

The meeting was attended by Issa bin Saleh al Shaibani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of India and non-resident ambassador to the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal and several officials from both sides. — ONA

Establishment of childhood development centres under review

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) on Tuesday held a meeting to study the progress made in a project to establish 'Integrated Early Childhood Development Centres'.

The project aims to provide early childhood services within specific geographical locations in an integrated manner through cooperation among the sectors concerned. It focuses on means of improving health and educational services offered to children in accordance with internationally approved standards and methodologies.

The project covers measures of raising public awareness about the importance of early childhood development, the application of concepts of early intervention and the consolidation of different types of intelligence in early childhood.

The meeting, held at the ministry's premises in Muscat, was chaired by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

The project is the outcome



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of cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) and partner institutions in Oman, including the ministries of Education, Health, Finance, Labour, Housing and Urban Planning, in addition to Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and Oman Energy Association (OPAL).

The project seeks to expand the segment of beneficiaries of its services, to ensure support to all children, notably children belonging to families with limited income in different governorates of Oman. — ONA

BODIES OF FOUR HAIMA ACCIDENT VICTIMS TO BE REPATRIATED

KABEER YOUSUF
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Bodies of the four expatriates who died in a crash with a truck in Haima on Monday, will be repatriated to their hometown, according to the Civil Defence and Ambulances Authority (CDAA).

The four deceased in the fatal accident which happened a few kilometres away from Salalah and 50 kilometres of Haima, were identified as expatriates from Indian state of Karnataka who were on their way back from visiting the khareef.

Adishesh Basavaraj, Pawan Kumar who were from Devadurga, Raichur, Karnataka, and Pooja Mayappa and Vijaya Mayappa, natives of Tegahala were charred beyond recognition in the deadly accident.

CDAA said that the car in which they were travelling in crashed into a trailer and caught fire.

Adishesh was a resident of Nizwa while the other three were visiting Oman on a visiting visa.

Necessary documentation for

the repatriation of the bodies which are kept at Haima Hospital Mortuary, are fast progressing and will be sent to their hometowns at the earliest.

The CDAA urged motorists to apply caution and be alert while driving on two-way traffic roads and to take necessary rest especially driving at night.

"Never drive while one is tired or sleepy and to be alert while driving especially on single carriageway. Also, prefer day time to drive long- destinations to safeguard oneself as well as the lives of others," the spokesperson from CDAA said.

Belarusian Minister explores investment opportunities in Al Batinah North

SUHAR: Alexei Bogdanov, Minister of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade in the Republic of Belarus, on Tuesday visited Al Batinah North Governorate to learn about investment opportunities and major economic projects in Al Batinah North Governorate, including the Wilayat of Sohar.

During the visit, Bogdanov and his accompanying delegation held a meeting with Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Busaidi, Wali of Sohar. The meeting, held at the office of the Governor of Al Batinah North, was attended by businessmen and directors of commercial establishments and ports in the governorate.

During the meeting, the Belarusian minister listened to a detailed account about the current



Bogdanov and his delegation took note of the progress made in the establishment of the railway network connecting the Wilayat of Sohar and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. – ONA

investment projects and future opportunities in the sectors of ports, agriculture, fisheries and mining, in addition to petroleum and converting industries at Sohar Port, the Free Zone and Sohar Industrial City and logistic services provided for those projects.

Bogdanov and his delegation took note of the progress made in the establishment of the railway network connecting the Wilayat of Sohar and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates — a stretch of 303 kilometres. They also had a close look at salient features

of the governorate's ports in Shinas, Liwa, Sohar and Al Suwaiq and their related commercial and economic activities.

Bogdanov and his accompanying delegation later visited Sohar Port and Free Zone, where they were briefed about major commercial and industrial projects, both in the port and the free zone, in addition to logistic services, container handling, and advanced industrial activities in the sectors of energy, metals and petrochemicals.

The briefing covered investment opportunities and land leasing at Sohar Free Zone, industrial projects, light converting industries, logistics services or other commercial services that can be established in the governorate. — ONA

Students have wider course choice in Unified Admissions

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

Students will start getting select services under Unified Admissions which is to start next week. The scheme aligns with the recent announcement of admission results and the commencement of registration procedures for the new academic year.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, through the General Directorate of Missions, has initiated visits to various private higher education institutions.

These visits aim to oversee the registration process for general education diploma students, support the efforts of these institutions, and ensure a smooth onboarding process for students delegated this year.

The Higher Education Admission Centre has revealed the results for the first round of admissions for the 2024/2025 academic year, with a total of 27,178 accepted male and female students.

Following the announcement, students were given a window to select their preferred institutions for flexible internal missions. This selection was available through their registration pages on the unified admission system from Wednesday, August 21, to Sunday, August 25. Students who applied within this timeframe received a response from the respective institutions.

If the number of applicants exceeds an institution's capacity, a comparison of applicants is conducted according to the criteria outlined in the student guide for higher education



The Higher Education Admission Centre has revealed the results for the first round of admissions for the 2024/2025 academic year, with a total of 27,178 accepted male and female students

admissions. Students who are not accepted into their chosen institution for any reason have the right to select another institution within the remaining registration period.

The Admission Centre also announced a new service for

students who may have made errors in their selections. This service will be available from Monday, September 2, to Wednesday, September 4, for all students, including those who received offers in the first round, those who did not receive an offer,

or those who had not previously registered in the system.

To utilise this service, students must meet specific conditions, including the availability of a vacant seat in the desired study programme and a competitive average that meets or exceeds the lowest average accepted in the first round for that programme.

Additionally, the centre emphasised that students with non-Omani certificates whose final results were released after the first round should immediately contact the centre and provide the necessary documentation.

For students in the second round, a special admission process will be conducted after their final results are announced, ensuring their eligibility to compete for academic programmes they initially

registered for.

A ministry source highlighted that these measures are designed to simplify the registration process and provide maximum opportunities for students to make informed choices aligned with their academic goals and future aspirations.

The centre plans to announce any remaining vacancies for academic programmes for the second round of admissions in early November 2024 and will provide updates on other registration and acceptance timelines as necessary.

Students are encouraged to stay informed about the latest developments through the centre's official communication channels and to complete their registration promptly according to the procedures established by each institution.



SHOWCASING DHOFAR’S BROADCASTING EXCELLENCE

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 27

The Khareef Dhofar Season is not only a time of natural beauty and cultural celebration, but also a period of heightened media activity that garners attention from across and beyond the Sultanate of Oman.

Beyond its allure as a tourist destination, Dhofar emerges as a vibrant hub for media, particularly in radio broadcasting. The city’s dynamic radio programmes, crafted with dedication and creativity, cater to a broad audience, informing, entertaining and engaging listeners across Oman.

One of the standout programmes is ‘Atheer Al Khareef’, a daily live broadcast that encapsulates the spirit of the khareef season. This programme vividly portrays Salalah’s cultural and natural wonders during this time, drawing listeners into the heart of the festivities. Its live format ensures the content is timely and relevant, providing audiences with the latest insights and updates, making them feel connected to the ongoing celebrations.

‘Al Waqt Al Idhafi’ is another significant offering, a weekly live programme that delves into current affairs with depth and clarity. This show’s strength lies in its ability to present nuanced perspectives on timely issues, enriching listeners’ understanding of the world around them.

Economics enthusiasts are well served by ‘Al Muntada Al Iqtisadi’, a weekly



During the khareef, Dhofar has emerged as a vibrant hub for media, particularly in radio broadcasting

programme focusing on financial and business sectors. It offers essential insights into economic developments within Oman and beyond, featuring expert analyses that are both informative and accessible.

Meanwhile, ‘Atheer Al Mahabba’ touches the hearts of listeners with its weekly live broadcasts centred around themes of love and unity. This programme resonates deeply with audiences, reflecting the compassionate and communal values integral to Omani society.

For the youth, ‘Al Khareef wa Al Shabab’, a daily live show, provides a platform that addresses their interests, aspirations and challenges. Supervised by a dedicated team, this programme not only entertains, but also empowers young Omanis, encouraging them to actively engage with their communities.

Environmental

consciousness is another critical focus of Salalah’s broadcasts. ‘Hadith Al Bi’ah’, a daily programme, plays a vital role in raising awareness about environmental issues, emphasising the importance of preserving Oman’s natural resources, particularly during the khareef season.

Technology enthusiasts are not left behind, as ‘Uloom wa Taqniyah’, a weekly programme, explores the latest in science and technology, keeping listeners informed about innovations shaping the future.

Highlighting the commitment to cutting-edge content, the special broadcast of the ‘Digital Explorer’ programme on August 3, 2024, offered listeners a deep dive into the world of digital advancements, showcasing the integration of technology into everyday life.

Road safety, an essential concern during the busy khareef season, is addressed

by ‘Safety on the Road’, a programme broadcast live by Shabab Radio on August 22. This broadcast served as a crucial public service announcement, emphasising the importance of adhering to safety regulations for both drivers and pedestrians.

Lastly, the ‘Cultural Scene’ programme, though recorded, enriches the radio offerings by delving into Oman’s diverse cultural heritage, providing listeners with an appreciation for the arts, traditions and cultural narratives that define the nation.

These programmes from Salalah are more than mere broadcasts; they embody the city’s dynamic spirit and the relentless efforts of those who bring these shows to life. Through their dedication, they ensure that Salalah’s voice resonates far and wide, offering content that is as enriching as it is memorable, and leaving a lasting impact on listeners across Oman.

New travel apps enhance khareef visitors’ experience

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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There has been a notable surge in travel applications during this Khareef Dhofar Season demonstrating their effectiveness in enhancing the overall visitor experience.

Recent statistics highlight a substantial increase in the adoption of these digital tools, underscoring the success of ongoing digital transformation initiatives.

Once a complex and time-consuming process, trip planning and hotel booking have now become as effortless as a few taps on a smartphone. These applications streamline the entire travel experience, allowing tourists to easily manage their itineraries, book accommodations and organise activities, all from the comfort of their mobile devices.

The effectiveness of Dhofar’s tourism strategy can be attributed to integrated efforts and innovative marketing approaches. One of the key drivers of success during the Khareef Dhofar Season is the availability of comprehensive information about tourist sites and events on unified digital platforms.

The ‘Dhofar Seasons’ application serves as a digital guide, offering detailed information on events, tourist sites, and enabling ticket bookings for various recreational activities. Complementing this is the “Absher” application, which facilitates easy access to services provided by the Dhofar Municipality.

To further enhance the tourism experience, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in collaboration with Dhofar Municipality, has launched the “Sikka” electronic platform. This platform aims to streamline the management of rental agreements between tourists and property owners during the khareef season. It ensures that both parties adhere to quality



One of the key drivers of success during the Khareef Dhofar Season is the availability of comprehensive information about tourist sites and events on unified digital platforms

standards, thereby guaranteeing an optimal level of hospitality and service for all guests.

These applications provide tourists with the opportunity to engage in a wide range of events, from cultural festivals to entertainment activities, while also allowing them to explore the governorate’s top tourist destinations. Moreover, they offer easy access to information on accommodations, dining options and transportation services.

The ongoing digital revolution has not only heightened the demand for travel and vacation applications, but has also redefined the tourism landscape, creating unprecedented advancements in the sector. Technology, particularly through the use of smart applications, is revolutionising the global tourism industry.

Beyond simplifying trip planning, these tools enhance the travel experience itself by incorporating augmented and virtual reality technologies.

Tourists can now explore destinations virtually before visiting, setting accurate expectations and preparing them for a more informed and enriching journey.

Conference looks at emergency medicine

SALALAH: A 3-day international conference organised by the Omani Society of Emergency Medicine (OSEM) in Salalah is exploring the latest scientific and practical developments in dealing with all types of emergency cases.

More than 40 specialists from the Sultanate of Oman and abroad are taking part in the conference, hosted by the Directorate-General of Health Services in Dhofar Governorate.

The conference looks into research on preparing for crises and disasters,



The conference activities include a health exhibition that showcases outcome of 20 research papers presented by emergency medicine specialists from different countries of the world. – ONA

with emphasis on the use of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) in streamlining the performance of emergency departments, including the role of nursing in dealing

with infectious emergencies.

The conference activities include a health exhibition that showcases outcome of 20 research papers presented by emergency medicine specialists from

different countries of the world.

This is in addition to a roadshow, organised by institutions supporting the conference) featuring the latest technologies and devices used in emergency departments.

The conference programme also includes six intensive training workshops covering various aspects of emergency medicine, including an introduction to clinical toxicology and a training course on dealing with paediatric and adult emergencies. — ONA

STRATEGY UNVEILED TO MARKET DHOFAR AS YEAR-ROUND DESTINATION

FROM P1

Phase II spans from June 21 until the start of the khareef weather changes. This phase aligns with the peak tourist season, particularly this year due to the overlap with Eid Al Adha. To capitalise on this opportunity, the ministry is offering competitive travel packages that bundle accommodation, tours, and transportation. These packages are designed to provide visitors with a seamless and enjoyable experience, from the moment they arrive to the time they depart.

Phase III addresses the traditional slowdown in tourism that occurs during the academic

year. To mitigate this, the ministry has strategically shifted the timing of conferences and meetings to September and October. This approach aims to optimise the utilisation of hotel and tourist facilities during a typically quieter period. By attracting business travellers and conference attendees, the ministry hopes to stimulate the local economy and provide a steady stream of revenue for tourism businesses.

Al Ghassani emphasised the importance of adaptability in tourism marketing. By providing visitors with accurate and transparent information about Dhofar Governorate’s conditions and attractions, the

ministry seeks to enhance their overall experience and ensure the region’s tourism industry remains vibrant throughout the year. Additionally, the ministry is committed to fostering a sustainable tourism model that respects the local culture, environment and heritage.

While the ministry’s marketing strategy is ambitious and promising, there are several challenges that need to be addressed. One of the main challenges is the limited infrastructure and facilities in Dhofar Governorate, which can hinder the governorate’s ability to accommodate a larger number of visitors. Additionally, the lack of awareness about

Dhofar Governorate’s year-round attractions among international travellers is another obstacle that needs to be overcome.

However, there are also significant opportunities for Dhofar Governorate’s tourism industry.

The governorate’s unique natural beauty, cultural heritage and growing infrastructure development offer immense potential for attracting visitors throughout the year. By effectively marketing Dhofar Governorate as a diverse and welcoming destination, the ministry can help realise this potential and ensure the region’s long-term sustainability.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

INTERNATIONAL TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee at Ministry of Information announces its Tender for the following work:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
6/2024 (323/2024) at E-Tendering	AI Utilization Project for Ayn Platform	International Excellent First	7/9/2024	22/10/2024	25/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

2. Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.

(For more information, please see the original circular issued by the Tender Board on the Isnad platform.)

Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am. Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically.

You are requested to provide 2 hard copies for your offer after the submission in Projects Department at Ministry of Information.

3. The Ministry has the right to:

1) Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.

2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone: 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)



HEALTH OF STUDENTS IN FOCUS



Dr Anoud al Badi

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The Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the School and University Health Department, will pay more focus on ensuring a healthy and safe environment that enhances health practices in the school community, for the positive and effective link between students' academic achievement and their physical, mental, psychological and social development, just as students will begin a new academic year in a few days.

This effort stems from the ministry's positioning of school and university health as one of the most important priorities for promoting health in the community and an essential element in primary health care, as school students from the age group of 7 to 18 years constitute an important segment of society in the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking to the Observer, Dr Anoud al Badi, Acting Director of the School Health Department at the Ministry, said that the Ministry of Health is keen to intensify all efforts that would enhance the health of school students and the rest of the school community in an integrated manner.

"We are constantly working to enhance school health by implementing comprehensive health programmes aimed at providing therapeutic and preventive health services that include the physical and psychological aspects of the school community," Dr Anoud said.

The Ministry of Health also places its focus and vision on 'a physically healthy, mentally and psychologically sound, scientifically distinguished and socially interactive school and university generation' by providing an integrated system of preventive, therapeutic and promotional services and employing governance to keep pace with life circumstances to create a safe and healthy environment.

The number of service providers in school health has reached 742 male and female nurses distributed throughout all the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman where the number of schools with clinics according to the latest statistics reached 94 per cent.

"The National Strategy for School Health is in line with the priorities of Oman Vision 2040 to develop a health system with international standards by providing comprehensive and fair health care in the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman," Dr Anoud said.

She further said that various programmes and activities are being implemented to promote the health of school students, adolescents, university and college students, based on the commitment to providing preventive and promotive services. She stressed that the therapeutic services for students are provided through the school health clinics, which are equipped with the necessary equipment and devices to provide students at the beginning of each year, and provide health services including first aid, transferring cases to the school's affiliated health institutions and following up on them.

HEALTHY BEHAVIOURS

The programme of health-promoting higher education institutions also aims to promote healthy behaviours such as physical activity, healthy nutrition, avoiding smoking and psychotropic substances among students, and making the university environment healthy and safe. The department is keen to provide basic health services in institutions as the students are about to begin a new academic year. This is in addition to equipping the school health clinic with the necessary devices and equipment to provide school health services to students.

SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAMMES



Expanded immunisation programmes for grades 1 to 6

Health awareness and education programme



Early detection services for students in grades 1, 7 and 10

Eye health programme for students in grades 1,4,7 and 10



Oral and dental health programme for students in grades 1 and 2



RECALL DATE: 28/08/2024

Recall

TOYOTA

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
HILUX	January 16, 2023 through April 29, 2024	596

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

Recall consequence

Subject vehicles are equipped with a sport bar affixed through brackets. Under certain severe usage conditions, the brackets may crack causing the sport bar to potentially detach from the vehicle. If this occurs, it could become hazardous to other vehicles and pose a safety risk for pedestrian traffic.

Recall Action

To remove the sport bar

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



Contact details: Toll free - 80073000
Working days: Sunday - Thursday
Working Time: 8:00 - 17:00 hrs.





Collecting funds from public without permit an offence: MoSD

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Collecting money from the public without a permit is an offence and can be punished according to Articles 299 and 300 of the Oman Penal Code, which criminalise the collection of money from the public by any means or inviting them to donate without obtaining a license from the competent authority, as stated by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD).

The MoSD issued instructions following reports of people attempting to collect money without authorisation. The Ministry emphasises that only authorised individuals or organisations are allowed to collect money, whether for use within Oman or abroad.

A source from MoSD, speaking to the Observer, clarified that the



The law does not prohibit collecting money for charity but aims to ensure that donated funds reach deserving recipients

law does not prohibit collecting money for charity. It aims to ensure that donated funds reach deserving recipients and are used according to established guidelines and goals set by donors.

Article 299 of the Oman Penal Code specifies that individuals collecting money without a license may face imprisonment for a minimum of one month and a

maximum of three months, as well as a fine ranging from RO 200 to RO 600.

Article 300 states that collecting money from the public without a license and sending it outside Oman can lead to imprisonment for a minimum of three months and a maximum of one year, along with a fine of RO 1,000 to RO 2,000.

Legally approved clubs and organisations, with permission from the MoSD, can collect funds for charitable purposes. However, certain conditions must be met, such as registration with the Ministry and a clear charitable goal.

The ministry has launched the 'Joud' digital platform for charitable donations to support social initiatives. This platform allows individuals and institutions to donate securely and electronically to charitable associations and volunteer teams in Oman. It aims to streamline the donation process and ensure funds reach their intended recipients promptly.

Overall, the regulations aim to prevent unauthorised money collection and ensure transparency and accountability in charitable activities.

'ENGINEER IT WITH AI' CONTEST TO FOSTER INNOVATION



The competition attracted 100 participants, divided into 25 teams, showcasing a strong turnout of talent from diverse backgrounds

BALQEES ALORAIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in collaboration with the Programming Academy and SAS Media Company, launched the 'Engineer it with AI' competition in Muscat.

The event, opened under the auspices of Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, was also attended by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, and Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport. The competition attracted 100 participants, divided into 25 teams, showcasing a strong turnout of talent from diverse backgrounds.

This pioneering initiative aims to stimulate innovation in the field of generative artificial intelligence (AI). It is designed to attract promising talents, including students, job-seekers, and professionals interested in the development and application of AI technologies.

The competition kicked off with an introductory workshop outlining its primary objectives of fostering innovation, building technical skills, and nurturing local talent in the rapidly advancing field of AI.

Taw'ah bint Abdullah al Dawood, Head of the Development and Studies Department at the National Centre for Space, Advanced Technology, and Artificial Intelligence, emphasised that AI development is contingent upon capacity building and talent support.

She highlighted the

importance of providing a conducive environment, offering necessary support to innovators, and fostering cooperation between public and private sectors to maximise AI application benefits across various domains.

Al Dawood noted that this competition comes at a critical time when the world is experiencing rapid AI advancements, and she encouraged participants to seize this opportunity to showcase their skills and creativity.

Among the participants is Haitham al Rahbi, a data analyst, who is part of a team comprising four specialists — Eshaq al Mantheri, an AI researcher; Al Ahlam al Salehi, an AI trainer; and Fatma al Harthy, a Future Skills trainer.

Their project aims to develop an AI model to unify government communication messages.

This innovative system leverages natural language processing and deep learning to streamline and enhance governmental communication with the public.

The model is trained on extensive textual data, including institutional mandates, objectives, the Oman Vision 2040 document, and the communication goals outlined in media plans. It ensures that messages are consistent with national strategies and objectives.

Additionally, the model features tools for automatic message generation, linguistic proofreading, and integration into media texts, providing consistent and reliable communication.

With a user-friendly interface and API integration, government officials can quickly input information and receive ready-to-publish texts, thereby improving transparency and trust between the government and its citizens.

Municipality again invites bid to develop festival ground

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

Muscat Municipality has again sought proposals from experienced firms or consulting teams to prepare a master plan for Muscat Festival Ground.

It may be noted that the municipality floated the tender for the same project in the recent past.

The scope of the work will include the preparation of tender documents to design and develop a regional entertainment attraction centre that can accommodate the needs of Muscat, its surroundings, and the entire region.

The development should be able to generate sufficient income



Muscat Municipality has been working on developing a permanent venue to organise annual festivals and events

to sustain its operations as well as be an economic catalyst for its surrounding areas.

The masterplan should include an analysis of the highest and best use of the plot, taking into consideration surrounding developments, and social, and other benefits to the community. The plan should align with Oman's 2040 vision and incorporate the 2050 target for net-zero emissions.

The last date to receive the tender document is September 10 while the priced bid will open on November 11.

Muscat Municipality has been working on developing a permanent venue to organise annual festivals and events.

GOOD RESPONSE TO CHIRU MEGA YOUTH FORCE BLOOD CAMP

Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), a voluntary organisation, conducted a blood donation camp on Friday. The camp held at Bausher Blood Bank, opposite to the Royal Hospital, received good response as many volunteers turned out to donate blood. The blood donation drive was organised on the occasion of the birthday of prominent Telugu film actor Chiranjeevi. CMYF Founder President Ramdas Chandaka thanked all those who came forward for this humanitarian cause. The CMYF has been honoured by the Ministry of Health on several occasions in recognition of its continuing support for blood collection services.



Exhibition for heritage houses opens at Oman Across Ages Museum

MUSCAT: The activities of the exhibition for museums and private heritage houses, organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) in collaboration with the Oman Across Ages Museum in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, have begun. The exhibition, titled "Cultural Assets from Museums and Private Heritage Houses," will run until September 26.

This initiative aims to open promotional windows for museums and private heritage houses, highlight their efforts, and raise awareness among the local community about the importance of these museums in preserving the national heritage. Additionally, it seeks to enable future generations to understand

the aspects of Omani civilisation and national heritage identity. These museums play a vital role in cultural and economic aspects, serving as sites for learning, research, and innovation, while also contributing to the preservation of national identity, enhancing cultural awareness within the community, and providing job opportunities for Omani youth.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Mansoori, Director of the Department of Museums and Private Heritage Houses at the MoHT, stated that the Ministry has announced that the exhibition will feature 11 licensed museums from different governorates in the Sultanate of Oman, including Bait Al Zubair



The exhibition will run until September 26

Museum, Bidiya Museum, Bait Al Ghasham Museum, Madha Museum, Gateway of the Past Museum, Nizwa Museum, Sharaf House, Generations Continuity Museum, Bait Adam Museum, Bait Al Minzifa Museum, and Al Hamra Currency Museum.

He explained that the number of licensed museums and private

heritage houses stands at 19, while the number of applications that have been granted initial approvals is 20. These are distributed across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and are currently in the process of completing the remaining procedures and requirements for licensing.

Dr Al Mansoori clarified that, according to the Cultural Heritage Law, a private museum is a place where archaeological, heritage, historical, scientific, cultural, natural, and artistic artefacts, among others, are displayed for the purpose of study, research, public service, and community cultural development.

A private heritage house, on the other hand, is defined as a historical building owned by private institutions or individuals, showcasing the heritage artefacts specific to the area in which it is located. He added that the Department of Museums and Private Heritage Houses continually monitors the administrative and technical

aspects of these museums and heritage houses by guiding their owners before and after the final licensing. This is to ensure the importance of implementing the regulations outlined in the Regulation Governing Museums and Private Heritage Houses, issued by Ministerial Decision No. 262/2010, and to ensure compliance. The Department also works to align the operations of these museums with the provisions of the regulation and conducts regular visits to monitor their administrative and technical status.

He pointed out that museums and private heritage houses are an important and active part of the museum sector.

Gaza space narrows for families

GAZA: Palestinians displaced by fighting in the Gaza Strip crowded onto the seashore as Israeli forces continued to battle Palestinians in central and southern areas, with health officials reporting at least 17 people killed in strikes on Tuesday.

Ceasefire talks were continuing in Cairo with little sign of a concrete breakthrough over key issues separating the sides, including future control over two corridors in the Gaza Strip once fighting ends.

In recent days, Israel has issued several evacuation orders across Gaza, the most since the beginning of the 10-month war, prompting an outcry from Palestinians, the United Nations and relief officials over the reduction of humanitarian zones and the absence of safe areas.

Residents and displaced families in the southern city of Khan Yunis and Deir Al Balah, in central Gaza, where most of the population is now concentrated, said they have been pushed to live in tents now packed on the beach.

“Maybe they should bring ships, so next time they order people to leave we can jump there, people are now on the beach near the seawater,” said Aya, 30, a displaced woman from Gaza City, who now lives with



Palestinians gather at the site of an Israeli strike that destroyed several houses, in Khan Yunis. — Reuters

her family in western Deir Al Balah. “Every day they say talks are progressing, an agreement is close, then all falls like dust. Do negotiators know that every day more families get wiped out by Israeli bombardment?” she added.

Palestinian health officials said Israeli strikes killed nine Palestinians in Bureij and Maghazi, two of Gaza’s eight historic refugee camps, while another strike killed five people in Khan Yunis and a third killed three others in Rafah.

More than 40,400 Palestinians have been killed in the war, according to Gaza’s health ministry.

The crowded enclave has been laid to waste and most of its 2.3 million people have been displaced multiple times and face acute shortages of food and medicine, humanitarian agencies say.

United Nations aid operations in Gaza ground to a halt after Israel issued new evacuation orders on Sunday for Deir Al Balah, where the UN operations

centre was located, a senior UN official said.

The evacuation order came as the UN has been preparing a campaign to vaccinate an estimated 640,000 children in Gaza against polio, after at least one case of the disease was identified.

Although there has been optimism from the United States, which is supporting the talks along with Egypt and Qatar, Hamas and Israel have been trading blame for a lack of progress. — Reuters

■ PAKISTAN ATTACKS



A bus with passengers sitting on the roof with belongings drives past a damaged vehicle, a day after militants conducted deadly attacks, in Bolan district of Pakistan’s restive province of Balochistan. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Tuesday that attacks by separatist militants in Pakistan’s southwestern province of Balochistan are aimed at stopping development projects that form part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). — Reuters

AID STRUGGLES AS SUDAN DAM COLLAPSE KILLED 30

ARBAAT: Emergency responders were scrambling on Tuesday to find out how many people remain missing after waters burst through a dam in eastern Sudan, resulting in the worst in a series of floods that have devastated a country already torn by 500 days of war.

The collapse of the Arbaat Dam on Sunday killed 30 people and likely dozens more, in the latest in a series of inundations around the country as this year’s rainy season hits heavier, and in places earlier, than in past years.

The flooding has impeded aid delivery already disrupted by the conflict between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

“Even before the dam burst people were trapped by the flooding and couldn’t get anything from Port Sudan.

The aid coming in now can’t get to the people,” said Mohamed Othman, a leader from one of the flooded villages.

Some 118,000 people have been displaced nationwide and more than 300,000 affected across the country.

“We don’t know how many are unaccounted for (in Arbaat). It’s very difficult to get information out from there,” said UN OCHA spokesperson Jens Laerke.

In the Darfur region, the flooding has blocked food deliveries, including the first shipment of supplies from the World Food Programme to famine-threatened Kreinik since the re-opening of the Adre border crossing to humanitarian.

The bridge leading to the town, where thousands of displaced people are sheltering with little food, was destroyed in the rains, said one local volunteer.

WFP on Sunday said that the first shipments since mid-July had made it through Al Tina border crossing into North Darfur, having been blocked. — Reuters



A Sudanese man walks on a flooded street in the town of Tangasi, in Sudan’s Meroe province. — AFP

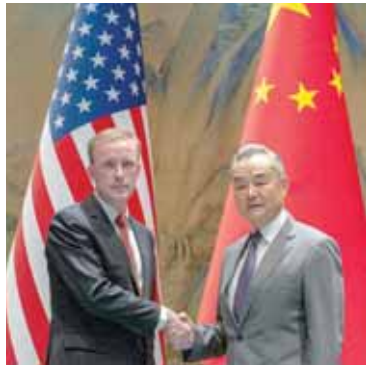
Top Chinese, US officials hope for productive talks

BEIJING: US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and China’s top diplomat Wang Yi said on Tuesday they were hoping for productive talks as they met in Beijing.

Sullivan said after he arrived in the Chinese capital on Tuesday afternoon that he looked forward to “a very productive round of conversations” with foreign minister Wang. “We’ll delve into a wide range of issues, including issues on which we agree and those issues... where there are still differences that we need to manage effectively and substantively,” he said.

Wang told Sullivan he was keen for “substantive” and “constructive” talks during his visit, the first to China by a US national security adviser since 2016. He also said he wanted the two sides to “help China-US relations move forward towards the San Francisco vision”, referring to a framework hashed out by Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping during talks in the US city last year.

An American official said ahead of the visit Sullivan would discuss the disputed



China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi (R) shakes hands with US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan at Yanqi Lake in Beijing. — AFP

waterway with counterparts in Beijing, including Wang. “We are committed to making the investments, strengthening our alliances, and taking the common steps on tech and national security that we need to take,” the official said.

Sullivan and Wang have met five times over the past year-and-a-half -- in Washington, Vienna, Malta and Bangkok, as well as alongside Biden and Xi at the November summit in California.

Those meetings between Wang and Sullivan were sometimes announced only after they concluded after long hours together. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

NEW DELHI

Modi urges early resolution of Ukraine conflict

Indian PM Narendra Modi said on Tuesday that he told Russian President Vladimir Putin that he backed an early, peaceful resolution to the Ukraine conflict, days after he held talks with President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv.

Modi said he spoke to Putin by phone and discussed ways to strengthen the partnership between their two countries. “Reiterated India’s firm commitment to support an early, abiding and peaceful resolution of the conflict,” Modi said. Modi



“underlined the importance of dialogue and diplomacy as well as sincere and practical engagement between all stakeholders” to find peace, the Indian foreign ministry said. — Reuters

TOKYO

Typhoon Shanshan disrupts travel in Japan

A strong typhoon was heading for southern Japan, bringing heavy rain and disrupting bullet trains and flights. Typhoon Shanshan was moving towards the southern Amami archipelago, packing gusts of up to 216 kilometres per hour.

Heavy rain prompted the suspension of the bullet train between the central cities of Hamamatsu and Toyohashi, though service resumed shortly thereafter, according to the operator. There were also delays on other



parts of the high-speed network and local trains. Going forward, some bullet train operations may be cancelled or suspended. Japan Airlines said it would cancel 116 domestic flights. — AFP

BAGHDAD

Iraq issues warrants for ‘heist of the century’

An Iraqi criminal court on Tuesday issued arrest warrants for a businessman and a former government official wanted over their alleged involvement in stealing \$2.5 billion of public funds. The scandal, dubbed the “heist of the century”, sparked widespread anger in Iraq, which is ravaged by rampant corruption, unemployment and decaying infrastructure.

The court issued the warrants for businessman Nour Zuhair and Haitham al Juburi, a former



adviser to then prime minister Mustafa al Kadhemi. The two suspects are among several facing a trial which opened in mid-August, but are on the run and failed to appear in court. — AFP



omanobserver.com/podcast

In brief

MADRID



SPAIN TO DONATE 500,000 MPOX VACCINES TO AFRICA

Spain will donate 500,000 mpox vaccine doses to countries in central Africa suffering from a surge in cases, the government said on Tuesday. The doses amount to 20 per cent of Spain's total mpox vaccine reserves, the health ministry said without specifying which nations in the region will receive the vaccines.

Spain also urged its European Union peers to follow suit and also donate 20 per cent of their mbox vaccine stockpile, saying it "makes no sense to stockpile vaccines where there is no problem," the statement added.

France and Germany have both announced they will each donate 100,000 mpox vaccine doses. — AFP

BRUSSELS



EU FACES LEGAL CHALLENGE OVER CLIMATE GOALS

Green activists said they were taking the European Union to court over "insufficient" climate targets, accusing Brussels of violating a key global agreement.

CAN Europe and Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) said in legal written arguments to a top EU court that the bloc's targets for emissions from agriculture, waste, small industry and transport were "grossly inadequate". "The EU's overall climate ambition remains alarmingly off-track from the limit of the 2015 Paris climate accords," the groups said.

The agreement set the target of limiting to a temperature increase of 1.5C over pre-industrial levels. — AFP

CARACAS



VENEZUELA OPPOSITION CANDIDATE FACES SECOND SUMMONS

Venezuelan opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia was on Tuesday facing a second summons to appear before prosecutors as part of a probe into his claim that he was the rightful victor of last month's presidential election. Gonzalez Urrutia, 74, who has been in hiding since after the election, ignored a first summons to appear on Monday.

Gonzalez Urrutia is being investigated for alleged crimes such as "usurpation of functions" and "forgery of public documents." He became the last-minute presidential candidate after Maria Corina Machado was banned. — AFP

Russian strikes pound Ukraine for 2nd day

KYIV: Russia fired a wave of attack drones and missiles at Ukraine that killed at least five people, authorities said on Tuesday, after a second night of heavy strikes across the war-battered nation.

Within hours of the barrage, Ukraine claimed fresh advances in its surprise assault on Russia's Kursk border region and reported taking nearly 600 Russian troops as prisoners in the past three weeks.

"Crimes against humanity cannot be committed with impunity," President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a post on social media, saying on Tuesday that four people had been killed and 16 wounded. One woman later died in hospital, authorities said.

Journalists in the capital Kyiv heard air raid sirens echo over the city throughout the night as well as an explosion, likely from air defence systems.

Monday's attack was one of Moscow's largest-ever on Ukraine, prompting Kyiv to push for allies' permission to use Western-provided weapons to strike deep inside Russia.

Zelensky said in Kyiv that Ukraine had used Western-supplied F-16 fighter jets to counter the Russian barrages and also announced that Ukraine had successfully tested a domestically-produced ballistic missile.

Local authorities said three of the victims had been killed in the southeastern Zaporizhzhia region and two died in the central city of Kryvyi Rig after a missile struck a hotel.

The hotel strike comes just



People look at burnt-out trucks on a site following an air attack, in the Odesa region, Ukraine. — AFP

Journalists in the capital Kyiv heard air raid sirens echo over the city throughout the night as well as an explosion, likely from air defence systems

days after a team working for the Reuters news agency was hit by a missile in their hotel in the eastern Ukrainian city

of Kramatorsk, killing a safety advisor working with the agency.

The Russian attacks triggered widespread blackouts and spurred condemnation from Ukraine's allies in Europe and the United States. Russia said the attack had targeted infrastructure linked to the Ukrainian military.

Nato member Poland said its airspace was violated during the barrage, probably by a drone. Since February 2022, Russia has

launched repeated large-scale drone and missile attacks on Ukraine, including punishing strikes on energy facilities.

Ukraine's electricity grid operator said on Tuesday that emergency blackouts would be applied throughout the day to reduce pressure on the grid following the fresh attacks that damaged energy infrastructure nationwide.

Local Ukrainian authorities said that three other civilians

had been killed in separate attacks in the Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv and Kherson regions.

Ukrainian forces have been pushing their offensive in Kursk, a surprise operation that has seen Kyiv gain swathes of territory in three weeks. Zelensky said late on Monday that Ukraine's cross-border incursion launched on August 6 was partially to "compensate" for Kyiv's inability to strike into Russian territory. — AFP

Macron seeks fresh negotiations on govt

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron faced an uphill battle on Tuesday as he tried to revive negotiations over a new government in France, with the political left refusing to take part after he rejected their candidate for prime minister.

More than seven weeks after an inconclusive parliamentary election which cost his allies their relative majority, Macron has still not named a new prime minister to take over from the current caretaker administration. Left-wing coalition the New Popular Front (NFP) emerged from the vote as the largest bloc, but well short of an absolute majority.

In the 577-seat National Assembly, the NFP has over 190 seats, followed by Macron's centrist alliance at around 160 and Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) at 140.

The NFP have nevertheless demanded that the president pick their candidate Lucie Castets, a 37-year-old economist and civil servant with a history of left-wing activism. But late on Monday, Macron ruled out naming a left-wing government, saying it would be a "threat to institutional stability". Instead, he called on "all political leaders to rise to the occasion by demonstrating a spirit of responsibility".

Macron's office said that it would be pointless to name



Senate President Gerard Larcher (R) leaves after a meeting with French President at the Elysee presidential palace in Paris. — AFP

For more than seven weeks, Macron has still not named a new prime minister to take over from the current caretaker administration

an NFP government as it would immediately be rejected by a no-confidence vote in parliament. The president called on the socialists, ecologists and communists in the leftist alliance to "cooperate with other political forces", in an apparent attempt to lure the more moderate members of the coalition away from the hard-left LFI. Socialist party boss Olivier Faure refused Macron's overture, saying he would "not be an accomplice to a parody of

democracy". Socialist deputies would back a no-confidence motion against any government that was not put forward by the NFP, he said, accusing the president of seeking to "prolong Macronism" despite losing the National Assembly election.

"French people will start to get annoyed, to say the least," Faure warned, saying he would take part in street protests after Communist party leader Fabien Roussel called for a "grand popular mobilisation".

The far-right RN was not invited to Tuesday's talks, which kicked off with Macron meeting a group of independent deputies.

On Wednesday, he will see representatives from Les Republicains, a centre-right party, and a number of other conservative figures. — AFP

Texas judge suspends Biden immigration reform policy

HOUSTON: A Texas judge ordered a temporary pause on a policy that would streamline the process for spouses of US citizens to obtain legal status in the country, a blow to one of US President Joe Biden's biggest immigration reform policies.

Judge J. Campbell Barker granted a 14-day administrative stay in a case brought by the Republican attorneys general of 16 US states challenging the Biden administration's policy.

In June, Biden announced the new policy, which streamlined a pathway to citizenship for an estimated half a million immigrants married to US nationals.

The 16 states bringing the lawsuit, however, say the policy is costing them millions of dollars in public services — including healthcare, education and law enforcement — used by the immigrants.

"The claims are substantial and warrant closer consideration than the court has been able to afford to date," Judge Barker wrote in his order.

"This is just the first step. We are going to keep fighting for Texas, our country, and the rule of law," said Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, whose state is party to the case, in a post on social media platform X after the order.

The new rules would streamline the process for those who already qualify for permanent residence by removing a requirement that



US President Joe Biden speaks at an event at the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP file photo

they leave the country as part of the application process.

The rules applied to those in the country for at least 10 years and married to a US citizen before June 17, 2024, and also applied to an estimated 50,000 stepchildren of US citizens.

Those approved would be granted work authorisation and the right to stay in the United States for up to three years while they apply for a green card, which is a pathway to full citizenship.

Monday's ruling suspends the granting of this "parole in place" status, but does not halt the government from continuing to accept applications for the status. In a statement, US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) confirmed it would continue to take applications but would not grant any until the stay was lifted. — AFP

Holiday from a holiday, post-vacation blues



Hyesha Barrett
@coach_hyesha

Hyesha is a certified Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat. She is affiliated with the Whispers of Serenity Clinic

HOLIDAYS are a perfect getaway, a great fix to revitalise the soul to shift and kick-start the old energy into fervent rejuvenation. The best prescribed antidote away from the daily routine, holidays offer a wonderful respite to unwind, explore and indulge in new experiences. However, if the holidays are wrought with an endless stream of activities, non-sufficient relaxing time and having to manage overtly demanding family members, post-holiday blues can easily bring on the need for a “holiday from a holiday”. This humorously described common phenomenon can be attributed to several factors, which may contribute to post-vacation fatigue. With the desire to maximise experiences most of us cram our itineraries with events, activities, sight-seeing excursions and social engagements in an attempt to make the most of our time away. While this can lead to unforgettable experiences, it can also be physically and mentally exhausting. The constant movement, coupled with navigating unfamiliar environments can leave travellers feeling depleted. A much more beneficial approach would

be to embrace the minimalist route of simply enjoying peaceful and serene moments through connecting to our breath, calming the body and watching the world pass by.

SIGNIFICANT ROLE
Another contributing factor which also plays a significant role in post-vacation fatigue is handling travel logistics. Long-flights, layovers and time zone changes can disrupt sleep patterns which can lead to jet lag. Dealing with unfamiliar territories, living without our homely creature comforts, the stress of packing and unpacking, car rentals, public transportation, language barriers and cultural differences can often add to our weariness. While these experiences are enriching, they also require a level of mental engagement that can be draining over time.

Moreover travelling with family, particularly with young children can become a juggling act. Ensuring that everyone is entertained, fed, comfortable and safe requires constant attention and energy. Parents often find that their “relaxing” vacation turns into a series of logistical challenges,

WHILE
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ANGST

whereby our own self-care finds itself at the bottom of the priority list.

Once the holiday is over, returning to the routine of daily life can feel unsettling. The transition from the freedom of late nights, unhealthy food and one too many missed working out sessions, can easily bring on anxiety as furthermore work and household responsibilities resume.

This post-holiday blues is a well-documented occurrence, where the contrast between the leisurely holiday and the structured daily life creates a sense of dissatisfaction and enervation. Sometimes, upon reflection of the holiday, we didn't end up doing half the things we were hoping to do, more often having focused on others rather than ourselves.

While holidays are essential for rejuvenation and exploration, they can sometimes lead to unforeseen angst. It's important to honour your feelings, to schedule in some “me” time and to reflect on what can be done better next time to aid your mental and emotional relaxation. Make sure you plan a gentle transition and some buffer days at home with some deep downtime before returning to your back from holiday to-do-lists and commitments.

South Korea fights new border threat!

CLAIRE LEE

Near the heavily fortified border that divides North and South Korea, a monitoring device is working 24-7 — not tracking missiles or troop movements, but catching malaria-carrying mosquitoes that may cross the border.

Despite its advanced healthcare service and decades of determined efforts, achieving “malaria-free” status has remained elusive for South Korea, largely thanks to its proximity to the isolated North, where the disease is prevalent.

The South issued a nationwide malaria warning this year, and scientists say climate change, especially warmer springs and heavier rainfall, could bring more mosquito-borne diseases to the peninsula unless the two Koreas, which remain technically at war, cooperate.

The core issue is the DMZ, a four-kilometre-wide no man’s land that runs the full length of the 250-kilometre border. The demilitarised zone is covered in lush forest and wetlands, and largely unvisited by humans since it was created after the 1953 ceasefire that ended Korean War hostilities.

The heavily mined border barrier area has become an ecological refuge for rare species — an Asiatic black bear was photographed in 2018 — and scientists say it is also an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes, including malaria carriers that can fly as far as 12 kilometres.

The DMZ has stagnant water plus “plenty of wild animals that serve as blood sources for mosquitoes to feed on in order to lay their eggs”, said Kim Hyun-woo, a staff scientist at Seoul’s Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency.

South Korea once believed it had eradicated malaria, but in 1993 a soldier serving on the DMZ was discovered to have been infected, and the disease has persisted ever since, with cases up nearly 80 per cent last year to 747, from 420 in 2022. “The DMZ is not an area where pest control can be carried out,” Kim Dong-gun, an environmental biology professor at Sahmyook University in Seoul, said.

As mosquito populations increase, more malaria carriers are “feeding on soldiers in the border region, leading to a continuous occurrence of malaria cases there”, he said.

The South Korean health authorities have installed 76 mosquito-tracking devices nationwide, including in key areas near the DMZ.

North of the border, malaria is more widespread, with WHO data indicating nearly 4,500 cases between 2021 and 2022, with the country’s extreme poverty and food insecurity likely exacerbating the situation. — AFP

Starmer signals pain and ‘unpopular decisions’ to fix British economy



Elizabeth Piper
The writer is UK political editor for Reuters based in London

PRIME MINISTER Keir Starmer said on Tuesday he would have to take unpopular decisions, raising the possibility of “painful” taxes on the wealthy and spending cuts to try to fix Britain’s problems he blamed on Conservative misrule.

In a speech in the rose garden of his Downing Street office, the scene of Covid parties under a former Conservative government, Starmer promised to end politics as usual, telling voters he was levelling with them that Britain’s problems would only get worse before getting better.

Elected in a landslide victory in July, Starmer has vowed to rebuild British society, saying this month’s anti-migrant riots reflected divisions that have taken hold, stoked by what he described as the Conservatives’ preference for populism. He also blamed the last government for leaving him with a £22 billion (\$29 billion) black hole, something he said was unexpected and which had forced him to take some difficult decisions such as limiting fuel payments to the elderly.

The opposition Conservative Party accuses Starmer’s Labour Party of portraying the fiscal situation as much worse than it is so it can hike taxes after campaigning before the election on an agenda not to raise certain taxes on working people.

Starmer said he planned to stick to that pledge, but there would be short term pain in what he said would be “unpopular decisions” for the long-term good.

“There is a budget coming in October, and it’s going to be painful. We have no other choice ... Those with the broader shoulders should bear the heavier burden,” he said in a speech to voters he met during the election campaign, referring to a fiscal statement due on October 30.

“We have inherited not just an economic black hole but a societal black hole and that is why we have to take action and do things differently. Part of that is being honest with people about the choices we face and how tough this will be,” he said.



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer speaks during a press conference in the Rose Garden at 10 Downing Street, London, Britain. – Reuters

THE BRITISH PM SAID HE PLANNED TO STICK TO THAT PLEDGE, BUT THERE WOULD BE SHORT TERM PAIN IN WHAT HE SAID WOULD BE ‘UNPOPULAR DECISIONS’ FOR THE LONG-TERM GOOD

“Frankly, things will get worse before we get better,” he told the audience of apprentices, teachers, nurses, small business owners and firefighters.

DISHONEST ANALYSIS
The rose garden last made headlines after it was used by former Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his staff to hold parties during the Covid lockdowns, events that Starmer said had shattered the trust between the public and its politicians. Conservative leadership contender, Kemi Badenoch, who is also the party’s policy chief for housing and communities, said the speech was based on a “dishonest analysis”.

“The truth is that Keir Starmer is managing voters’ expectations for a decade of decline,” she said in a statement.

Starmer, a former director of public prosecutions, said he could not

believe as prime minister he had to count available prison places to try to deal with those behind the riots that targeted Muslims and migrants.

“Not having enough prison places is about as fundamental a failure as you can get. And those people throwing rocks, torching cars, making threats, they didn’t just know the system was broken, they were betting on it, gaming it,” he said.

Starmer said the former Conservative government’s failure to tackle problems, and its focus on the “snake oil” of populism, had widened divisions in society which would take time to heal.

He inherited an economy with sluggish growth, which is only now showing signs of improvement. Public sector net debt is at the highest since the early 1960s and the tax burden is on track to hit a near-80 year high.

Finance minister Rachel Reeves has said the projected public finances overspend means having to cut billions of pounds of spending.

“Those who made the mess should have to do their bit to clean it up,” Starmer said, referring to the water regulator’s new ability to place tough fines on companies responsible for allowing sewage into lakes and rivers.

“But just as when I responded to the riots, I’ll have to turn to the country and make big asks of you as well, to accept short term pain for long-term good, difficult trade off, but the genuine solution.”

New tourism growth trajectory

The Sultanate of Oman is becoming an increasingly attractive destination for global travellers thanks to its systematic positioning, amazing history, friendly people, spectacular scenery and diverse landscapes.

Although Covid-19 pandemic hit the Oman tourism hard as lockdowns restricted people from travelling, the sector witnessed significant recovery as visitor arrivals started increasing from the fourth quarter of 2021 onwards following ease in limitations on logistics movement.

Tourist arrivals have impressively surpassed pre-pandemic levels, jumping from 2.5 million in 2019 to 2.9 million in 2022. In 2023, Oman welcomed more than three million foreign tourists, marking a 41.2-per cent increase over 2022.

Underscoring this historic growth is a report from Fitch Solutions Company BMI that the average annual tourist influx for the period from 2023 to 2027 will grow by 7.4 per cent, indicating sustained growth in the nation's tourism sector.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, Oman was among the top 20 best performing destinations in the world for tourist arrivals between January and July 2023.

The credit of this growing popularity of Oman as a premier tourist destination goes to the country's Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, which made efforts to put Oman on the global tourist map.

The ministry has implemented a number of development plans to enhance investments and expand cultural and geological tourism programmes. It also has many offers including new tourism products, especially in leisure and adventure tourism. For this purpose, the ministry started collaborating with nearby countries.

In March this year, the ministry launched a 'See Double' campaign, prompting travellers to visit both destinations during their summer holidays in collaboration with Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development



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THE CREDIT OF THIS GROWING POPULARITY OF OMAN AS A PREMIER TOURIST DESTINATION GOES TO THE COUNTRY'S MINISTRY OF HERITAGE AND TOURISM, WHICH MADE EFFORTS TO PUT OMAN ON THE GLOBAL TOURIST MAP

Authority.

Oman also signed an agreement with Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Bahrain to promote cruises across all four destinations.

In October 2023, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait agreed to form a 'GCC zone' for visas that will help GCC tourists cross-country travel like they do in Europe.

Interestingly, Oman has been a significant draw for Indian travellers because of many factors, including the availability of similar cultural influence, travel accessibility from most Indian cities and easy visa procedures.

As a result, Oman is enthusiastically stepping up its efforts through comprehensive promotional campaigns to attract the Sultanate of Oman's allure of diverse experience to Indian travellers.

The current roadshows being held in major Indian cities in partnerships with prominent players, including leading luxury hotels and airlines, reinforce Oman's position as "a top-tier destination for Indian travellers seeking luxury, culture and adventure."

The roadshows are part of a broader strategy by Oman's Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to boost visitor numbers from India and reinforce the strong ties between the two nations through tourism.

According to report by the Global Trade & Technology Council of India (GTTC India), that the atmosphere at the roadshows was charged with energy as Indian travel trade professionals engaged in meaningful dialogues with Oman tourism officials.

"The message was clear: Oman is not just a destination; it is a luxurious haven of natural beauty, rich heritage and extraordinary experiences that promise to leave a lasting impression," GTTC India stated in the report.

Indian tourist arrivals in Oman registered remarkable growth of over 70 per cent compared to the previous year, crossing the half-million mark to reach 610,057 visitors. The growth continues to gather momentum, with the figures showing a 15-per cent increase in arrivals in the first five months of 2024.

POT BREAKING!



A boy breaks a dahi-handi (curd-pot) suspended in the air during celebrations to mark the Krishna Janmashtmi festival in Mumbai, India, on Tuesday. – AFP

Rethinking emissions targets in developing countries

DESPITE committing to nationally determined contributions (NDCs) in the 2015 Paris climate agreement to limit global warming, countries have struggled to meet their emissions-reduction targets. This is particularly true for developing countries, where pressing economic and political challenges tend to overshadow long-term climate objectives.

Implementing effective climate policy requires a shift in thinking. Climate change is both a negative externality and an inequality problem, raising the question of who should bear the costs of climate action within and between countries. Policymakers should focus more on the complicated tradeoff between economic efficiency and equity to ensure that developing countries do not shoulder the burden of the rich world's historical carbon dioxide emissions, and that measures are in place to safeguard future generations.

Of course, the Paris agreement set clear goals while adhering to the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities," which means that all countries are responsible for addressing climate change, but not equally so. But there is still a tendency to focus on uniform targets. Consider the global push for net-zero greenhouse-gas



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(GHG) emissions by 2050 — a complimentary long-term goal outlined in the Paris agreement, and one with respect to which many developing countries remain far off track.

To achieve this ambitious goal, countries must be able to devise climate policy based on their capabilities and historical responsibilities, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all strategy. Recent research suggests that this would require net-negative emissions targets for high-income countries, while allowing low-income countries to generate net-positive emissions. Of course, such differentiation is not a free pass: developing countries would still have to reduce GHG emissions. But this approach, embodying the spirit of "common but differentiated responsibilities," better reflects their economic conditions and development needs.

Moreover, financial assistance from developed to developing countries to support climate action has been ineffective, owing mainly to transparency and accountability problems. In this context, the same study finds that carbon sequestration and capture,

whether through technological innovations or natural solutions, could be a politically feasible alternative to direct monetary transfers. Enabling each country to monitor its own efforts to absorb carbon could bring the world closer to net-zero emissions while respecting diverse national circumstances.

Emissions in Latin America, for example, are split almost equally between energy, agriculture and livestock, and land use, whereas they are largely energy-related in the United States and Europe. Promoting sustainable agricultural and livestock practices — as opposed to focusing solely on decarbonising the energy system



Promoting sustainable agricultural and livestock practices could help reduce emissions.

— could therefore help reduce emissions in the region, as well-managed pastures and soil can increase carbon sequestration. This approach would also align private incentives with social returns by revaluing land and allowing farmers to remain internationally competitive.

The case of Argentina illustrates how improving the sustainability of agriculture and livestock could play a pivotal role in the transition to a green global economy. A series of economic crises, coupled with increasing political volatility, have led the Argentinian government to focus more on immediate problems than climate policy. But given the country's position as a

leading food producer, revamping these industries could help it enhance climate mitigation and adaptation — and contribute meaningfully to international goals — while recognising its economic conditions and development needs.

This year, Argentina began certifying the production of carbon-neutral beef, a programme that could reduce emissions if implemented correctly. The country has already started to embrace sustainable practices such as regenerative livestock farming, which increases carbon sequestration, productivity and profitability by restoring the soil's natural fertility. Moreover, Argentina is among the countries with the highest rates of no-tillage farming. This practice, which also helps store carbon, was used on more than 90 per cent of its agricultural land in 2019-20.

Addressing domestic inequality is equally crucial in shaping effective climate policies in Argentina and other developing countries. Ongoing research demonstrates that conventional approaches, including uniform carbon taxes, fail to account for nuanced socioeconomic disparities.

sport



Faisal al Aghbari scores the winning goal for Ibri from a second penalty kick.

IBRI STUN SOHAR, AL RUSTAQ BEAT SAHAM

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

Al Nasr and Oman Club played to a goalless draw in the third round of the Omantel League, marking the first draw of the new season at the Seeb Sports Stadium on Monday.

The match witnessed a strong start from Al Nasr, as they tried to open the scoring from the first minute, but Oman Club's defence was cohesive.

Oman Club's first attempt came in the fourth minute with a shot by Mahmoud al Hasani, which did not pose a threat to Al Nasr's goal. Oman Club controlled the midfield during the first half, but without any significant effectiveness in front of Al Nasr's goal, so the first half ended in a goalless draw.

The second half began with a good spread of the two teams, with a continuous attack from Oman Club. The Oman Club coach made changes by bringing in Yazid al Rawahi instead of Abdulwahid al Hanai and the match witnessed a better performance from Al Nasr with



Al Rustaq players celebrate their goal against Saham.

repeated opportunities, especially through Yazid al Maashani. Despite the danger posed by Oman Club, Al Nasr's defence and goalkeeper continued to keep the net clean.

The attempts continued from both teams until the end of the match, which ended in a goalless draw, with each team earning one point. With this draw, Oman Club raised their tally to 7 points, occupying third place, while Al Nasr raised their score to 4 points in fifth place.

Oman Club dropped back

in the race to compete for the top spot, as Seeb and Al Nahda led the competition with 9 points from 3 rounds, with Seeb outperforming on goal difference.

IBRI UPSET SOHAR

Ibri secured a valuable 1-0 victory over Sohar at the Sohar Sports Complex.

The first half ended in a goalless draw, as Sohar had the advantage and wasted several opportunities, most notably Mohsen Jawhar's shot in the fifth minute which was saved by Ibri



Al Nasr and Oman Club players in action.

goalkeeper Mutia al Saadi.

Sohar also had other opportunities through Ali Fadhel and Ahmed Masi, but without translating into goals. For their part, Ibri tried to enter the atmosphere of the match, and the first opportunity came in the 11th minute through Branly Augustin.

In the second half, the referee awarded a penalty kick to Ibri in the 47th minute, which was executed by Faisal al Aghbari, but Sohar goalkeeper Faye al Rushaidi saved it. The two teams continued to search for a goal

until the 80th minute when Faisal al Aghbari scored the winning goal for Ibri from a second penalty kick.

Despite Sohar's continuous attempts to equalise the score, they were unable to score. The match witnessed a large crowd of Sohar supporters who provided strong support for their team.

With this victory, Ibri got their first 3 points in the league after two consecutive defeats, while Sohar's balance froze at 3 points, but they remained ahead of Ibri on goal difference, occupying sixth place, while Ibri came in eighth place.

AL RUSTAQ THUMP SAHAM

Al Rustaq secured a deserved 3-1 victory over Saham at the Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

The two teams started the first half cautiously, with multiple attempts from both sides without translating into goals.

The scoreless draw continued until the 64th minute, when Mohammed al Najashi managed to break the deadlock by scoring the first goal for Al Rustaq with a powerful shot from inside the

penalty area.

It was not long before Saham quickly got back into the game, as Prince Obengo scored the equaliser in the 66th minute after successfully penetrating the Al Rustaq defence.

However, Al Rustaq did not back down, but continued to press until Fiston Abdul managed to score the second goal in the 82nd minute.

Five minutes before the end of the match, Abdulaziz al Shaqsi strengthened Al Rustaq's lead with the third goal in the 85th minute, thus confirming his team's superiority on the field.

With this victory, Al Rustaq managed to collect their first 3 points in the league after suffering two consecutive defeats in the previous two rounds, while Saham remained without points, recording their third loss in a row.

This round is the last before the international break, as the Oman national team prepares to participate in the Asian qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup. The top-tier Oman league will resume on September 14 for the fourth round.

Silhavy names Oman squad for Iraq and S Korea clashes

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

The head coach of the national senior football team, Jaroslav Silhavy, announced on Tuesday a 25-member Oman squad for the opening games of the deciding round of the Asian Qualifiers for the 2026 Fifa World Cup, against Iraq and South Korea on September 5 and 10 respectively.

The selection of the Czech coach marks the harmony among the majority of players who were together in the last round of the Asian qualifiers which progressed Oman to this stage. On the other side, the unveiled squad omitted many faces who were expected to join the team based on their performance recently including Al Mundher al Alawi, Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Juma al Habsi and Hatim al Roushdi.

Silhavy opted the following players to represent the national team in the forthcoming games against Iraq and South Korea including: Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Faye al Rushedi, Ibrahim al Rajhi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Mohammed al Musallami, Khalid al Buraiki, Ghanim al Habshi, Ali al Buaisi, Ahmed al Kaabi, Amjad al Harthy, Abdulaziz al Shmoosi, Arshad al Alawi, Harib al Saadi, Abdullah Fawaz, Salah al Yahyaei,



Zaher al Aghbari, Jameel al Yahmadi, Omar al Malki, Sultan al Marzooq, Nasser al Rawahi, Issam al Subhi, Abdulrahman al Mushefiri, Mohsin al Ghassani, Mohammed al Ghafri and Mohammed al Ghafri.

Oman team players will report to the daily training sessions, on Wednesday, after a long gap since the completion of a preparatory camp in Spain.

The team will travel to Basra City in Iraq on September 3 while they will return back to Muscat on the following day of the match. This is to ensure the team's readiness ahead of both essential games.



Oman will aim to book a historic spot in the forthcoming edition of Fifa World Cup 2026 which will be co-hosted by Canada, Mexico and the United States.

Oman have high hopes to accomplish this dream as they were drawn in a group that comprises South Korea, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine and Kuwait in Group B.

Oman will kick off their Asian qualifiers games with an away match against Iraq in Basra city on September 5. The match will start at 8 pm (Oman time) at Basra International Stadium. Then, Oman will host South Korea in a key game on September 10.

Later, the Red Warriors will meet Kuwait on October 10 in Muscat and it will be followed by Jordan clash on October 15 in Amman city.

The concluding first leg matches will be against Palestine on November 14. The second leg matches will begin as Oman will host Iraq in Muscat on November 19 before travelling to Seoul to face South Korea on March 20, 2025, and then Kuwait on March 25, 2025. Then, Oman will be back to play a home game as they will take on Jordan in Muscat on June 5, 2025 and the concluding game against Palestine is scheduled on June 10, 2025 in an away match.





Salalah Club players pose with their bronze medals in the Fatima Bint Mubarak Gulf Basketball Academy Cup for Women, in Abu Dhabi.

Salalah girls secure third in Gulf Cup



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

The Salalah girls' basketball team achieved a remarkable accomplishment by securing third place in the Fatima Bint Mubarak Gulf Basketball Academy Cup for Women, held in Abu Dhabi. This achievement came after Salalah's exciting victory against the Fatima Academy team with a score of 52-39. The Kuwaiti team, Al Qurain, clinched first place, while the Qatari club, Al Gharafa, took second place.

Salalah's participation in this tournament reflects the Oman Basketball Association's commitment to developing women's sports and its support for female talents in sports clubs. Salalah Club was nominated to

participate in this tournament after achieving first place in the overall ranking of the 2023 Oman Women's Sports Games.

In the interesting match, Sarah Abdullah opened the scoring for Fatima Academy with a free throw. However, Marwa al Ajmi quickly responded by scoring a point from a free throw for Salalah. The pressure continued from Salalah players, as Marwa al Ajmi and Noor al Kharousi were able to add four points, raising the score to 5-1 in favour of Salalah. Zeina Batash was able to increase the difference by scoring two additional points, and despite the attempts of the Fatima Academy players to come back in the match, the first quarter ended with Salalah leading 12-9.

In the second quarter, Shams al Duha al Khenji started by scoring

a wonderful three-pointer, which increased the difference in favour of Salalah. But Hayat al Maskari quickly responded by scoring two points, then Noor al Kharousi added three more points for Salalah. Despite the attempts of the Fatima Academy players to reduce the difference, Ghadeer Nasser was able to score two points, and Shams al Duha added another three-pointer, making the score 22-13 for Salalah. At the end of the quarter, Fatima Academy made a comeback scoring 10 consecutive points, to end the second quarter with a 23-22 lead.

In the third quarter, the fierce competition continued between the two teams, as the players exchanged points. Noor al Kharousi managed to score a three-pointer for Salalah in

the eighth minute, bringing the score to 35-33. At the end of the quarter, Shams al Duha added a point from a half basket, ending the third quarter with Salalah leading 36-33.

In the fourth and final quarter, Shams al Duha widened the gap for Salalah by scoring two points. Despite Fatima Academy players' attempts to reduce the difference, Salalah's defences were cohesive, preventing them from returning to the match. Ruba al Kalbani added two points for Salalah from a quick counter-attack, bringing the score to 41-34. Shams al Duha continued to shine by scoring five consecutive points, enabling Salalah to maintain their lead until the end of the match, which ended with a 52-39 victory.

In their semifinal, Salalah lost against Al Gharafa 53-31.

Ahmad set for WEC challenge in US

AUSTIN, Texas: Oman's Ahmad al Harthy returns to race action this weekend during round six of the FIA World Endurance Championship, the event marking another fresh test for the Team WRT driver with his maiden visit to the Circuit of the Americas in the USA.

Badged as the 'Lone Star Le Mans', the six-hour race at COTA in Austin, Texas, will be contested on September 1, and Al Harthy and his esteemed team-mates in the No 46 BMW M4 LMGT3 entry, Valentino Rossi and Maxime Martin, are determined to deliver a serious points haul.

Going into the ante-penultimate event of the FIA WEC campaign, the trio hold sixth in the LMGT3 driver standings after a season which has certainly experienced ups and downs – the highlight thus far being a fantastic second place at Imola in Italy during round two. Two unfortunate non-scoring events, at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium and Le Mans in France, have tempered the team-mates' challenge in LMGT3 but ahead of this coming weekend's race in North America they are only nine points shy of the top four in the championship.

Last time out at Interlagos in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Al Harthy, Martin and Rossi combined to deliver a richly deserved return to the points with a very creditable top five result from 12th on the class grid in a sun-baked six-hour contest.

The desire, of course, is to make an overdue return to the LMGT3 podium but in a category as hugely competitive as the FIA World Endurance Championship that is much easier said than done, with an entry packed with the world's most high profile teams and professional endurance racers.

As is always the case, OQ, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel, Experience Oman and BMW Oman supported Al Harthy will be keenly focused on developing the very best race set-up during the practice sessions in Austin. From there, he will be determined to progress to the top 10 Hyperpole qualifying shoot-out after only just missing out in Brazil by a mere tenth of a second.

Ahmad al Harthy:
"I really cannot wait to get on track at COTA for the first time



- **Circuit of the Americas in Texas hosts Rd6 of FIA WEC this weekend**
- **Omani racer Ahmad al Harthy relishing brand new challenge in USA**
- **Al Harthy, Maxime Martin, Valentino Rossi target big points in 6hr race**
- **Team WRT BMW M4 drivers currently sixth in LMGT3 Championship**

this week, it's going to be another amazing first for me in my career and I'm looking forward to learning this incredible circuit and making the best preparations we can for qualifying and the race. I'm excited to be racing in the USA for the first time, and proudly promoting Oman as we do that – hopefully with a strong result. "It's been a good season generally in FIA WEC, our first together with Vale and Maxime with WRT, with just a few things working against us, especially Spa and Le Mans. Overall I'm happy with my performances, it's incredible working with such a professional team as WRT, and we will all be working hard to deliver the best we can over the last three races – starting at COTA this weekend!"

Following three free practice sessions, two on August 30, and one on the morning of August 31, LMGT3 qualifying is scheduled to begin at 15.00 local time on August 31 with the Hyperpole shoot-out taking place directly after. On September 1, the six-hour 'Lone Star Le Mans' at the Circuit of the Americas will begin at 13.00 local time.

Oman take part in Arab junior tennis in Tunisia

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

Oman took part in the Arab Tennis Championship for Juniors for age groups under-12 and under-14 years held in Tunisia from August 16 to 24.

The Arab Tennis Championship was organised by the Tunisian Tennis Federation in cooperation with the Arab Tennis Federation. The conclusion came under the patronage of the Tunisian Minister of Youth and Sports Kamal Daqish and in the presence of Shaikh Ahmed Al Jaber al Sabah, President of the Arab Tennis Federation and



Oman junior tennis team with the dignitaries.

President of the Tunisian Tennis Federation Dr Salma al Moulahi and in the presence of a number of dignitaries and ambassadors.

Egypt won the gold in the under-14 boys and girls sections. In under-14 boys section, Algeria

took the silver while Morocco claimed the bronze medal.

In the under-14 girls category, Tunisia (A) came second and Morocco finished third.

In the under-12 boys, Syria won first place, Tunisia (A) came



Oman junior tennis team with the Oman Ambassador to Tunisia.

in second and Algeria finished third. In under-12 girls, Tunisia (A) came on top ahead of Tunisia (B) and followed by Lebanon.

Along with the top place winners, other teams were also honoured for the participation in

the tournament.

Earlier, Ambassador Dr Hilal bin Abdullah al Sinani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Tunisia, visited the national tennis team at the team's residence, where he

met with the delegation of the Omani tennis team, stressing the importance of ensuring that all appropriate conditions are provided for them and wishing them a pleasant stay.

Dr Hilal also touched on the importance of participating in tournaments to develop technical levels, concluding that their age is at the beginning of their sports career, and that success and achievements come in succession, wishing them further progress and prosperity.

In tournament action, the Oman boys' team lost to Bahrain 2-1 in a good contest, while the girls' team recorded a victory over Lebanon 3-0.

Djokovic shines under the lights

GAUFF ROLLS ON AS US OPEN CHAMPIONS OPEN WITH VICTORIES



USA's Coco Gauff celebrates match point over France's Varvara Gracheva during their first round match on day one of the US Open tournament. – AFP



Serbia's Novak Djokovic plays a return to Moldova's Radu Albot during their first round match on day one of the US Open tournament at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City. – AFP

NEW YORK: Defending champion Novak Djokovic eased into the second round of the US Open with a straight-set victory over qualifier Radu Albot on Monday as Coco Gauff launched her defence of the women's title with a convincing victory.

Djokovic, seeking his 25th Grand Slam title and his first since his victory at Flushing Meadows last year, wasn't his sharpest self.

But he was more than a match for 138th-ranked Albot, breaking the Moldovan six times on the way to a 6-2, 6-2, 6-4 victory.

He notched a men's record 78th match win on Arthur Ashe Stadium, where he said the "electric" energy of the night session was unlike any other.

"The night sessions here are best in the world," said Djokovic, who capped the action on a day that drew a record 74,641 spectators according to the US Tennis Association.

That included a day-session crowd of 42,886 and a record-setting night-session crowd of 31,775.

"There's an incredible energy, and with the new rule this year that the crowd can move around, there are a lot of things happening," the four-time champion said.

Seeded second behind Jannik Sinner, Djokovic is vying to become the first man to repeat in New York since Roger Federer won five straight US Opens from 2004-2008.

He's coming off an emotional triumph at the Paris Olympics, but Djokovic has yet to capture a Grand Slam title this year.

He had 10 double faults among 40 unforced errors, but was nevertheless in full control throughout the two-hour, seven-minute contest that ended shortly before midnight.

Gauff, meanwhile, powered into the second round with a 6-2, 6-0 victory over France's Varvara Gracheva.

The 20-year-old American fired 10 aces and needed just 66 minutes to beat 66th-ranked Gracheva. She saved eight break points — including two with aces in the final game.

"It is definitely a lot of pressure this tournament but I'm just enjoying it," said Gauff, who is seeded third behind world number one Iga Swiatek and Aryna Sabalenka.

"Last year was incredible, so I'm just bringing those vibes and whatever happens, happens."

Gauff has battled through an erratic season since capturing her maiden major last year and her tune-up tournaments saw her fall in the third round at Toronto before she crashed out of her first match as the defending champion in Cincinnati.

A LITTLE TOUGH

"The last few weeks have been a little bit tough," Gauff said.

American Ben Shelton opened the action on Ashe with a 6-4, 6-2, 6-2 victory over 2020 champion Dominic Thiem.

Shelton's triumph marked an end to Thiem's Grand Slam career, the Austrian having announced he would retire at the end of 2024 after several injury-plagued seasons.

"I just want to say thanks for all the support," Thiem told fans. "It's been 10 years since I first played here, I had my greatest success on this court."

Fourth-seeded Alexander Zverev of Germany needed four sets to get past lucky loser Maximilian Marterer 6-2, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-2.

Sixth-seeded Andrey Rublev beat Brazilian Thiago Seyboth Wild 6-3, 7-6 (7/3), 7-5 and eighth-seeded Casper Ruud of Norway advanced with a 7-6 (7/2), 6-2, 6-2 win over China's Bu Yunchaokete.

Ruud next faces French veteran Gael Monfils, who beat Diego Schwartzman 6-7 (2/7), 6-2, 6-2, 6-1 in the Argentinian's final Grand Slam appearance as he heads into retirement.

Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka cruised into the second round with a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Australian qualifier Priscilla Hon.

Wimbledon champion Barbora Krejickova, seeded eighth, eased into the second round with a 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 victory over Spanish qualifier Marina Bassols Ribera.

Olympic women's singles gold medalist Zheng Qinwen of China, seeded seventh, rallied from a set down to beat Amanda Anisimova 4-6, 6-4, 6-2. — AFP



Ben Shelton of the USA after beating Dominic Thiem of Austria. Thiem announced he would retire at the end of 2024 after several injury-plagued seasons. – USA Today Sports

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Scheme to incentivise patronage of local content

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

The National Office for Local Content is developing a loyalty programme designed to incentivise the purchase of local products and services, a key official has revealed.

Eng Maryam bint Mohammed al Kamaliyah, Member of the National Office for Local Content at the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, explained the idea behind the loyalty programme: “The Loyalty Programme is like a platform for citizens, where all local products and services will be listed. When a citizen goes to purchase a product from any store, points will automatically be added to their account in this programme based on their purchase. The number of points will depend on the percentage of

local content in the product. For example, if the product is 100 per cent locally made, the number of points will be higher; if it’s 60 per cent, the points will be lower, and so on.” Interviewed by a local radio channel, she added: “This applies to all Omani products as well as local services. If a citizen uses a service from a local company, points will be added as well. The idea is to accumulate these points, and after reaching a certain number of points, there will be rewards, (which) could be discounts on services or savings on other items that the citizen might need.” Additionally, the programme will allow users to see their contribution to supporting local products and services.

The programme is part of a larger plan to enhance local content and in-country value (ICV) in Oman. Earlier this



The loyalty programme for local content, currently in development, will provide rewards for citizens who purchase local goods and services.

year, the Council of Ministers approved the National Local Content Policy (2024-2030), and as a result the National Office for Local Content was established

under the umbrella of the General Secretariat of the Tender Board. According to Eng Al Kamali, the office is currently in the process of developing a national

The programme is part of a larger plan to enhance local content and in-country value (ICV) in Oman. Earlier this year, the Council of Ministers approved the National Local Content Policy (2024-2030), and as a result, the National Office for Local Content was established under the umbrella of the General Secretariat of the Tender Board

focusing on four sectors: health, construction, services (including electricity and water), and energy. Our focus is on formulating a national strategy for local content within these four sectors, identifying opportunities for localisation, and implementing initiatives over the coming years. These initiatives will create job opportunities, boost direct investment, and localise industries by encouraging the establishment of factories to manufacture products locally instead of importing them. We are working in collaboration with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Unit,” she said.

Additionally, she unveiled that the office will hold a national laboratory on local content in November, following which the approved national strategy will be announced.

Oman’s dedicated Food City project at Khazaen



The high-level delegation touring the different components of The Food City at Khazaen on Tuesday.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

MUSCAT: A high-level delegation representing government and public sector entities responsible for delivering Oman’s national food security strategy, visited Khazaen Economic City to conduct a first-hand assessment of the Food City planned within the hub. Led by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR), the team also comprised Eng Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaïdy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries; Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of SME Development Authority, and Sulayem bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority.

“The purpose of the visit was to assess Khazaen’s contribution to food security projects, including the Central Fruit and Vegetable Market (Silal), the industrial bakery of Salalah Mills Company, the Oman Bio-Products factory, and the food industries centre of Jasmine Oriental Company, which is recognised as one of the largest food processing centres in the Middle East,” said Khazaen in a post.

The Food City project, which combines Silal and a Food Industrial Cluster, exemplifies Khazaen’s commitment to strengthening food security by offering attractive investment opportunities, it further noted.

“The Food City project is designed to meet the increasing demand for food in both local and international markets, while also fostering the development of value-added food industries, improving food supply chains and cold chains, and attracting high-quality food industry sectors such

as packaging, canning and re-export.”

Covering an area of 1 million m2, The Food City integrates the Khazaen Central Fruits and Vegetables Market (Silal) with a value-added Food Industries Cluster alongside supply chain infrastructure. This combination of facilities and capabilities is designed to enable the establishment of an integrated platform for exporting, importing, packaging, marketing, and distributing vegetables and fruits, says Khazaen.

The Food Industrial Cluster itself, spanning an area of 300,000 m2, has been conceived an integrated food processing complex designed for manufacturing, canning, packaging, and food preserving operations. It is primarily targeted at international companies specialised in food supply chains and cold chains, and packaging, storage and transportation.

Food related projects currently in various stages of development and operation at The Food City include: Salalah Flour Mills (frozen bakery factory), Integrated Barka Crystal (production of carbonated water), The Sparkling Spring (production of carbonated water), Oman Bioproducts (animal feed), Al Safwa (catering and packaging services), Jasmine Oriental (food Industries Centre) and Basateen (a centre for collecting and distributing agricultural crops).

On Tuesday, Khazaen added yet another food company to the list. Zircon Food Industries Company is investing RO 3.8 million in the development of an integrated industrial complex for refining, sorting and packaging rice, sugar and spices products. The project, powered by solar energy, will also include integrated units for storing food reserve commodities.

OMAN FISHERIES WITNESSES INCREASE IN REVENUE FOR Q2



Revenue growth is the result of strategic efforts to enhance sales margins and closely monitor fixed costs.

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

MUSCAT: Oman Fisheries Company SAOG has reported a revenue of RO 3.87 million for the period ending June 30, 2024, marking a 3-per cent increase from RO 3.75 million during the same period last year. This growth is the result of strategic efforts to enhance sales margins and closely monitor fixed costs, leading to a 7.9-per cent reduction in total expenses.

These measures have significantly reduced the company’s net losses, which fell by 33 per cent to RO 1.11 million, compared to RO 1.66 million in the previous year. Despite the improvement in financial performance, the company’s net equity stands at RO 2.03 million, reflecting a 35-per cent decrease from last year, primarily due to the incurred losses during the period.

Oman Fisheries Company successfully reduced its inventory from 3,184 MT on December 31, 2023 to 1,084 MT by June 30, 2024, representing a significant 66 per cent reduction. The Company recovered RO 154,000 from long-standing overdue accounts, demonstrating effective financial management.

A 10-per cent reduction in general and administrative expenses was achieved, decreasing from RO 897,000 in the first half of the previous year to RO 809,000 in the same period this year. The Company made substantial improvements in logistics, contributing to overall cost optimisation.

A restructuring of the commercial team was undertaken to better align supply and demand, enhancing operational efficiency. The Company’s market presence was extended to new regions, including the United States and China, supporting growth and diversification. New value-added products were introduced to maximise per-unit value and profit margins.

Upgrades to the Quality Management System were implemented, leading to the attainment of HACCP international certification across all company branches.

The Company continues to face challenges in managing working capital and liquidity, which remain areas of focus. Efforts are ongoing to develop and sustain a high-margin customer base, particularly in elite segments, to enhance profitability. Oman Fisheries says it is committed to driving further improvements in operational efficiency, expanding market presence and enhancing shareholder value.

OPAL and EA sign green alliance initiative



The signing ceremony was attended by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority and Eng Mohammed bin Hamoud al Naabi, CEO of OPAL.

MUSCAT: Oman Energy Association (OPAL) — the umbrella organisation of energy companies and service providers in the Sultanate of Oman— and the Environment Authority (EA) have come together yesterday to sign the Green Alliance Initiative. This landmark agreement marks a collaborative effort between private sector companies, predominantly from the energy sector and the EA to invest in the afforestation sector.

The signing ceremony was attended by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority and Eng Mohammed bin Hamoud al Naabi, CEO of OPAL.

Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri stated, “Signing this initiative comes within the ongoing efforts to enhance cooperation between government agencies and private sector institutions to achieve national environmental goals in accordance with Oman Vision 2040. We are confident that this cooperation will lead to tangible positive results that contribute to protecting the environment and enhancing the sustainability of its natural resources.” The Green Alliance Initiative aims

to enhance the economic value of environmental resources and align with the ambitious goals of Oman Vision 2040. It focuses on establishing partnerships to protect the environment and sustain natural resources through increased vegetation cover and investment in carbon credits via afforestation projects. This initiative is also a crucial step towards supporting energy sector companies in achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

Eng Mohammed bin Hamoud al Naabi commented, “The Green Alliance initiative represents an important step towards achieving carbon neutrality and enhancing environmental sustainability in the Sultanate of Oman. We are proud of this cooperation with the Environment Authority and are committed to making every effort to ensure the success of this initiative and achieve its goals. We believe that this cooperation will not only protect the environment and achieve zero carbon neutrality but will also enhance the economic value of society and create new opportunities for investment in environmental projects.

Discover the new Kia Sorento: AWD that fits your budget and needs



Get ready for an errand-packed day or unwind as the night falls; the Kia Sorento drive is pure pleasure.

Looking for an impressive premium vehicle that is a compelling blend of sophistication and versatility? Meet the all-new Kia Sorento, a crossover SUV making strides in the automotive arena. Get ready for an errand-packed day or unwind as the night falls; the Sorento drive is pure pleasure, delivering impressive fuel efficiency, the 3.5L V6 engine produces an exceptional 272 horsepower and 33.8 kg/m of torque paired to an 8-speed transmission.

Underscoring Kia's commitment to innovation, the Sorento is based on Kia's next-generation powertrain, the Smartstream, which creates a fun, dynamic, and eco-friendly driving experience. Make statements while on the go in an SUV that stands a class apart with its sensual design, bold contours,

and Kia's signature vertical Star-Map DRL graphics that project a futuristic appeal.

Large families' up to 7 members with a knack for adventure can be seated. The Sorento is a complete family car ideal for comfort & also utilitarian as school pickups, grocery runs, and fun-filled family moments. Make longer drives interesting with Sorento's spacious premium leather-fitted interiors, and horizontal air vents enabling a sense of wideness, roomy leg and headroom. Enhance the inside mood with the curved display infotainment system integrated with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay. The USB ports spread across all three rows for device charging is an excellent way to keep the family entertained throughout the drive. Other useful features include the power tailgate option for

effortless luggage keeping and seamless connectivity features such as the wireless charging tray.

Accelerate your journey and build joyful memories with Sorento's cutting-edge safety features. Designed for elevating experiences, Kia has included the latest features in this SUV which include Forward Collision-Avoidance Assist 2 (FCA 2), Junction Turning, Junction Crossing, Lane-change Oncoming, Direct Oncoming, Driver Steering Assist, Auto Evasive Steering Assist, and Blind-spot Collision-Avoidance Assist among others.

Moving up a notch, Kia's attentiveness towards safety protocols enables peace of mind. The Safe Exit Assist (SEA) activates when an occupant exits the car after stopping. The system issues alerts in case of a collision risk with an oncoming

vehicle. Assessing the risk factor, the Electronic Child Lock button stays locked to prevent the occupant's exit, thwarting a life-threatening scenario.

The new Kia Sorento balances elegance, performance and power. At your nearest Kia showroom, take a closer look at the Kia Sorento. Get detailed product insights and customer support throughout your buying journey with Kia's professional sales staff.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), Kia's distributor in Oman, ensures a rewarding ownership experience with excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities. Recognized globally, RIA has received prestigious accolades, including the 'Good Partnership' award, the 'Family Like Care' Service Award, and the 'Kia Distributor of Distinction' award.

Opening a Youth Account at BankDhofar is simple, convenient and suits your lifestyle

MUSCAT: Young people are the driving force behind societal and economic progress, essential for initiating transformative change and fuelling innovation and growth. Recognising their pivotal role, banks are crucial in empowering youth by offering services and opportunities that support their financial and personal aspirations. These services range from offering financial guidance, helping them build a stable financial future. Additionally, banks offer accounts that enable young people to manage their money efficiently, guiding them toward sound financial planning.

TAILORED FOR TODAY'S YOUNG ACHIEVERS

BankDhofar understands the unique needs of its young customers and has designed the Youth Account to meet those needs. The account provides numerous benefits, allowing young people to manage their finances effortlessly. Customers have praised the convenience of the ease of opening accounts



BankDhofar understands the unique needs of its young customers and has designed the Youth Account to meet those needs.

through the Intilaqah app, where they can easily open an account with just a click, anywhere and anytime. The Youth Account also offers advantages like no minimum balance fees, free mobile transfers and more.

SMART WAY TO SAVE

The Youth Account from BankDhofar is more than just a banking option; it's a tool for building a secure future. Abdulrahman bin Mohammed

al Balushi, a satisfied customer, shared how he uses his account to save for his post-graduation plans. He sets aside a portion of his monthly income to fund his dream of starting a small business, ensuring he has the financial foundation needed to succeed. Abdulrahman also mentioned how saving has become a part of his lifestyle, helping him achieve both professional and personal goals, including planning a fun annual vacation with friends.

FREE MONEY TRANSFERS AND EXCLUSIVE PERKS

Mohammed bin Maqbool al Balushi, another happy customer, didn't think twice before opening a Youth Account with BankDhofar. He appreciates the numerous benefits that cater to young people's needs and future ambitions, such as free money transfers via mobile banking app and the freedom to deposit any amount without worrying about a minimum balance. Mohammed highlighted how the account offers exclusive discounts at

various outlets and allows him to manage most of his banking transactions via mobile banking app, including bill payments and account management. Additionally, BankDhofar's widespread branches across Oman provide easy access to assistance and services whenever needed.

CONVENIENT MOBILE BANKING

For Hassan Al Lawati, the ease of opening a Youth Account at BankDhofar aligns perfectly with the fast-paced lifestyle of today's youth. Whether busy with university studies or personal projects, young people can open their account through the Intilaqah app from anywhere—be it a college café, a family outing, or while watching their favourite team's match. Hassan emphasised that the account also offers exclusive deals at various outlets and facilitates seamless electronic transactions, such as bill payments and money transfers, all through the mobile banking app.

National Finance champions customer service excellence, delivering experiences

MUSCAT: Demonstrating a deep commitment to customer-centricity, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman's leading finance company, has established a legacy of being a true Partner for Growth for both individuals and corporates. Central to fulfilling this promise is the company's relentless pursuit of redefining customer experiences. National Finance goes beyond mere satisfaction, striving to exceed expectations by offering customers the guidance and support they need to embark on sound and hassle-free financing journeys.

In its quest to deliver unparalleled customer service, National Finance implements a range of strategic initiatives designed to elevate service quality, responsiveness, feedback engagement, and overall customer satisfaction. These efforts consistently distinguish National Finance within the country's financial sector, reinforcing its position as a leader in the industry.

Emphasising the company's focus on customer service excellence, Tariq bin Suleiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance, said, "At National Finance, the customer is at the heart of everything we do. This is evident in the careful design of our finance solutions, tailored to meet their evolving needs, and in the ease and flexibility that set our offerings apart in the market. Our commitment to service excellence has enabled us to build deep trust within the local community and strengthen our relationships with our valued retail and corporate customers.

technology, National Finance has introduced a suite of innovative digital solutions designed to streamline processes and enhance the customer experience. The company offers a user-friendly mobile application and website, allowing customers to effortlessly apply for financing, calculate instalment amounts, and manage their financial commitments. Furthermore, National Finance values feedback as a crucial driver for improvement. By actively listening to its customers, the company refines its product offerings and service quality to better meet their needs.

Moreover, the company acknowledges the pivotal role of the human element at every customer touchpoint, prioritising the continuous training and upskilling of its relationship managers stationed at branches nationwide. These efforts are dedicated to enhancing customer service skills, fostering empathy, and ensuring that each interaction is both positive and productive. Additionally, relationship managers serve a key advisory role, understanding customer needs and offering guidance on the most suitable financing options for their unique circumstances.

As National Finance expands its reach across the nation, it remains steadfast in its commitment to excellence in customer service. The company consistently delivers exceptional service quality, demonstrating a keen dedication to assisting its customers in fulfilling their lifestyle and business aspirations.

The company continues to set new benchmarks in the industry, ensuring that every customer interaction embodies the values of integrity, transparency, and innovation that National Finance stands for.



These efforts consistently distinguish National Finance within the country's financial sector, reinforcing its position as a leader in the industry.

Omani-Brazilian Business Forum seeks to deepen private sector ties

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) organised the Omani-Brazilian Business Forum at the Chamber's main headquarters on Monday. The visiting trade delegation was received by Eng Hamoud bin Salem al Saadi, Second Deputy Chairman of OCCI's Board of Directors, in the presence of several business leaders. The forum aimed to enhance bilateral relations between the two friendly countries at the economic and commercial levels, explore investment opportunities in various sectors, in addition to achieving cooperation and partnerships between the private sectors in the two countries in the sectors of information technology, food security, pharmaceutical industries, tourism and industry.

Al Saadi pointed out that the forum comes during the fruitful cooperation established by both the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Brazil, the most important manifestations of which are enhancing trade and investment exchange between the two countries, and efforts to enhance trade and economic integration by maximising the benefit from the commercial capabilities shared by the two countries to increase the generation of opportunities



The forum aimed to enhance bilateral relations between the two friendly countries.

between the two sides.

Al Saadi added that the location of Oman qualifies it to be a centre for attracting investments and re-exporting Brazilian products and goods to many emerging markets in Asia and Africa, while Brazil is a gateway for Omani products and investments to enter the promising market in South America.

LOOKING FORWARD

Al Saadi indicated that the Omani private sector is looking forward to working with its Brazilian counterpart in promising sectors, most notably food security, contracting, construction, marketing, pharmaceutical industries, food industries, information technology, tourism and industry.

He also said that the

Chamber, as the official representative of the private sector in Oman, is keen to provide all means for Omani businessmen to meet with their Brazilian counterparts to exchange experiences and discuss finding commercial partnerships.

For his part, Marcelo Lucas, head of the Brazilian businessmen delegation, expressed his happiness to be in the Sultanate of Oman and his appreciation for the level of relations between the two countries in the economic and commercial fields, as these relations seek to achieve the development goals that the two countries seek.

The forum witnessed a visual presentation entitled 'Invest in Oman' in which the progress achieved by Oman in

credit ratings and international indicators was reviewed, and the sectors relied upon to achieve the goals of economic diversification in the Oman Vision 2040 were highlighted, which include logistics, industry, tourism and food security, in addition to the possible sectors represented by health, education and information technology.

The presentation also touched on the legislation regulating investment in Oman, as well as investment incentives and components and ease of starting businesses.

The Brazilian companies participating in the forum presented visual presentations to introduce their businesses, which represent the sectors of technology, food industries, construction and pharmaceutical industries.



Mortgages jumped 8.9% to RO1.09 billion in value.

RO 1.7 billion worth real estate transactions recorded by July-end

MUSCAT: The total value of real estate transactions in Oman rose by 6.4 per cent by the end of July 2024, reaching RO 1.73 billion compared to RO 1.63 billion during the same period in 2023.

According to preliminary figures from the National Centre for Statistics and Information, fees collected for all legal transactions amounted to RO 38.2 million, a decrease of 0.4 per cent compared to the end of July 2023. The value of sales contracts totaled RO 631.3 million for 38,627 contracts, marking a 0.5 per cent increase in the number of contracts.

The value of mortgage contracts increased by 8.9 per cent, reaching RO 1.09 billion for 11,799 contracts. Additionally, there were 793 exchange contracts valued at RO 8.2 million.

The number of property ownerships issued by the end of July 2024 was approximately 130,647, a decrease of 5.2 per cent. The number of ownerships issued to citizens of GCC countries rose by 14.1 per cent, totaling 857 ownerships. — ONA



Discussions focused on enhancing trade exchange between the two countries.

Omani-Chinese Economic Forum explores investment opportunities

MUSCAT: The Economic and Trade Exchange Forum between the Sultanate of Oman and the People's Republic of China, held in Muscat on Monday, discussed the most significant investment and trade opportunities in Oman.

The forum, organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, focused on enhancing trade exchange between the two countries and exploring opportunities to establish investment projects in vital sectors, especially in technology and digital transformation.

The forum brought together several Chinese investors and their Omani counterparts to explore investment and trade opportunities that can be developed and strengthened, particularly in supporting digital transformation.

Thuraiya al Balushi, Director of Economic Diversification Investments at the Oman Investment Authority, explained that the forum was convened to explore investment opportunities between the Sultanate of Oman and the People's Republic of China. During the forum, the investments of the Oman Investment Authority, both inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman, and the sectors and areas of focus were reviewed. The participating Chinese delegation also presented the investment potentials and opportunities available in China.

The forum aims to encourage Chinese investors to engage in national initiatives targeting the attraction of foreign direct investment, while also showcasing the incentives and facilities offered by the Sultanate of Oman to investors. — ONA

Omani vertical farming venture sees positive consumer response

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

Omani indoor vertical farming venture Trufud Farm says its expanding portfolio of leafy green vegetables and herbs continues to make inroads into the domestic retail and bulk markets, underscoring growing consumer appetite for its pesticide-free greens.

Launched just over a year ago at a facility near Al Naseem Garden in Barka, Trufud Farm is a subsidiary of well-diversified Omani business house Al Adrak Trading & Contracting. It houses two types of farming systems: A Fan & Pad type hydroponic system set in a 10,000 m2 of shade net greenhouse; and a fully-automated indoor environment controlled Vertical Ebb & Flow Table System covering a 3,600 m2 area. While the former is designed for Dutch Buckets and nutrient film technique (NFT) type hydroponics, the latter comes with 10,000 Dutch buckets and 128,000 NFT grow holes.

At this state-of-the-art facility is grown a wide array of leafy greens and exotic herbs, according to Richard Sathish Sequeira, Deputy General Manager - Facility Management, Al Adrak Trading & Contracting.

Major products include Lollo Bionda, Oak Leaf, Baby Romaine, Curly Kale, Boston



Trufud's indoor vertical farm facility in Barka.

Lettuce, Sorrel, Thyme, Rosemary, Basil, Microgreens and Edible Flowers. Cherry Tomatoes and Heirloom Tomatoes.

Well-known for its pesticide-free cultivation in a clean environment, Trufud's fresh produce is available at a number of leading supermarket brands, wholesale markets and the talabat delivery network.

Indoor vertical farms like Trufud, with its accent on pesticide-free cultivation, can contribute to safe production of leafy greens, says Sequeira. "Vertical farming can enhance food safety through the use of

better temperature-controlled technology and yield, resource management and reduced supply chain risk in the future." Presently, a small player in this sector, Trufud Farm aims to spread its wings in different segments of agricultural production. Not on the anvil, however, are any immediate plans to venture into organic farming, Sequeira explained.

"Organic products often have higher production costs, certifications and regulations, which can lead to higher prices. Convincing consumers to pay a premium can be a challenge. Hence, Trufud is concentrating

on pesticide-free cultivation." Summing up its role in supporting Oman's food requirements, the company added in a post: "In today's world, where the impact of climate change on traditional agriculture is increasingly severe, vertical farming has emerged as a revolutionary solution to these challenges.

It offers a promising alternative for growing food and addressing the limitations of conventional farming methods. Trufud is committed to bringing revolutionary changes to Oman's agricultural landscape through our state-of-the-art farming techniques."

Leverage your deposit insurance coverage



R MADHUSOODANAN

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The author is a former SBI official and Financial Planner resident in Oman

FOR EXAMPLE A & B HAVE A JOINT ACCOUNT WITH A BALANCE OF RO 60,000 WITH 50 PER CENT SHARE EACH. IN THIS CASE, BOTH OF THEM WILL GET RO 20,000/- EACH

Traditionally, bank deposits are one of the most preferred savings over other investment options due to reasons viz; liquidity, stable returns and flexibility in operations. However, bank deposits are unsecured and no tangible security is available. For the banks, the depositors are unsecured creditors. In the event of a bank failure, the depositors are at stake. Remember the unexpected collapse of Silicon Valley Bank in March 2023. Despite the above negativity, bank deposits are a popular class of savings.

Deposit Insurance Coverage Scheme Banks are vulnerable to liquidity and solvency risks. The principal objective of the Deposit Insurance Scheme is to protect depositors' interests and also to protect the stability of the financial system of the country. Deposit Insurance is one of the methods by which one can manage the default risks to some extent. As a pivotal component of the financial safety net, deposit insurance provides a guarantee of money back subject to the rules and regulations. Various governments and regulatory authorities have enacted laws in this regard.



Beyond the basics, leverage your deposit insurance coverage.

For example in the US, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) guarantees deposits up to \$250,000. The Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) of India guarantees up to INR 5,00,000. Bank Deposits Insurance Scheme (BDIS) administered by the CBO guarantees up to RO 20,000 - while, Kenya Deposit Insurance Corporation insures Kshs 500,000 per depositor.

How to Maximise the Insurance Coverage The maximum insurance coverage is capped. However, one can leverage the cover by resorting to multiple strategies. For example in Oman maximum insurance coverage is RO 20,000 per depositor per bank whereas



in India INR 5,00,000 - while in Sri Lanka it is Rs 11,00,000/-. This upper limit is the aggregate amount of all deposits lying in various eligible deposit accounts of the depositor in one branch or various branches of the same Bank up to and including the interest accrued thereon.

Therefore the depositor can increase the coverage by keeping his deposits with multiple banks. For example A of Oman, wants to deposit RO 100,000/- Instead of depositing with one bank, A can deposit the amount with 5 banks RO 20,000/- each. He gets a coverage of RO 100,000.

Keep Money in joint accounts As per Oman laws, the joint account holders are

treated separately while considering the coverage. For Example A & B have a joint account with a balance of RO 60,000 with 50 per cent share each. In this case, both of them will get RO 20,000/- each.

As per Indian laws, both joint account holders will not get the maximum coverage of INR 5,00,000 each, but only INR 5,00,000, but can leverage the coverage by opening multiple accounts jointly and severally. For example A B & C have deposits with XYZ Bank in their sole name and also in their joint names viz (i) A&B (ii) B&A (iii) AB&C (iv) AC&B (v) BC&A (vi) CA&B. In this case, all the 9 deposits (3 +6) are covered under the Deposit insurance separately. The same model may be replicated with other banks as well.

No doubt, deposit insurance is a crucial safeguard for Bank deposits. It protects deposits from potential risks associated with bank failures and defaults. Despite the initiatives, a large part of the deposits is still out of this safety net primarily because depositors hold much higher deposits in their name. The awareness of the Insurance rules is very important to avail higher insurance coverage.

Astronauts' plight piles pressure on Boeing's struggling space unit



JOEY ROULETTE

The author is the Space Reporter at Reuters.



A United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket carrying two astronauts aboard Boeing's Starliner-1 Crew Flight Test (CFT), is launched on a mission to the International Space Station, in Cape Canaveral, Florida, US. – Reuters

NASA's decision to send Boeing's Starliner capsule home without astronauts follows years of missteps by the planemaker in its space business and raises doubts over the future of the unit, analysts and industry sources said.

Taking NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams to the International Space Station (ISS) was to have been a turning point for Starliner after years of delays, technical glitches and supply chain mishaps. Starliner has cost Boeing \$1.6 billion in overruns since 2016, according to a Reuters analysis of securities filings.

The astronauts were to stay at the ISS for about eight days, but problems with Starliner have extended that to eight months.

Starliner's propulsion system malfunctioned and NASA deemed the troublesome thrusters unsafe for the return journey. So Wilmore and Williams will be brought home in a SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule next year, the latest humiliation for Boeing at the hands of Elon Musk's dominant space company.

The mission was meant to be a final test before NASA could certify Starliner for routine flights. Boeing's new CEO Kelly Ortberg now must decide whether to keep pouring money into Starliner, which analysts doubt will ever be profitable, or to unravel the capsule business and focus on rebuilding the tarnished reputation of its core planemaking division.

Elsewhere in its space business, US government watchdogs have repeatedly reported Boeing is years behind schedule and several billions of dollars over budget as main contractor on NASA's giant Space Launch System (SLS) rocket, a centrepiece vehicle of America's moon programme.

And the aerospace giant is already trying to sell a separate

BOEING MAY HAVE TO RE-DO THE ASTRONAUT MISSION TO THE ISS IN ORDER TO GET THE SPACE CAPSULE CERTIFIED BY NASA

rocket launching firm it jointly owns with Lockheed Martin, Reuters reported last month.

NASA administrator Bill Nelson said he spoke to Ortberg on Saturday and left that conversation 100 per cent sure Starliner would fly astronauts again. But that is no guarantee of a long-term commitment if Starliner's troubles persist.

Asked whether Boeing would stay in the programme after Starliner's current mission, a Boeing spokeswoman declined to comment, telling Reuters the company is focusing on getting the spacecraft back safely.

"I am not sure the decision will ultimately be NASA's. Boeing is going to have to foot much of this bill, as they have been," said Lori Garver, former NASA deputy administrator who was a key architect of NASA's Commercial Crew Program.

Ortberg, who started as CEO this month, is busy trying to convince Boeing workers, investors, airline customers and the flying public that safety issues are under control after a panel dramatically flew off a 737 MAX jet in midair in January.

Analysts said Boeing will probably keep Starliner alive, partially because Boeing has experienced worse in other programmes in its defence business. In the future, Starliner

could serve customers other than NASA, such as private space stations meant to replace the ISS after 2030, but those efforts could change.

NASA'S BIND

NASA sees Boeing as a crucial backup to Musk's SpaceX, the only entity capable of putting humans in orbit other than US rivals Russia and China.

Boeing has spent more than half of its \$4.5 billion NASA contract awarded in 2014 and Starliner has yet to be certified. The contract, which has swelled by \$300 million despite its fixed-price structure, includes six post-certification Starliner missions that will fall farther behind schedule with each mishap.

SpaceX's Crew Dragon was certified in 2020 and has flown 10 crewed missions for NASA since signing a contract initially worth \$2.6 billion. NASA has bought more Crew Dragon missions to make up for Boeing's delays, boosting SpaceX's contract to \$4.9 billion.

Boeing may have to re-do the astronaut mission to the ISS in order to get the space capsule certified by NASA. The company already had to repeat an uncrewed 2022 mission at a cost of nearly \$500 million.

"I wouldn't rule anything out. We have options for how

we move forward," NASA's space operations chief Ken Bowersox, a former astronaut, told reporters on Saturday when asked if Starliner can be certified without a do-over. He did not specify the options. It has been five years since the Starliner's first uncrewed test failed because of several critical software glitches. Since then, SpaceX has outpaced Boeing in rocket launches, crewed space flight and satellite manufacturing.

NASA's inspector general has estimated Crew Dragon's mission price as around \$55 million per seat, while Starliner's is around \$90 million.

DEEP PROBLEMS

For years, Boeing's space unit has suffered an exodus of skilled staff; many have joined SpaceX and Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin. Boeing's clunky supply chain makes designing spacecraft more complicated than for Musk's more nimble, largely vertically integrated operation, according to 10 people who have worked with Boeing's space unit.

Boeing, in a statement to Reuters, said the company is proud of its Starliner workforce and noted that it has acknowledged the workforce and supply chain challenges on earnings calls.

Throughout Starliner's

development, the hardware and sometimes the software of the propulsion system have been persistent issues. New problems were found just hours before the spacecraft made an initial attempt to launch this summer. Helium, used to pressurise the propellant, was leaking through a small seal in a flange.

NASA saw the leak as low-risk and allowed Starliner to launch. Yet officials said the propulsion system had a "design vulnerability" Boeing must address before its next mission.

The Space Launch System (SLS) rocket is another problem for Boeing's space unit. An August report by NASA's inspector general cited deep issues with quality control, while saying Boeing's SLS workforce in Michoud, Louisiana "lacks sufficient aerospace production experience, training, and instruction."

A Boeing spokeswoman said the company disagrees with many of the report's "assertions, including any suggestion that our Michoud workforce is unqualified."

Unlike Starliner, NASA foots the bill for delays and development problems with SLS. The extent of cost overruns are unclear because NASA does not accurately track them, inspector general reports have repeatedly said. NASA is trying to hand ownership of SLS to Boeing and co-contractor Northrop Grumman to bring the costs down, but that appears unlikely.

"Boeing's other businesses aren't terribly vulnerable to disruption. But space? That's another story," said Richard Aboulafia, an aerospace analyst. Aboulafia believes Ortberg will crunch the numbers and negotiate with NASA to make Starliner viable, although he is not convinced that is the right step.

"If I were an advisor to Kelly Ortberg, which I'm not, I'd say... for space, well boss, you might want to consider selling it," said Aboulafia. — Reuters

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Planning Engineer, PMP. Indian male 11 years experience in Construction Projects. Well versed with Primavera P6 Software, strong communication skills, Interpersonal skills, EDT Claims, Recovery schedules, project control. Having Omani Driving License.

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Position : Sales Representative

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Interested candidates should send their CV, along with copies of their qualifications and work experience, to the following email address within 15 days from the date of this announcement:
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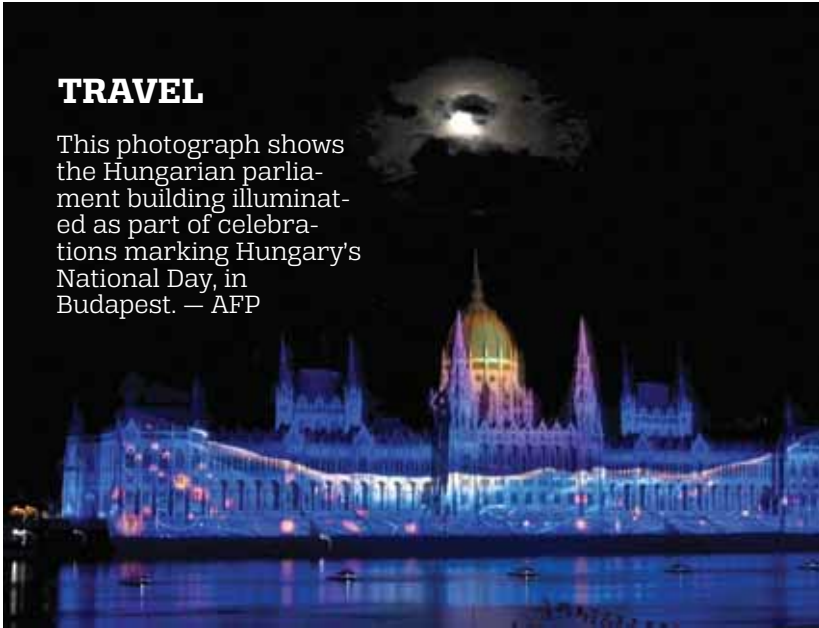
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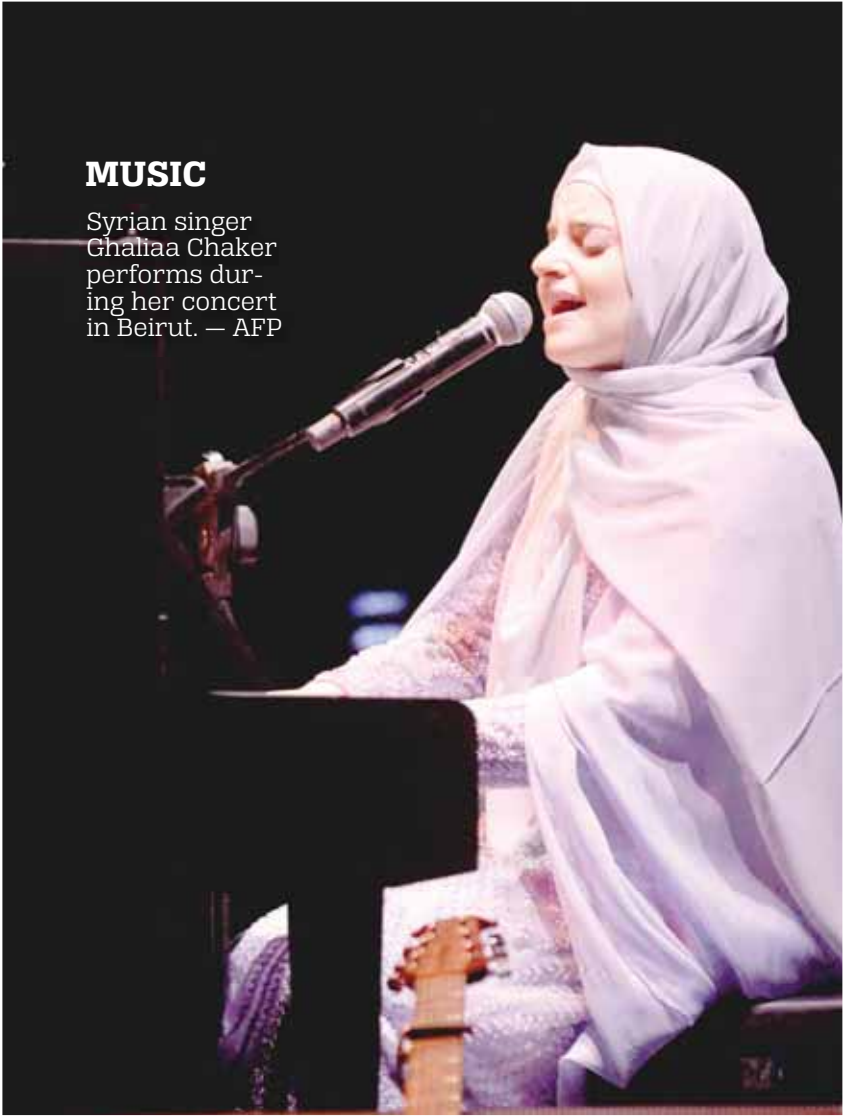
MOVIE

Cast member Amanda Righetti attends a premiere for the film "Reagan" at TCL Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles, California. — AFP



TRAVEL

This photograph shows the Hungarian parliament building illuminated as part of celebrations marking Hungary's National Day, in Budapest. — AFP



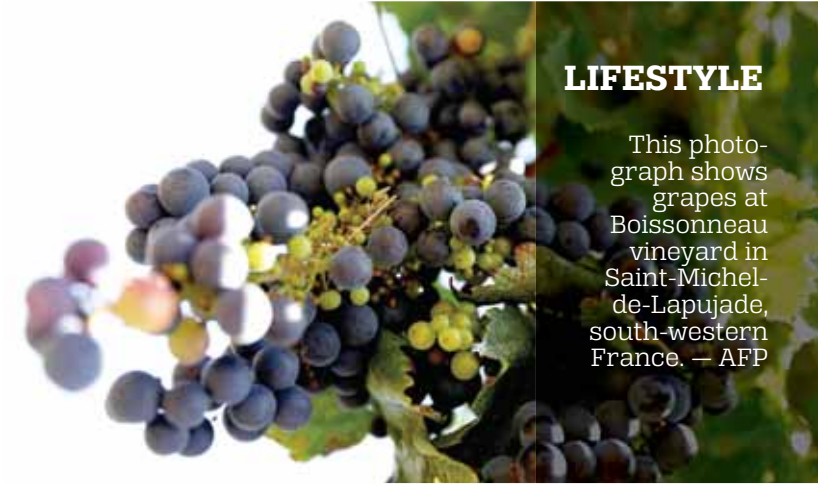
MUSIC

Syrian singer Ghailaa Chaker performs during her concert in Beirut. — AFP



HARVEST

A worker dries chilli peppers at a factory in southwestern China's Chongqing municipality. — AFP

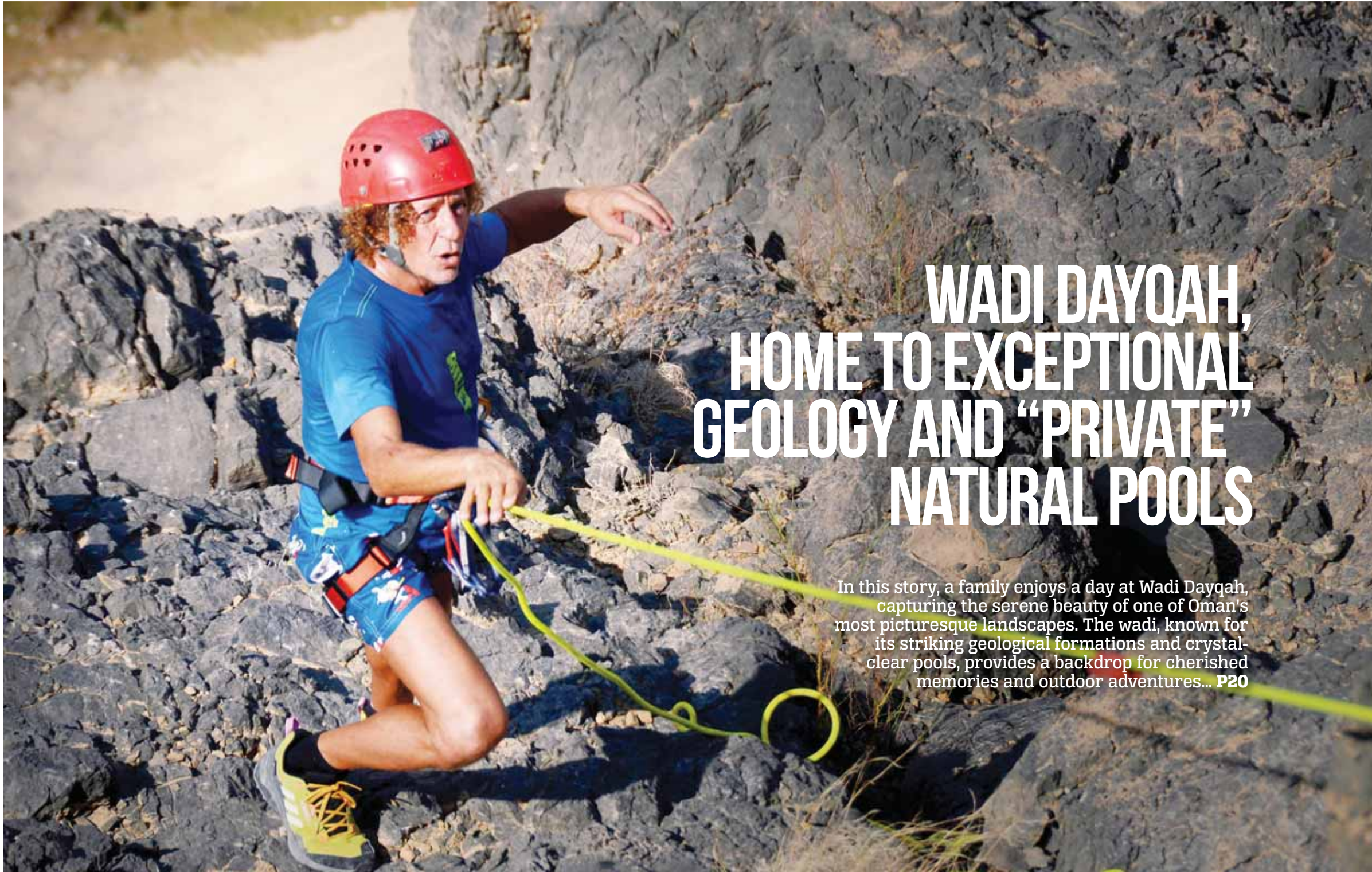


LIFESTYLE

This photograph shows grapes at Boissonneau vineyard in Saint-Michel-de-Lapujade, south-western France. — AFP

art & life

WEDNESDAY | AUGUST 28, 2024 | SAFAR 23, 1446 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



WADI DAYQAH, HOME TO EXCEPTIONAL GEOLOGY AND “PRIVATE” NATURAL POOLS

In this story, a family enjoys a day at Wadi Dayqah, capturing the serene beauty of one of Oman's most picturesque landscapes. The wadi, known for its striking geological formations and crystal-clear pools, provides a backdrop for cherished memories and outdoor adventures... **P20**



THE WORLD'S BIGGEST DIAMOND FINDS

AFTER THE REPORTED discovery of the world's second biggest diamond in Botswana, a massive 2,492-carat stone by Canadian mining company Lucara, here are other famous diamond discoveries:

- BIGGEST EVER: THE CULLINAN -
The largest gem-quality diamond ever found, by far, is believed to be the Cullinan, discovered in 1905 in South Africa and weighing 3,106 carats. Among the stones cut from it was the Star of Africa, which is part of the British crown jewels on display in the Tower of London.

- DETHRONED: SEWELO -
The 1,758-carat Sewelo diamond was until Thursday the second biggest diamond in history. It was mined in Botswana also by Lucara in 2019. Luxury group LVMH, owned by Bernard Arnault, previously listed as the world's richest man, bought the tennis-ball sized diamond in January 2020.

- LESEDI LA RONA -
The 1,109-carat Lesedi La Rona — a diamond also the size of a tennis ball — was discovered at Karowe, northeastern Botswana, also by Lucara in November 2015. It was bought by British jeweller Laurence Graff for \$53 million in September 2017.

- MANY DISCOVERIES IN BOTSWANA -
Other exceptional diamonds have been found over the past four years in Botswana by Lucara (1,174 carats in June 2021, 1,080 carats in August 2023 and 998 carats in November 2020) and by Debswana, which is jointly owned by the South African government and diamond company De Beers (1,098 carats in June 2021).

- THE EXCELSIOR -
The Excelsior diamond, found in 1893 in South Africa, weighed 995 carats uncut. The biggest stone cut from it is 69 carats, which was bought in 1996 by the jeweller

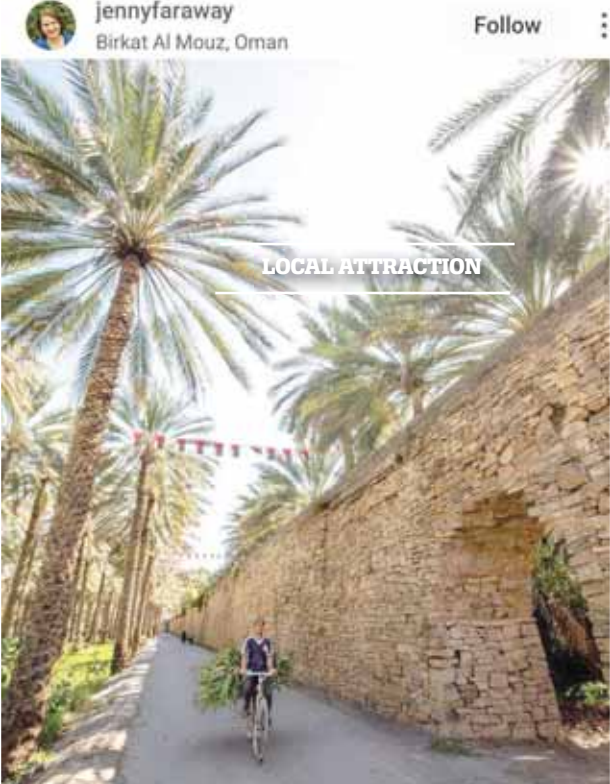
Robert Mouawad.

- THE STAR OF SIERRA LEONE -
The diamond was found in Sierra Leone in 1972 and weighed just under 969 carats and yielded 17 stones, the biggest of which is 53.96 carats.

- LESOTHO -
British miner Gem Diamonds said in January 2018 it had discovered the 910-carat stone at the Letseng mine in the landlocked southern African country of Lesotho.

- THE INCOMPARABLE -
The stone weighing 890 carats was found in the 1980s in what was then Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo, by a young girl playing outside her house near the tailings from a mine. The biggest stone cut from it is 407 carats. —**AFP**

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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JAPAN IS NEXT LEVEL FOR RETRO GAME COLLECTORS

US TOURIST DAVID Madrigal is over the moon after paying \$200 for a “vintage” console at a busy Tokyo store that is tapping into booming global demand for retro gaming kit.

“When I came into this store, I was like a kid walking into a candy shop,” Madrigal, 23, said at Super Potato in the Akihabara district famous for its Japanese pop culture shops.

“This stuff is my passion. I love older consoles,” he said. The PS Vita, a console released in 2011, that he bought “would usually cost me about \$600 in the US.”

Super Potato has three floors packed with Game Boy cartridges, Sega Dreamcast consoles wrapped in plastic and antiquated arcade machines where nostalgic customers can play “Street Fighter II” again.

Prices can be eye-watering. A handheld Nintendo Game & Watch electronic game from the 1980s — featuring “Zelda” — was priced at 250,800 yen (\$1,750).

Around 70-80 per cent of customers are foreign tourists, who have flocked to Japan in record numbers this year, store manager Komura, who only gave his surname, said.

SOUL GAMING Part of the appeal, Madrigal said, is that many modern games are a bit “more of the same” compared to ones when he was growing up.

“There was a different kind of innovation,” he said. “Companies weren’t afraid to think outside the box. They were willing to take risks.”

Video game historian Hiroyuki Maeda said that additional demand from collectors comes from the fact that some consoles were marketed differently outside Japan.

Nintendo’s Famicom and Super Famicom consoles for example were released abroad under alternative names, and with different and more colourful designs, he said.

“If you come to Japan and see a machine you’ve never seen before, you want to buy it. It stimulates the collector’s soul,” said Maeda, who has written dozens of books on gaming history.

“The definition of retro gaming varies, depending on the era that the people who engage in it are nostalgic for,” Maeda said.

SUPER COLLECTOR Amid rice fields and lotus fields two hours north of Tokyo, Proudoro (his online persona) has amassed a vast treasure trove of video game relics.

The “super collector” has stuffed an old building opposite his family home with several thousand vintage games and consoles, as well as arcade machines in full working order.

“The appeal of collecting retro games is really the nostalgia of childhood memories in games shops or spending time playing at

friends’ houses,” the 50-year-old collector said.

“To be honest, I don’t really play games,” he added.

“Being surrounded by games, their sounds, their atmosphere, looking at them and dreaming, that’s enough to keep me happy.”



STUFFED INTO BINS Proudoro has spent lavishly to build his collection.

Retro games can reach sky-high prices: a still-wrapped version of the game “Super Mario Bros.”, released in 1985, sold in 2021 for \$2 million.

Until the late 1990s, however, old games were virtually worthless, according to historian Maeda.

“They were crammed into bins in shops” and sold for as little as 10 yen (seven US cents today), he said.

Proudoro says he travelled around Japan 20 years ago looking for collectables in toy shops and bookstores.

“There were often stocks of Super Famicom or Game & Watch in a corner, covered in dust. The

elderly people who ran these shops would tell me to take them away to clear them out,” Proudoro said.

“As I work in vegetable wholesale, I would give them a crate of onions or potatoes, and everyone was happy.

“Today that would no

TRAVEL



Four-part docuseries captures the beauty of Al Ain as a living oasis

WHEN ENVISIONING Al Ain, many may think of capturing selfies atop Jebel Hafit, encountering giraffes at the renowned Al Ain Zoo, or exploring the historic Qasr Al Muwaiji. A new campaign by Experience Abu Dhabi unveils these attractions and more, inviting audiences on a journey to discover the rich history, vibrant attractions, and hidden gems of the Living Oasis city, Al Ain — a destination awaiting exploration with friends and family.

This four-part documentary-style campaign immerses viewers in the heart of Al Ain, highlighting the city and surrounding region’s cultural richness, adventurous spirit, and deep-rooted

5,000 years. The city is rich in archaeological sites, restored forts, and ancient human settlements, which have fostered crafts and traditions that endure to this day.

During their time in Al Ain, Obaid and Salim discover that this living oasis offers a serene escape from the bustle of city life, blending adventure, nature, history, and culture into one extraordinary destination. The duo explores Al Ain’s vast oasis of lush date palms, uncovers secret underground rivers nourished by natural mountain springs, delves into the city’s proud heritage, and enjoys the warm hospitality of its residents.



traditions. From ancient forts and verdant oases to exhilarating outdoor activities and bustling local life, the series follows two Emirati friends as they uncover Al Ain’s diverse experiences, leaving audiences eager for more.

The campaign features Emirati corporate banker-turned-photographer Obaid al Budoor and Salim al Attas, an engineer by profession and the first Emirati slam poet by night. Together, they traverse Al Ain, mastering traditional skills like archery and horseback riding while embracing modern, adrenaline-pumping activities that push them beyond their comfort zones.

Located just over an hour from both Abu Dhabi and Dubai, the Unesco World Heritage site of Al Ain has been inhabited for over

“As a photographer, traveller, and explorer, it’s incredibly rewarding to escape the daily grind and recharge my creative energy in such a tranquil and lush environment,” said Obaid. “Al Ain’s unique energy left a lasting impression on me.”

“I thoroughly enjoyed discovering Al Ain, and I hope that those who follow our adventures—whether white-water rafting, exploring local crafts, immersing in Al Ain’s vibrant café culture, or experiencing its myriad offerings — are inspired to visit and create their own unforgettable memories in this remarkable destination,” added Salem.

The documentary series “Al Ain: A Living Oasis” premiered on August 19, 2024. Watch it here: <https://visitalain.ae/en/campaign/al-ain-living-oasis>.



BY DR KHALED ABDUL MALAK

Last week, my family and I decided to spend a day out with my cousin Omar, who was visiting us from Riyadh for five days. We chose to explore Wadi Dayqah, a location that holds a special place in my heart. It was the first wadi I visited back in 1995 with my German friend, Wolfgang Hoffmann, and has since become a cherished spot where I spent many weekends with my young children. It's also a place I would often take my parents to whenever they visited us from Lebanon.

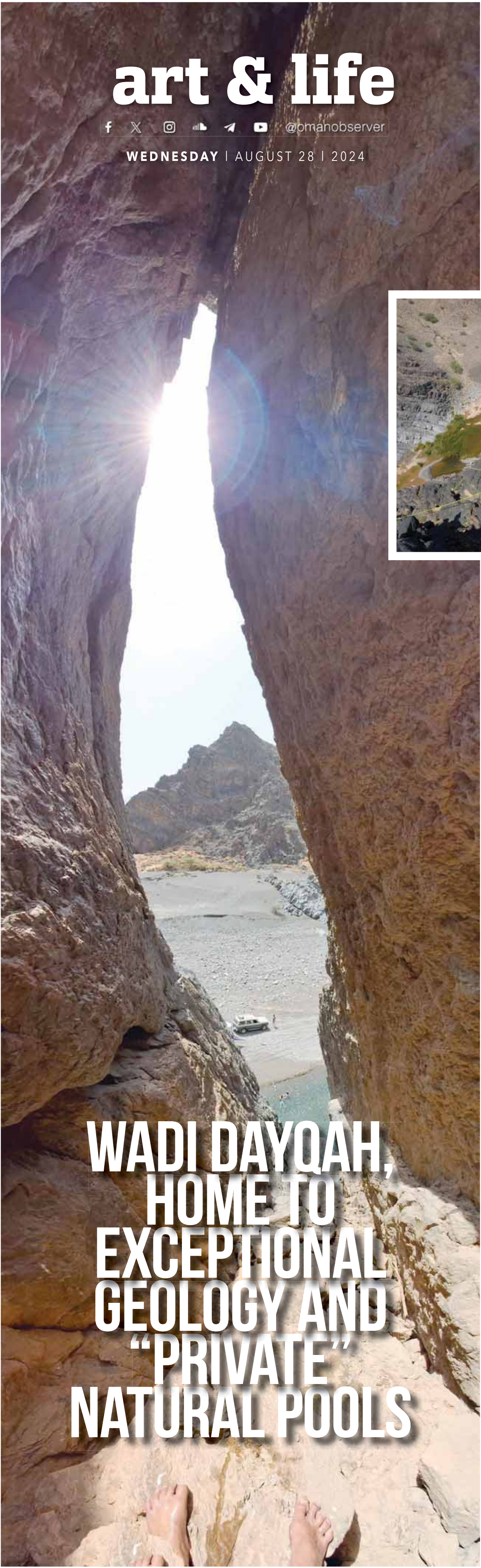
On the day of our trip, the weather was unusually cool and pleasant for August, with temperatures around 30 degrees Celsius, a welcome change from the usual 40 degrees at this time of year.

We packed our picnic gear, food and drinks and met up with my son and his family in Al Amerat to drive together towards Qurayat. Along the way to Wadi Dayqah Dam we passed through a tributary of the main canyon. Once we reached the wadi bed, we drove upstream another 4 kilometres to a superb pool located at the foot of an extraordinary geological feature where I had completed a 108-metre abseil a few months ago with my climbing partners, Ahmed and Rami. I named that descent "Jeddo's Drop" (Grandfather's Drop in



Arabic) in honour of my role as a grandfather to three grandchildren. At this spot, there was once a single Ziziphus spina-Christi, also known as a sidr tree, where we could stay in the shade. Unfortunately, it had been uprooted by a massive flood, likely just a few months ago, as it was still standing during our last visit in April.

On the left bank of the canyon lies an ancient falaj, a traditional water supply channel, which likely served the village of Hayl Al Ghaaf, located about 5 kilometres downstream from the junction of the tribu-



tary and the main canyon. My friends from the village could not recall when the falaj was last functional. When Cyclone Gonu struck Oman in June 2006, my friend Ahmed from Hayl Al Ghaaf told me that the village was completely flooded, with only the minaret of the village mosque remaining visible during the deluge. In some parts of Wadi Dayqah, the water level reached as high as 32 metres. Wadi Dayqah is an exceptional climbing site where my mentors in climbing and canyoning, Patrick and Nathalie Cabiro, have opened many routes. I am proud to have one of these climbing paths named after me, "Dr Khaled". The geology of Wadi Dayqah is truly fascinating. The stratified, colourful lay-



ers of limestone rise dramatically towards the sky in a wavy pattern, creating a stunning visual display. We enjoyed a refreshing swim in the crystal-clear waters of our "private" natural pool before indulging in some snacks. I wanted to explore further upstream to show my cousin other



beautiful ponds, but unfortunately, the track was completely erased just a few hundred metres ahead, making it impossible to continue by car. Although it was possible to continue on foot, the sun was too strong at that time of day, so we decided to return and enjoy our "private" pool for a couple more hours before packing up and heading back to Muscat. It was around 4 in the afternoon when we left. Omar's impression of his visit to "Amazing Oman" was summed up as: "Simply amazing. A great outdoor experience and a must for every nature lover's bucket list. The scenery is breathtaking and unique. The visual contrast between the colourful, arid mountains, lush greenery and crystal-clear water pools creates a surreal feeling as if witnessing the work of a talented painter's imagination. Add to that the sense of safety and assurance provided by Dr Khaled's experience and confidence, and you find yourself completely immersed in the experience."