

Harris and Walz kick off bus tour

Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris and her running mate Tim Walz will campaign together on Wednesday in Georgia, a state that Democrats narrowly won in 2020 and could play a decisive role in this year's election. The 2024 race has changed dramatically since Harris became her party's candidate last month, and she hopes to galvanise Black voters who make up about one-third of Georgia's electorate and will be crucial in the effort to win there. Harris and Walz will take a bus through southern Georgia, home to some of its largest Black populations and where the campaign has added staff and opened field offices. **DETAILS ON P7**

SUNRISE - 05:48 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:30 AM
DHUHR - 12:13 PM
ASR - 03:40 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:33 PM
ISHA - 07:45 PM



P12

SINNER, ALCARAZ SURVIVE WOBBLES



P13

'LAND-BRIDGE' BOOSTS HUTCHISON PORTS SOHAR CONTAINER VOLUMES BY 26PC



P20

'WATER' ATTRACTIONS LURE TOURISTS IN OMAN



MUSCAT

OMAN, BELARUS REVIEW RELATIONS

Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, received Bogdanov Alexei, Minister of Anti-monopoly Regulation and Trade in the Republic of Belarus, and his delegation. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of bilateral cooperation in the sectors of transport, logistics and information technology. They also explored means of boosting this cooperation. The meeting was attended by officials from both sides. **DETAILS ON P5**

CRUDE PRICE AT \$77.13 A BARREL

Oman oil price for October delivery on Wednesday reached \$77.13, comprising a drop by \$2.09, compared to the price of Tuesday, which stood at \$79.22. The average price of Oman oil for August delivery stabilised at \$82.50 per barrel, thus \$1.39 per barrel lower than July delivery. World oil prices fell nearly 2 per cent on concerns about Chinese demand and risks of a broader slowdown. Brent crude futures traded at \$78.27 barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate crude futures fell 1.76 per cent to \$74.2.

BEIJING

TOP OFFICIALS PLAN BIDEN-XI CALL

Top US and Chinese officials on Wednesday discussed plans for Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping to talk in coming weeks, despite exchanging warnings over regional tensions. US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan made a rare trip to Beijing for talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi just days after China became embroiled in security rows with American allies Japan and the Philippines. The White House said the two sides were "planning for a leader-level call in the coming weeks", along with talks between senior military commanders. It would be Biden and Xi's second call since an ice-breaking summit in California last year that was aimed at easing tensions between the two superpowers located on opposite sides of the Pacific.

Oman charts path towards a carbon-free future

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority, has completed the preparation of the final draft of the general policy framework for registering and issuing carbon reduction certificates, in accordance with Article 6 of Paris Agreement. The final document consists of 52 pages, in which the Sultanate of Oman charts its path towards a carbon-free future. Through the document, Oman seeks to become a prominent carbon trading centre in the Middle East. In the context, the

Environment Authority affirmed that the draft received the commendation of international institutions and organisations specialised in this field. The authority pointed out that the draft or framework will be reviewed by all stakeholders during a technical workshop to be held in mid-September in Muscat. It is worth to mention that the political framework for the draft will be launched at the 29th Conference of the Parties next November in the capital Baku, the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Baku conference will



Oman seeks to become a prominent carbon trading centre in the Middle East.

bring together representatives from nearly 200 countries, along with environmental organisations, scientists and civil society. The conference aims to assess progress on climate goals, negotiate new commitments, and promote international cooperation in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, adapting to climate impacts, and financing climate action. COP29 will play a key role in shaping the global climate agenda and ensuring that the goals of the Paris Agreement are met. — **Agencies**

Jesse Emerson and his wife Catherine have found a unique way to enjoy and contribute to the khareef season. The couple, currently on a world tour from Oregon, USA, in their vintage 1983 Toyota camper truck, is not only soaking in the tranquillity of the Khareef Dhofar Season but also entertaining festival visitors with their captivating fire shows. **DETAILS ON P3**

LIGHTING UP THE KHAREEF



Depression entering Arabian Sea

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Oman Meteorology is closely watching the deep depression brewing in the sea to analyse which direction it would take in the Arabian Sea. The Civil Aviation Authority's National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre announced on Tuesday that a surface depression centred in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent is expected to move west towards the northeastern Arabian Sea on Friday or Saturday evening, with no effect on the Sultanate of Oman during the next four days, although there are expectations

We do not know yet if it is going to have an effect on the coasts of Oman. We will continue to follow the models to analyse the situation that it will enter the northeastern Arabian Sea within the next 48 hours. The Meteorologist at Oman Met Office said: "The Regional Meteorological Centre monitoring tropical cyclones based in New Delhi, India, has classified it as a deep depression. We do not know yet if it is going to have an effect on the coasts of Oman. We will continue to

follow the models to analyse the situation." Initial indicators show that the northern governorates of Oman may be affected by this weather condition at the beginning of next week. Specialists at the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre are monitoring the developments. Meanwhile, cumulonimbus cloud activity continued over Al Hajar Mountains and its expansion into the neighbouring areas in the governorates of Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi. Thunderstorms are expected in Dhofar Governorate, with scattered rains.

Deadly Israeli raids as Gaza war rages on

UN SAYS RAIDS RISK WORSENING 'CATASTROPHIC' WEST BANK

JENIN: Hundreds of Israeli troops backed by helicopters, drones and armoured personnel carriers raided the flashpoint cities of Jenin and Tulkarm and other areas in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday, killing at least 10 Palestinians. The assault, one of the largest seen in the West Bank for months, followed a series of smaller raids in the area over recent weeks. Meanwhile, the United Nations said that Israel's large-scale military operation on Wednesday in the occupied West Bank "risks seriously deepening the already catastrophic situation" in the Palestinian territory. Israel's operations in the cities "and the killing of at least 10 Palestinians, two of them reportedly children, take the overall death toll in the West Bank since October 7 to 637," UN Human Rights Office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani said in a statement. "This represents the highest number of fatalities over a period of eight months since the UN first started recording casualties in the West Bank two decades ago." Columns of Israeli armoured vehicles entered two refugee camps, in Tulkarem and Tubas, as well as Jenin. By midday, they were blocking entrances to the towns and camps, AFP photographers said, with soldiers firing at the camps from which gunfire and explosions were heard. The Palestinian Red Crescent said Israeli forces killed nine people and wounded 15 others in the raids, revising its previous



A Palestinian boy rises his hand into the air as Israeli soldiers inspect what he is carrying during a raid in Jenin in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday. — **AFP**

toll of 10 dead. Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas cut short a visit to Saudi Arabia and headed home to "follow up on the latest developments in light of the Israeli aggression on the northern West Bank", Palestinian official media said. **OPEN WAR** Islamic Jihad issued a statement early on Wednesday denouncing an "open war" by Israel. "With this aggression, which aims to transfer the weight of

the conflict to the occupied West Bank, the occupier wants to impose a new state of affairs on the ground to annex the West Bank", the statement said. Hamas late on Tuesday reiterated its call for Palestinians in the territory to "rise up". Its statement came in response to comments by far-right Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, who said this week he would build a synagogue at Jerusalem's flashpoint Al Aqsa mosque compound if he could. **SEE ALSO P6**



NUMANI RECEIVES PAKISTAN’S CHIEF OF JOINT STAFF



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, on Wednesday received Gen Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and his accompanying delegation. Gen Sahir expressed his appreciation to the Sultanate of Oman for facilitating means of enhancing cooperation in a bid to achieve joint interests. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces. – ONA

OMAN, PAKISTAN DISCUSS BILATERAL RELATIONS

MUSCAT: Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, on Wednesday received at Bait Al Falaj Gen Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by a number of senior officers of the academy. — ONA



Ensure that no child is left alone in the school bus

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@vinot_nair

With the new academic year set to begin on September 1, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) has urged bus drivers and other stakeholders to take all steps that are essential to ensure the safety of children.

Major Harith bin Moosa al Kindi from the directorate general of ROP traffic said that school bus drivers must be patient and vigilant, focus on the road, and follow traffic rules.

To ensure that no student is left behind in the bus while travelling to school or returning home, he said, “Unfortunately, there have been incidents where students have been left behind in buses in the past. We try to raise awareness with bus drivers as much as possible, to make regular checks when students board the bus and when they leave the bus. We also try to educate school employees to focus more on these areas.”

He said that ROP is evaluating new technologies to ensure that these incidents don’t occur and the use of onboard cameras will help not just to monitor the driver’s behaviour



but will ensure that no student is left behind on the bus.

Al Kindi said that there will be more police patrols near schools to avoid run-over accidents.

“ROP is always evaluating and studying new zones to increase police patrol and the police presence around schools.”

It may be noted that one or two cases of students left behind are reported each year despite active campaigns by the authorities. In some cases, there have been loss of lives too.

“One of the main reasons is that students are tired after long days in school or due to lack of adequate sleep at night, which makes them fall asleep inside buses and miss the bus stop,” said a manager of a school bus operator in Muscat.

Parents feel schools should take responsibility for the bus services. “Parents have their limitations once students board the bus for school till they return home. It is not about having high-tech buses, but also having the right persons on the wheels,” said one of the parents.

The Made-in-Oman school buses produced by Karwa Motors will hit the roads this academic year, which will be equipped with internal and external surveillance cameras, safe organisation of passenger seats, the presence of an emergency exit, and a clear view for the driver and passengers, an automatic fire extinguishing system, high-quality and high-performance air conditioning, a safety lock on the doors, and a distinctive design for the side doors with a sensor system.



INVITATION TO TENDER

OMIFCO invites all reputed and specialized companies with relevant experience in structural repair and maintenance, as well as expertise in the Fertilizer, Oil and Gas, and Petrochemical industries, to submit their best proposals for the following tender and the required services mentioned in the tender:

Tender No	01/14186/2024
Tender Description	Jetty Structure Repair and Maintenance
Brief Details	OMIFCO plans to hire an experienced contractor to implement a repair and maintenance package for its jetty structure located in Sur, Al-Sharqiyah South. The goal is to safeguard the integrity of the structural elements, extend the structure's service life, prevent further deterioration, and ensure the safety of its users.
Tender Collection	1 st September - 12 th September 2024
Tender Fees (Non-Refundable)	OMR. 250/= (Omani Rial Two Hundred Fifty, only).
Bid Bond	OMR. 5,000/= (Omani Rial Five Thousand, only)
Bid Submission due date	Not later than 12:00 pm on 07 th October 2024 (Oman time)
Mandatory Requirement	All IMO (International Marine Organization) Related Certificates including SOLAS (Safety Of Life At Sea).
Minimum Experience	Ten (10) Years of experience in the subject filed in similar scope of work and scale.

All bidders shall submit their offer in THREE (3) separate Files as per following:

- Technical Bid and Un-priced Commercial Bid.
- Commercial Priced Bid.
- Bid Bond valid for 120 days, with total amount as mentioned above.

All three Files shall be sealed and tagged with the Envelop Title, Tender Title and Tender Number and Password Protected in case of Online Submission. Also, the company profile and registration documents should be submitted along with the Technical Bid. All three Files should be submitted at OMIFCO Head Office in Sur - Tender Box at the Main Gate or through a link sent to purchase@omifco.com

Further details can be obtained from OMIFCO Purchase and Contracts Department at Sur Industrial Estate
Tel: +968 2553 2081 | Fax: +00968 2556 2824 | E-mail: purchase@omifco.com
P.O. Box: 67, PC 411, Sur, Sultanate of Oman



Over 1,300 visit the Arabian Oryx Reserve



HAIMA: Over 1,300 people visited the Arabian Oryx Reserve in the Wilayat of Haima in the Al Wusta Governorate since the beginning of 2024.

Sultan bin Mohammed al Balushi, Director of the Arabian Oryx Department, said the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary is an important centre for wildlife conservation and an engine for economic development by promoting ecotourism. The reserve includes ambitious projects such as the project for planting 80,000 wild trees within the framework of the programme to raise the vegetation cover and rehabilitate natural habitats with the aim of sustaining ecosystems.

The Arabian Oryx Reserve covers a vast stretch of 2,824 square kilometres, encircled by

The reserve includes ambitious projects such as the project for planting 80,000 wild trees within the framework of the programme to raise the vegetation cover and rehabilitate natural habitats with the aim of sustaining ecosystems

diverse wild environments. The reserve is home to 900 Arabian Oryx, in addition to 1,240 sand gazelles and 160 Arabian gazelles. Other species living in the reserve include the Nubian ibex, sand fox, striped hyena,

wild rabbit and honey badger, he said.

The reserve contributes to enhancing awareness of the ancient environmental and geological history of Oman through an exhibition displaying pictures and brochures that shed light on the story of its establishment and development, Al Balushi said.

Al Balushi noted that the Arabian Oryx Reserve utilises advanced technologies to trace herds of Arabian Oryx, Arabian gazelle and sand gazelle and document their migration routes to monitor their natural habitats. Last April, 50 sand gazelles were released into the reserve, a step that would enhance biodiversity sustainability in the governorate. — ONA



American couple’s fire dance lights up khareef season

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Jesse Emerson and his wife Catherine have found a unique way to enjoy and contribute to the Khareef Dhofar Season. The couple, currently on a world tour from Oregon, USA, in their vintage 1983 Toyota camper truck, is not only soaking in the tranquillity of the khareef season, but also entertaining visitors with their captivating fire shows.

Drawn by the allure of the khareef, they decided to extend their stay in Salalah, performing daily at various venues. “We are almost always busy entertaining the visitors, and we are grateful to the Dhofar Municipality and the event organisers for this wonderful opportunity,” said Catherine, who is deeply passionate about her craft. Despite years of performing, she still seeks Jesse’s reassurance after each show, asking, “I hope I didn’t make any mistakes during the show,” to which they both respond with mutual encouragement and appreciation.



Drawn by the allure of the khareef, American couple decided to extend their stay in Salalah, performing daily at various venues



Their journey in Oman began in Salalah, a place they have grown fond of, with plans to visit Muscat by mid-September. “It’s wonderful here, and it becomes even more

magical with the changing season. The Omani people and everyone we’ve met from around the world have been incredibly kind, friendly and helpful. It’s truly amazing. It’s

also much more organised than other places we have visited, which we greatly appreciate,” Catherine shared.

Spectators have been full of praise for their performances. Ayush described the show as “awesome” and made it a point to meet the couple after the performance. “I watched their entire show and waited afterward to meet them. It was flawless, especially considering they were working with fire throughout,” he noted.

Acknowledging the challenges of their craft, the couple revealed, “We have had to leave our daughter with an Indian family so we can focus on our performances. However, we are happy that she is doing well there, learning new skills with the children.” Their passion for fire dancing is evident. “Our performance evolves with every show, as we strive for perfection each time,” they explained. As their time in Salalah draws to a close, the couple looks forward to exploring more of Oman, with Muscat as their next destination.

Youth initiatives drive Dhofar’s economic growth

SALALAH: Youth initiatives in Oman, particularly in Dhofar Governorate, are playing a vital role in stimulating economic activities and creating investment opportunities that not only enhance the national economy, but also boost individual income and generate employment for young people.

The khareef being an extraordinary season, has catalysed numerous innovative youth projects, supported by relevant official bodies and in partnership with private sector institutions.

One such entrepreneurial endeavour is the ‘Osara’ entertainment project. Majid bin Ali al Masahli, one of the project’s founders, explained that the idea behind ‘Osara’ is to create an integrated tourist and entertainment hub along the Raysut beach in Salalah.

Managed by a dynamic group of Omani youth, it represents a comprehensive tourist destination offering a variety of entertainment and cultural activities, as well as relaxation zones suitable for all age groups.

Al Masahli further noted that the project was included in the khareef season events, featuring various programmes to cater to visitors, such as cultural and entertainment events, restaurants and cafes with stunning sea views, along with serene beach sessions.

The ‘Osara’ project is also noteworthy for its commitment to environmental sustainability, having been constructed using 70 per cent of recycled wood. Al Masahli highlighted plans to enhance the site’s tourism services with new recreational activities, including an archery challenge, axe throwing, jet skiing, water boating and horseback riding.

Established in 2022 through the efforts of Omani youth, the ‘Osara’ project has thrived with the support of Dhofar Municipality, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, Salalah Port, and the



The khareef has catalysed numerous innovative youth projects, supported by relevant official bodies and in partnership with private sector institutions

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. This project is a testament to the ongoing efforts to encourage and develop youth initiatives while strengthening the entrepreneurship sector in the governorate.

Another inspiring story is that of Nader bin Bakhit Fadel, founder of the ‘Lamir Al Mughsail’ site.

Now in its third year since its inception in 2022, this youth-managed project has developed into a vibrant tourist and entertainment destination. It features various restaurants and cafes, a children’s play area, pleasure boats for sea trips, an artificial waterfall, and beach seating specifically designed for families. Fadel emphasised that his project enhances tourism in Al Mughsail area of Salalah, offering diverse entertainment and tourism services .

— ONA

Dhofar’s ancient archaeological sites drive tourism growth

SALALAH: The Sultanate of Oman, rich in archaeological heritage, is an increasingly attractive destination for cultural tourism. Dhofar Governorate, in particular, draws visitors eager to explore its ancient sites, from castles and forts to ancient cities and markets, offering a glimpse into Oman’s storied past.

These sites, such as Samharam, Al Baleed and Khor Rori, serve as open-air museums, inviting tourists and researchers to delve into the governorate’s history and traditional architecture.

Efforts by government and local communities ensure the preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including arts, crafts, and traditions tied to social and religious customs.

Oman’s tourism strategy emphasises the development of its historical and natural sites, targeting a diverse audience that includes locals, students and international tourists.

Khalfan bin Saif al Touqi, an economic analyst, highlights the financial benefits of heritage tourism, noting Oman’s unique blend of landscapes, from valleys and mountains to deserts



Samharam, Al Baleed and Khor Rori serve as open-air museums, inviting tourists to delve into the governorate’s history and traditional architecture



and beaches, coupled with its rich cultural legacy.

Dr Salem bin Suhail al Kathiri, a media professional, emphasises the economic impact of archaeological

tourism, which generates employment and supports local industries. He also notes that preserving these sites is vital, with tourism revenues helping to fund restoration efforts.

Tourism’s role in Oman Vision 2040 is crucial, according to Dr Ashraf Musharraf of Sultan Qaboos University. He envisions the sector contributing significantly to Oman’s GDP and creating new jobs, advocating for an investment strategy to attract millions of tourists over the next decade.

Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Mushaikhi, an academic, stresses the importance of continually developing and marketing Oman’s archaeological map to keep these sites central to national and international tourism.

Finally, social media activist Mubarak bin Salem al Maashani underscores the role of modern media in promoting Oman’s tourism. By showcasing its history and natural beauty online, Oman can position itself as a premier global destination.

In summary, Dhofar’s archaeological treasures, along with its natural beauty and hospitality, make Oman a compelling choice for cultural and historical tourism. By preserving and promoting these assets, Oman secures its place on the world’s tourism map.

— ONA

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)



MANY SINGLE-USE CUPS ARE MADE OF STYROFOAM, POLYETHYLENE, OR POLYPROPYLENE, WHICH ARE ALL EITHER DIFFICULT OR IMPOSSIBLE TO RECYCLE. HOWEVER, EVEN PAPER-BASED COFFEE CUPS ARE CHALLENGING TO RECYCLE, AS MOST ARE LINED WITH PLASTIC TO PREVENT LEAKS!



WHAT'S IN A CUP?

THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF DISPOSABLES

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 28

Many coffee and Karak tea lovers enjoy heading to cafes for their favourite drinks, often served in disposable paper cups. While some appreciate the convenience and quick use of these cups, there are growing concerns about their potential long-term health effects, prompting questions about their safety and hidden dangers.

One of the main health risks associated with paper cups is the chemicals used in their manufacturing. Paper cups typically have a thin layer of plastic or wax to prevent liquid leakage, which can contain harmful chemicals like polyethylene.

When these cups are exposed

to heat, such as when used for hot beverages, these chemicals may be released and transferred to the liquid inside, posing a risk of ingestion over time.

A study has shown that hot beverages in paper cups can quickly become contaminated with microplastic particles. These particles come from the inner lining of the cup designed to make it waterproof, complicating the recycling process.

In an experiment by researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology, hot water was placed in 100 ml paper cups and left for 15 minutes, the typical time to finish a drink. Under a powerful microscope, researchers found nearly 25,000 microplastic particles in each cup.

AS MOST PAPER CUPS END UP IN LANDFILL, THEY SUBSEQUENTLY RELEASE METHANE, A MORE HARMFUL GAS THAT CO2 THAT ALSO TRAPS HEAT IN THE ATMOSPHERE, LIKELY CONTRIBUTING TO GLOBAL WARMING.

On the other hand, the disposal of paper cups can worsen their health impacts by contributing to environmental pollution. Improper disposal leads many cups to end up in landfills or incinerated, harming air and water quality.

Lobaid Ahmed, a master's student in environmental sciences, noted a rise in the use of paper cups in homes, becoming part of daily routines for many families. While convenient for quick use and disposal, he warned of potential long-term health and environmental costs. The chemicals in paper cups, especially for hot beverages, may leach into drinks when regularly consumed.

As an alternative, Lobaid suggested using reusable cups like ceramic, glass, or stainless steel.

These cups can be washed and reused, avoiding the concerns of harmful leaching and reducing waste from disposable cups.

For frequent coffee or tea drinkers outside home, Lobaid recommended personal portable cups to keep beverages hot. Carrying a personal cup in the car or on the go can protect health and reduce the environmental impact of disposable cups.

He stressed the importance of raising awareness about using reusable cups through household and community campaigns. These efforts can lead to healthier habits and a sustainable environment for current and future generations. Simple steps towards change can lead to healthier and more sustainable alternatives.



Omani-Belarusian Forum explores economic relations

MUSCAT: The Omani-Belarusian Business Forum on Wednesday discussed means of enhancing economic and trade relations between the two countries, as well as promoting trade exchange and tackling challenges facing investors.

The forum was organised by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). The event focused on several economic sectors, namely tourism, industry, logistics, importing and exporting, food security, and information and communication technologies (ICT).

Eng Hamoud bin Salim al Saadi, Acting OCCI Chairman, explained that the Chamber has worked to strengthen economic and trade relations with the Republic of Belarus in recent years by organising many high-level visits and meetings, which resulted in tangible positive results.

On his turn, Bogdanov Alexei, Minister of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade in the Republic of Belarus, Head of the Belarusian delegation, pointed out that the forum reflects the desire of his country to boost relations with Oman. He added that Oman has many components to be a gateway for Belarusian products to promising markets in the GCC and Asia.

He explained that the forum underlined means of stimulating bilateral cooperation, especially in the fields of industrial



During the forum, a MoU was signed between OCCI, and Belarusian National Centre for Marketing and Price Study



production, agriculture and information technology. He said that Belarus seeks to support cooperation in many fields, especially in information technology, bearing in mind that Belarus owns an incubator with thousand companies working in various fields of information technology.

Meanwhile, Dr Abdullah bin Masoud al Harthy, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Belarus and member of the OCCI Board, noted that the Omani private sector views Belarus as a promising economic and

investment partner in light of the efforts made to develop areas and opportunities for joint cooperation.

He explained that holding the Omani-Belarusian Business Forum provided an opportunity for business owners in the two countries to strengthen bilateral relations and explore trade and investment opportunities, in addition to facilitating shipping, import and export routes in various areas of common interest.

During the forum, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between

OCCI and the Belarusian National Centre for Marketing and Price Study. The MoU deals with the exchange of information that are related to external trade, the business environment, opportunities for production and importing, as well as investment and market trends.

Moreover, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Oman National Engineering and Investment Company (ONEIC) and Belarus Hi Tech Park Company. This MoU pertains to the field of ICT and advanced technologies.

Another MoU was also signed between Omani Euro Food Industries SAOG and Minsk Dairy Factory. The MoU pertains to cooperating in the field of retail business in Oman, with the possibility of expanding to neighbouring countries and markets.

Furthermore, the forum showcased prominent investment and commercial opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman. It also highlighted projects that are being implemented in accordance with Oman Vision 2040.

On the sidelines of the forum, several B2B meetings were held between Omani and Belarusian businesspeople. The forum was attended by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and several officials from both sides. — ONA

Oman, Belarus discuss cooperation



Salim bin Musallam Qatan holds talks with Bogdanov Alexei, Belarusian Minister

MUSCAT: Salim bin Musallam Qatan, Vice-President of the State Council, on Wednesday received Bogdanov Alexei, Minister of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade in the Republic of Belarus, and his accompanying delegation. The vice-president of the State Council reiterated the firmness of relations between Oman and Belarus. He also underscored the role undertaken by the parliamentary friendship association between the two countries in enhancing cooperation, especially in regulatory fields. On his turn, the Belarusian minister lauded the remarkable development witnessed in the Sultanate of Oman both on the local and international arenas. He also emphasised on the

importance of expanding bilateral relations. Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, on Wednesday received Bogdanov Alexei, Minister of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade in the Republic of Belarus, and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of bilateral cooperation in the sectors of transport, logistics and information technology. They also explored means of boosting this cooperation. The meeting was attended by officials from both sides. — ONA

Oman, Belarus discuss agriculture ties

MUSCAT: Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resource, on Wednesday received Bogdanov Alexei, Minister of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade in the Republic of Belarus, and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of bilateral cooperation in the fields of agriculture, fisheries, livestock, water resources and food security. They also explored cooperation potentials in research, the exchange of expertise and visits, as well as benefitting from the Belarusian experience in developing and growing the agriculture, fisheries and water resources sectors. The meeting was attended by officials from the ministry and members of the visiting delegation. — ONA

Senior supervisors convene to enhance supervisory practices

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, through its Directorate-General of Educational Supervision, is holding a two-day educational meeting for senior supervisors across various academic subjects.

The event, which gathers over 240 participants from the Ministry's General Diwan and educational directorates in the governorates, was inaugurated by Saif al Julandani, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision.

This annual meeting underscores the Directorate's

commitment to providing professional support to supervisory roles, particularly senior supervisors, while keeping pace with rapid developments in education and educational supervision.

It also aims to further the objectives of the Directorate's five-year plan, which includes the activation of educational supervision teams, with senior supervisors playing a pivotal role.

The first day featured a training session led by an expert from the Queen Rania Training Academy, focusing on support



A two-day educational meeting for senior supervisors of various academic subjects began in Muscat Governorate

methodologies in supervisory practices.

The session aimed to clarify concepts related to supervisory practices and educational support,

offering models tailored to the nature of the teacher, context and prior knowledge.

The second day of the meeting will involve specialised sessions for each subject, bringing together senior supervisors with curriculum, evaluation and training specialists. These sessions will address key aspects of supervision, review recent developments in curricula and evaluation, and work towards practical solutions for identified challenges.

Additionally, a series of training papers will be presented. In the latter part of the day,

Prof Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, will engage in a discussion session with participants, offering guidance and insights to help senior supervisors enhance their technical work within the educational directorates.

The meeting's overarching goal is to develop the capabilities of senior supervisors, equipping them with the skills to build and implement effective supervisory work plans, measure their impact and foster an environment of positive collaboration to improve supervisory performance.



OMAN PARTICIPATES IN UN OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME MEETING

VIENNA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the National Committee for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances, is taking part in the extraordinary meeting organised by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Vienna. The meeting is held during the period from August 28 to 30, 2024. Further, the meeting highlights the role of social media in the spread of electronic trafficking of narcotics and psychotropic substances. It also reviews the efforts of organisations and security establishments in this regard. — ONA



Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health (Ibri Regional Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in following Tender :-

Tender No.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non Refundable)
3383/ 2024	Supply, Installation, Testing, Commissioning and Training of Washer Extractor Machine at Ibri Regional Hospital	08/09/2024	Thursday before 9.00 am 12/09/2024	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25/- Per set

Notes :-

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender documents from the E.Tendering website : <http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Regional Ibri Hospital is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accept or reject any tender.

<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
Any Clarification you may contact via
Telephone : 24402200
Email id etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om



China, US discuss new round of talks between Biden and Xi



China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi and US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan (3rd L) before talks at Yanqi Lake in Beijing. – AFP

BEIJING: Top Chinese and US officials discussed holding fresh talks between their heads of state in the near future, Chinese state media said on Wednesday, after China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, met US national security adviser Jake Sullivan in Beijing.

Both sides also agreed to hold video calls between their military theatre commanders "at an appropriate time", according to the Chinese readout from the meetings, a move that Washington hopes could prevent conflict in areas like the Taiwan Strait.

"The key to the smooth development of China-US interaction lies in treating each other as equals," Wang told Sullivan according to state broadcaster CCTV.

This is Sullivan's second day

of talks with Wang and others, aimed at calming tensions between the two superpowers ahead of the US election.

The meetings will last until Thursday, and are expected to cover a range of areas where the two countries are at odds, including trade, the Middle East, Ukraine, and Chinese territorial claims from Taiwan to the South China Sea.

Wang told Sullivan the US should "stop arming Taiwan and support peaceful 'reunification' of China", adding that "Taiwan belongs to China and that 'Taiwan independence' is the biggest risk to peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait".

According to the Chinese readout, Wang also expressed Beijing's disapproval of US tariffs on a range of manufactured

goods and export controls targeting Chinese chip makers, saying Washington should "stop jeopardising China's legitimate interests".

China, the world's second largest economy, whose vessels have repeatedly clashed with Philippine ships in the South China Sea, said the US "must not undermine China's sovereignty... nor support Philippines' 'infringing acts'".

Manila and Washington have a mutual defence treaty and the US has vowed to aid the Philippines against armed attacks on its vessels and soldiers in the South China Sea.

In the final months of his presidency, US President Joe Biden has pushed direct diplomacy to influence Chinese President Xi Jinping to help

keep tensions at bay. US Vice-President Kamala Harris, the Democratic candidate in November's election, would likely pursue a similar strategy if she succeeds Biden.

In April, Biden and Xi navigated their countries' disagreements in a phone call, after deciding to significantly improve bilateral ties during a summit in San Francisco last November following a period of deep division over trade and the Covid pandemic.

However, many analysts aligned with Republican former president Donald Trump see that approach as too soft, in the face of a more assertive Chinese foreign policy. Trump is his party's presidential candidate again in the November election.

— Reuters

24 missing after heavy floods in Yemen

DUBAI: Heavy flooding caused by torrential rains in Yemen overnight has destroyed homes and left at least 24 people missing, authorities said on Wednesday.

The floods in Al Mahwit, a province west of the capital Sanaa controlled by Ansar Allah fighters, triggered landslides that swept through several homes, police said in a statement carried by the media. At least 24 people are missing after seven homes were destroyed in the province's Melhan district, police said.

Authorities have yet to report casualties but images circulating on social media purported to show corpses wrapped in blankets after the floods.

The agency could not independently verify their authenticity.

The mountains of western Yemen are prone to heavy seasonal rainfall. Since late July, flash flooding has killed 60 people and affected 268,000, according to the United Nations.

Western and central provinces have been warned of worse to come.

"In the coming months, increased rainfall is forecast, with the central highlands, Red Sea coastal areas and portions of the southern uplands expected to receive unprecedented levels in excess of 300 millimetres," the World Health Organization warned on Monday.

Earlier this month, the United Nations warned that \$4.9 million was urgently needed to scale up the emergency response to extreme weather in war-torn Yemen.

Climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of seasonal rains in the Yemeni highlands, much of which are controlled by Ansar Allah fighters. A decade of war with the internationally recognised government propped up by a coalition has ravaged medical infrastructure and left millions dependent on international aid.

— AFP



A dog looks on as children fill up a jerrycan from a water puddle left by recent heavy flooding in the Hays region south of Yemen's Hodeidah province. – AFP

Japan issues emergency warning as powerful typhoon nears

TOKYO: Southwestern Japan braced on Wednesday for what officials say could be one of the strongest storms to ever hit the region, as some residents in the path of Typhoon Shanshan were ordered to evacuate and major firms like Toyota closed factories.

Airlines and rail operators cancelled some services for the coming days as the typhoon, categorised as "very strong", barrelled towards the main southwestern island of Kyushu with gusts of up to 70 metres per second.

The meteorological agency issued an emergency warning

saying the typhoon could bring flooding, landslides and wind strong enough to knock down some houses.

"Maximum caution is required given that forecasts are for strong winds, high waves and high tides that have not been seen thus far," Satoshi Sugimoto, the agency's chief forecaster, told a news conference.

After striking Kyushu over the next few days, the storm is expected to approach central and eastern regions, including the capital Tokyo, around the weekend, the agency said.

Authorities issued evacuation



Pedestrians holding umbrellas struggle against strong wind and heavy rains caused by Typhoon Shanshan in Kagoshima, southwestern Japan. – Reuters

orders for more than 800,000 residents in Kagoshima prefecture in southern Kyushu and central Japan's Aichi and Shizuoka prefectures.

In Aichi, home to Toyota's headquarters, two people believed to be residents of a house that collapsed in a landslide during heavy rains were unaccounted for. Three residents of the house had been pulled out, according to public broadcaster NHK.

Toyota will suspend operations at all 14 of its plants in Japan from Wednesday evening through Thursday morning, it said. Nissan said it would suspend operations

at its Kyushu plant on Thursday and Friday morning, while Honda will also temporarily close its factory in Kumamoto in southwestern Kyushu.

Shanshan is the latest harsh weather system to hit Japan following last week's Typhoon Ampil, which also led to blackouts and evacuations.

ANA Holdings said it would cancel more than 210 domestic flights in total between Wednesday and Friday slated to leave or arrive in southwestern Japan, affecting about 18,400 passengers.

— Reuters

KOLKATA

Indian protesters block rail lines, halt buses

Thousands of protesters blocked train tracks, halted buses and shouted slogans in West Bengal in the latest demonstration following the brutal abuse and murder of a trainee doctor. Prime Minister Modi's BJP, which is in opposition in the eastern state, called for a 12-hour state-wide protest strike after police fired tear gas and water cannon to disperse a march.

Most of Wednesday's protesters were BJP workers, who also forced shops to shut,



as authorities braced for more disruptions, with one police official saying 5,000 officers had been deployed to quell any violence.

— Reuters

DHAKA

Bangladesh lifts ban on largest party

Bangladesh's new authorities lifted a ban on the country's largest party, Jamaat-e-Islami, imposed in the final days of the rule of now ousted autocrat Sheikh Hasina.

"The government... has cancelled the previous order of August 1, 2024 that banned Bangladesh's Jamaat-e-Islami", the order read.

"It will come into effect immediately," Jamaat-e-Islami, which has millions of supporters, was banned from contesting polls in 2013 after high court



judges ruled its charter violated the secular constitution. Jamaat was also barred from participating in elections in 2014, 2018 and again in January this year. — AFP

JAKARTA

Indonesia party backs minister for Jakarta gov

Indonesia's largest political party nominated a cabinet minister as its candidate for Jakarta governor, effectively ending the chance of the early favourite and vocal government critic Anies Baswedan of running.

The nomination follows a week of political drama and protests in the world's third-largest democracy over efforts by President Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo to consolidate power before he leaves office, in part via a proposed revision to election law that would have



benefited his youngest son and sidelined Anies.

The high-profile Jakarta governor position is seen as a stepping stone to the presidency.

— Reuters



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In brief

UNITED NATIONS



UN EXTENDS LEBANON PEACEKEEPING FORCE'S MANDATE

The United Nations Security Council extended the mandate of the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon for a year, calling for a 'de-escalation' of a recent surge in violence between Israel and armed group Hezbollah.

A unanimously adopted resolution said the council "decides to extend the present mandate of UNIFIL until August 31, 2025," referring to the UN's Interim Force in Lebanon.

With more than 10,000 personnel, the peacekeeping force has been stationed in Lebanon since 1978, with its role strengthened after a 33-day conflict between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006. — AFP

NEW YORK



SARAH PALIN WINS NEW TRIAL IN DEFAMATION CASE

Sarah Palin won her bid for a new trial against the New York Times over an editorial that the former Alaska governor said was defamatory.

The 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals said Palin can try again to prove that the Times should be liable for a 2017 editorial that incorrectly linked her to a mass shooting six years earlier that killed six people and seriously wounded Democratic US congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. Writing for a three-judge panel, Circuit Judge John Walker agreed with Palin that US District Judge Jed Rakoff had made several errors that tainted the February 2022 trial.

— Reuters

KYIV



RUSSIAN ATTACKS KILL SIX IN EAST UKRAINE

Russian bombardments on the eastern Ukraine region of Donetsk killed six people the governor of the region said, as Moscow announced it had taken another village in the area. The industrial region has suffered the worst fighting of Russia's attack. The Kremlin claimed to have annexed it alongside three other territories in 2022.

"The Russians killed four people and destroyed a house in Izmailivka," the regional official Vadym Filashkin said on social media. He added that two more people were killed in separate attacks near Chasiv Yar that damaged more than a dozen homes. — AFP

Harris, Walz kick off Georgia bus tour



US Vice President and 2024 Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris and her running mate Minnesota Governor Tim Walz board Air Force Two, departing Chippewa Valley Regional Airport in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. — AFP

WASHINGTON: Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris and her running mate Tim Walz will campaign together on Wednesday in Georgia, a state that Democrats narrowly won in 2020 and could play a decisive role in this year's election.

The election race has dramatically changed since Harris became her party's candidate last month, and she hopes to galvanise Black voters who make up about one-third of Georgia's electorate and will be crucial in the effort to win there.

Harris and Walz will take a bus through southern Georgia, home to some of its largest Black populations and where the campaign has added staff and opened field offices.

Before President Joe Biden dropped his reelection bid last month and endorsed Vice President Harris, polls showed Republican candidate Donald Trump with a clear lead in Georgia, and some Black voters were disillusioned with Democrats.

Since then, however, Harris has steadily gained ground in national polls and has been boosted by well over \$500 million in donations.

The latest polls compiled by FiveThirtyEight show Harris just behind Trump, 46.0 per cent to 46.6 per cent in Georgia, compared to about a five point lead for Trump before Harris entered. Before the 2020 race, Georgia last backed a Democrat for president in 1992.

If elected, Harris will be the first female president in US history. As a Black and South Asian woman, she is seeking to shore up support for Democrats among Black voters and motivate new groups of voters.

Harris is expected to focus on the economy and abortion rights during the Georgia trip, including a pledge to lower consumer costs, a campaign official said.

The tour will culminate with a Harris rally in the Savannah area on Thursday.

"Campaigning in this part of the Peach State is critical as it represents a diverse coalition of voters, including rural, suburban, and urban Georgians - with a large population of Black voters and working class families," the Harris campaign said.

It is Harris's second Georgia trip since she became the Democratic candidate. A rally

in Atlanta earlier this month featured hip-hop star Megan Thee Stallion and drew more than 10,000 people.

Harris, 59, pledged then that Democrats will win the state which has 16 electoral college votes and is one of several swing states that can lean either to Republicans or Democrats. Democrats won it by less than 12,000 votes in 2020.

Republicans have dramatically ramped up spending in Georgia and the Republican-controlled state election board added a new rule that voting rights advocates say could delay certification of the vote in November.

Trump, 78, said in a social media post last week that winning Georgia "is so important to the success of our Party, and most importantly, our Country." He is expected to campaign in the state several more times before Election Day on November 5.

Recent national polls have shown Harris building a small lead over Trump since she entered the race on July 21.

A new Reuters/Ipsos poll on Tuesday showed that Harris has eroded Trump's advantage on the economy and crime. — Reuters

Starmer, Scholz seek reset in British-EU ties

BERLIN: Britain and Germany's leaders agreed in Berlin on Wednesday to work on an ambitious treaty covering issues from defence to trade that would be part of a reset of British relations with the European Union.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's trip to the EU's top powers, Germany and France, aims to help Britain move beyond the previous Conservative government's fractious relations with European allies. Starmer, who took office last month, has put improved ties at the heart of his efforts to boost Britain's economic growth.

He billed the new cooperation treaty as a "once-in-a-generation chance to deliver for working people in Britain and in Germany" as it would deepen collaboration in science, technology, business and culture while increasing trade.

Starmer said that growth was his government's "number one mission".

"And what we understand clearly is that building relationships with our partners here in Germany and across Europe is vital to achieving it," he said.

Starmer, addressing a press conference alongside German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, said a reset would not mean reversing Britain's 2020 exit from the EU under the Conservatives, or re-entering the bloc's single market or customs union.

"But it does mean a closer

relationship on a number of fronts, including the economy, including defence, including exchanges," he said.

Scholz said Germany wanted to take this outstretched hand.

"The United Kingdom has always been an indispensable part of solving the big issues that affect the whole of Europe," he said. "This has not changed since it left the EU."

In a joint declaration, Britain and Germany said they hoped to sign the cooperation treaty at government consultations "by early next year". Defence ministers were also working on a new defence agreement, they said, which would follow the signing of a joint defence declaration in July.

Stephen Hunsaker, a trade researcher at the UK in a Changing Europe think tank, said however that any efforts to properly improve trade would risk encroaching on EU rules and could only happen at the periphery.

Britain and Germany, Nato allies and western Europe's biggest defence spenders, are looking for ways to deepen defence cooperation ahead of a possible scaling back of US military support for Ukraine if former US President Donald Trump returns to the White House in January.

The Republican presidential candidate has warned that if elected, he would fundamentally rethink "Nato's purpose and Nato's mission". — Reuters



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Britain's PM Keir Starmer after a joint press conference following bilateral talks at the Chancellery in Berlin. — AFP

Gaza teen amputee recalls nightmare of losing arms

GAZA: Teenager Diaa al Adini was one of the few Palestinians who found a functioning hospital in war-ravaged Gaza after he was wounded by an Israeli strike. But he did not have much time to recuperate after doctors amputated both of his arms.

Adini, 15, suddenly had to flee the overwhelmed medical facility after the Israeli military ordered people to leave before an attack in its war against Hamas. He made it to an American field hospital.

Many Palestinians have been displaced during the conflict, moving up and down and across the Gaza Strip seeking safe shelter. They are unlucky most of the time.

Scrambling to save your life is especially difficult for Palestinians like Adini, who require urgent medical care but get caught up in the chaos of the war, which erupted after Hamas fighters attacked Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 people, by Israeli tallies.

Memories of better days provide limited relief from reality



Palestinian teenager Diaa Al Adini, who had his both arms amputated after being wounded in an Israeli strike walks with his sister Aya on a beach outside a field hospital in Deir Al Balah in the central Gaza Strip. — Reuters

in Gaza. Israeli strikes have reduced most of one of the most crowded places on earth to rubble as rows and rows of homes are destroyed.

"We used to swim, challenge each other, and sleep, me and

my friend Mohammed al Serei. We used to jump in the water and float on it," said Adini, who walked on a beach with his sister Aya recalling the few distractions from before. His sister placed a towel over the place where his

arms used to be and wiped his mouth.

The strike hit when he was in a makeshift coffee house.

The teenager, who spent 12 days in hospital before he was displaced also lost his aunt, her

children and grandchildren in the war.

"As for my arms, I can get other ones fitted but I cannot replace my aunt," he said.

Israel responded to the Hamas attack in October — the country's bloodiest day in its 75-year history — with a military offensive that has killed at least 40,500 people and wounded 93,778 others, according to Gaza health authorities.

Israel says it goes out of its way to avoid civilian casualties and has accused Hamas of using human shields, an allegation it denies.

The suffering is unlikely to end anytime soon unless mediation by the United States, Egypt and Qatar secures a ceasefire. And even then, there is a possibility hostilities will resume.

So all Palestinians can do is hope for treatment at the few functional hospitals as they face a humanitarian crisis — severe shortages of food, fuel, power and medicine, as raw sewage increases the chance of disease. — AFP

Why mpox vaccines are only just arriving in Africa



Jennifer Rigby

The writer is the Global Health Correspondent at Reuters

The first 10,000 mpox vaccines are finally due to arrive next week in Africa, where a dangerous new strain of the virus - which has afflicted people there for decades - has caused global alarm.

The slow arrival of the shots - which have already been made available in more than 70 countries outside Africa - showed that lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic about global healthcare inequities have been slow to bring change, half a dozen public health officials and scientists said.

Among the hurdles: It took the World Health Organization (WHO) until this month to start officially the process needed to give poor countries easy access to large quantities of vaccine via international agencies.

That could have begun years ago, several of the officials and scientists said.

Mpox is a potentially deadly infection that causes flu-like symptoms and pus-filled lesions and spreads through close physical contact. It was declared a

global health emergency by the WHO on August 14 after the new strain, known as clade Ib, began to proliferate from Democratic Republic of Congo to neighbouring African countries.

In response to questions about the delays in vaccine deployment, the UN health agency said on Friday it would relax some of its procedures on this occasion in an effort to now accelerate poor countries' access to the mpox shots.

Buying the expensive vaccines directly is out of reach for many low-income countries. There are two key mpox shots, made by Denmark's Bavarian Nordic and Japan's KM Biologics. Bavarian Nordic's costs \$100 a dose; the price of KM Biologics' is unknown.

The long wait for WHO approval for international agencies to buy and distribute the vaccine has forced individual African governments and the continent's public health agency - the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - to instead request donations of shots from rich countries. That

LESSONS FROM COVID ABOUT INEQUITIES HAVEN'T YET BROUGHT CHANGE BUT WHO'S SLOW PROCESS DELAYED VACCINE ACCESS FOR CONGO. THE FIRST 10,000 DOSES IN AFRICA GOING TO NIGERIA, NOT CONGO

cumbersome process can collapse, as it has before if donors feel they should keep the vaccine to protect their own people. The first 10,000 vaccines on their way to Africa - made by Bavarian Nordic - were donated by the US, not provided by the UN system.

Helen Rees, a member of the Africa CDC's mpox emergency committee, and executive director of the Wits RHI Research Institute in Johannesburg, South Africa, said it was "really outrageous" that, after Africa struggled to access vaccines during the Covid pandemic, the region had once again been left behind.

In 2022, after a different mpox strain spread outside Africa, smallpox shots were repurposed by governments within weeks, approved by regulators and used in roughly 70 high and middle income countries to protect those most at risk.

Those vaccines have now reached 1.2 million people in the United States alone, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). — **Reuters**

Sky-high rents have Mumbai residents living on the edge

ANUJ SRIVAS

Among the swanky skyscrapers of India's financial capital Mumbai, hundreds of dangerously dilapidated buildings facing demolition are crowded with families risking their lives rather than braving impossibly high rents.

When torrential monsoon rains lash the coastal city each year, some of the decrepit colonial-era buildings come crashing down — often with a heavy loss of life.

"It was like seeing a biscuit that crumbles after you put it in tea," said office worker Vikram Kohli, recalling how he narrowly missed being killed when a four-storey building partially collapsed in July.

City authorities had red-flagged the century-old building in the megacity's bustling Grant Road area for repairs three years ago.

The government issued a "warning notice for evacuation" in June — but residents ignored it.

"No one vacated the premises", the state housing authority said.

When the building collapsed, one passerby was killed, four were injured and the fire brigade had to rescue 13 people trapped inside.

Vaishnav Narvekar, who ran a simple cafe on the ground floor, said he had been "expecting" it to collapse — just not so quickly.

It was the "worst feeling", he said.

But that is only one case among many in the densely populated city of about 20 million people. More than 13,000 buildings require "continuous repair" to stave off collapse, the state's Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) said.

Of those, it lists nearly 850 buildings as being "dangerous and dilapidated" and "not recommended for repair".

Many are apartment blocks packed with residents, suggesting more than a hundred thousand people could live in buildings at risk.

Scores are crushed to death each year when buildings collapse, their walls weakened by rainstorms which climate scientists say are increasing in intensity.

Mumbai, the home of glitzy Bollywood stars and billionaire business tycoons, is in the midst of a major infrastructure drive, including highways, metro lines and bridges.

But the government says its affordable housing budget is stretched, leaving many tenants determined to stay put in unsound dwellings.

"Where should we go if we left?" asked one tenant in the suburb of Ghatkopar, in a building listed as "dangerous", asking not to be named for legal reasons. "Our lives are here."

— **AFP**

Only a ‘Talent Haven Oman Project’ can safeguard our progress



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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

The saying 'one person's loss is another person's gain' rightly describes the current global war for talent. Over the past year, many highly skilled professionals — scientists, entrepreneurs, professors and educators, engineers, lawyers, physicians, thinkers, and journalists — have faced job loss in advanced economies simply for expressing their views online.

A significant contributor to this trend is the rise of 'doxing,' a malicious practice involving the online publication of private information to intimidate, blackmail, or control individuals. Doxed talents, often unsuspecting and innocent, find themselves, and their families, not only losing their income and careers but also facing identity theft, harassment, humiliation, and social isolation.

This raises a critical question: Can we offer these highly skilled but wrongfully targeted individuals a genuine chance to pursue life, liberty, and happiness? The Sultanate of Oman has a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to capitalise on this global talent displacement by building a diverse, high-value network of professionals who align with our national vision.

All notable civilisations have learned from this best practice, that rather than backtracking on welcoming incentives, such as attracting Foreign Direct Investments - FDI with visa schemes, Oman should build a more welcoming practice by prioritising creating an ecosystem that integrates top-tier, doxed talents worldwide.

Like many other countries, Oman is recovering from a period of polycrisis — a term coined by the World Economic Forum to describe overlapping challenges like the Covid-19 pandemic, rising living costs, and ongoing conflicts.

During such testing times, the need for a strong human capital base equipped with the right skills has never been more critical. Oman stands as an oasis of calm in a polarised world, making it essential to build a resilient community and economy.

This is where the Talent Haven Oman Project (THOP) comes into

play: creating a flexible, hybrid in-country and remote ecosystem that attracts and integrates diverse talents known for their track records in advancing prosperous economies.

THOP is not merely a talent acquisition strategy; it is a national imperative. By establishing an ecosystem that supports both in-country and remote collaborations, Oman can foster innovation, enhance its knowledge economy, and increase its competitive edge. Moreover, this initiative aligns seamlessly with Oman's long-term vision of economic diversification and sustainable development.

THE CURRENT GLOBAL CLIMATE PRESENTS A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR OMAN TO BUILD A WORLD-CLASS TALENT ECOSYSTEM THAT NOT ONLY DRIVES ECONOMIC GROWTH BUT ALSO PROMOTES SOCIAL HARMONY AND RESILIENCE

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEI&B) initiatives, once celebrated globally, are currently under attack by extremist elements, particularly in Western countries like the United States and parts of Europe.

As a result, talented individuals are increasingly being targeted and marginalised, triggering an upcoming talent exodus and making these Western economies fertile ground for identifying and attracting the talents Oman needs. The very skills and perspectives that make these individuals vulnerable in their home countries are precisely what can help Oman thrive.

For example, Ivy League universities have seen their leaders, such as the former president of Harvard University, Claudine Gay, come under intense scrutiny and criticism for refusing to support genocidal views.

Although Gay stepped down voluntarily, other high-ranking university officials have faced threats or been forced out due to public pressure

ignited by online campaigns. Similarly, globally recognised tech entrepreneurs like Pavel Durov, the founder and CEO of the messaging app Telegram, was arrested in Paris in August, 2024, for refusing to reveal the private data of antigenocide users. These talented leaders, with their experience, innovation, and drive, represent the calibre of individuals who could make significant contributions to Oman's growing economy.

The focus on technology and artificial intelligence - AI skills are essential, but recent studies underscore the importance of empathetic leadership. According to a 2020 Harvard Business Review study, 86 per cent of workers reported greater success under empathetic leaders.

This suggests that while technological prowess is vital, attracting a network of leaders who excel in understanding and responding to people is crucial for building a resilient and thriving community.

In this regard, Oman can distinguish itself by valuing and integrating human-centric skills alongside technical expertise.

The current global climate presents a unique opportunity for Oman to build a world-class talent ecosystem that drives economic growth and promotes social harmony and resilience. By positioning itself as a sanctuary for high-value, doxed talents who are anti-genocide and advocates of freedom, Oman can attract a wave of innovation, creativity, and expertise that will accelerate its progress. This is not just about economic gains; it's about building a community where people feel valued and are free to contribute without fear of reprisal.

The Talent Haven Oman Project (THOP) is more than a strategic initiative; it is a call to action. It offers a way for Oman to lead by example, creating an environment where diverse talents can thrive and where the values of respect, inclusion, and empathy drive progress.

This approach will not only strengthen Oman's position in the global arena but will also ensure that the nation remains a beacon of stability, prosperity, and human dignity. The time to act is now.

Indiscipline, risky driving behaviours

There are plenty of violations and offenders when it comes to road safety. To be bold, increased surveillance, penalties, and regulations will have little impact because the underlying problem is social attitudes behind the wheel.

According to road safety experts, deterrence is likely minimal if drivers believe they can get away with a simple slap on the wrist. Scholars also suggest that when users notice road policing, drivers adjust their behaviour for a while. Essentially, it is a risk-taking mindset.

Just the other day, I was shocked when I saw a taxi driver make a U-turn at a roundabout, crossing over a normal route to take the opposite street. I flashed the headlights and beeped to draw his attention, which he ignored. His offence was far worse than mine: flashing the lights and beeping.

To put it mildly, it was outrageous. Overconfidence? Perhaps. The worst is underestimating the consequences of his actions and being likely to believe nothing bad would happen.

This experience of seeing a taxi driver making a wrong-way U-turn at a roundabout, combined with recent articles regarding traffic accident statistics in Oman, prompted me to consider the issue.

The numbers released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) are alarming. In 2023, traffic accidents killed 595 people, a higher number than in 2022. Traffic incidents caused 2,129 injuries while the number of road accidents in 2023 exceeded 2,000.

Speeding was the leading cause of 304 deaths. This is a significant figure given the country's modest population. According to the statistics, 103 of the 595 deaths were caused by negligence, 80 by bad behaviour, 35 by failing to leave a safe distance, and 48 by overtaking. The data sheds light on risky driving confidence. Statistics on age and gender could help better understand the problem.



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These numbers tell us a more sinister story in which the contempt for one's life and others is a major concern. According to road safety studies, societal norms surrounding driving attitudes may be one of the reasons contributing to disrespect for traffic laws and regulations.

The same can be said about 2023 traffic accident injuries. Around 245 people suffered injuries due to speeding; 98 due to overtaking; 160 for not leaving a safe distance; and 80 injuries due to bad behaviour.

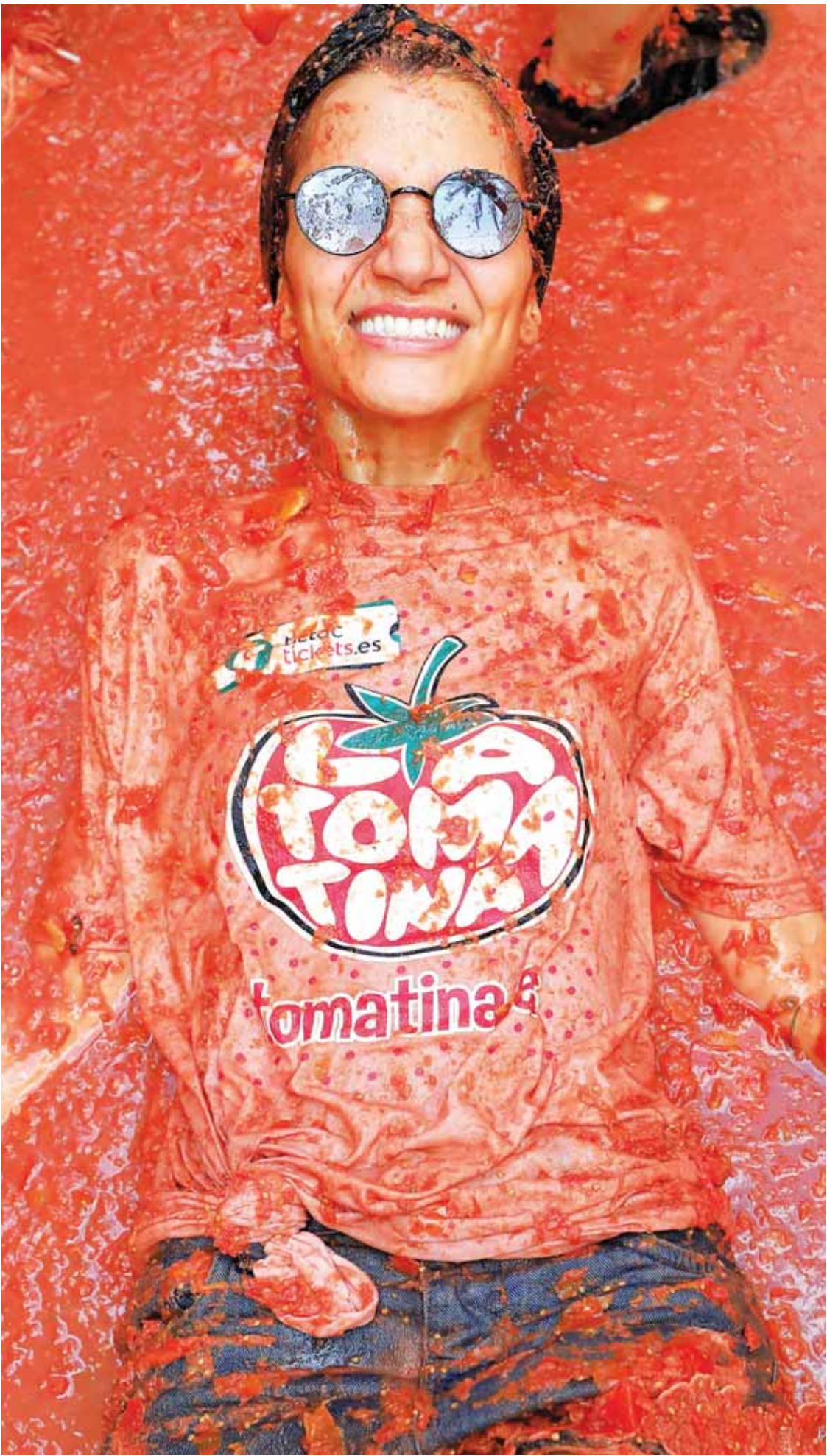
We barely hear that a lack of pedestrian cross-painting has caused accidents, or inadequate lighting on secondary streets, confusing signs, or the structure and design of the roads are the leading causes of traffic accidents. On the contrary, poor road conditions caused two deaths and 21 injuries last year, compared to five deaths and 20 injuries in 2022. The figures indicate that it is a human problem rather than a structural or engineering issue.

Yes, some matters are overlooked, such as speed bumps with worn-out paint, fading road paint, pedestrian crosswalks with virtually invisible stripes, pedestrians, scooters, bicycle riders crossing roads in dangerous places, and animals on the roads.

Victim driving style, such as when the car appeared out of nowhere and there was nothing I could do, is simply a rationale for transferring responsibility and saving face. The problem is that people may not consider the consequences; though, there is always the possibility of an accident where vehicles are moving.

Traffic rules merely require adherence to the regulations set by the authorities. This includes respecting speed limits, stopping at stop signs, using turn signals to indicate your intentions, and yielding to other vehicles as needed. Is that asking too much? There could always be justification that the driver has a problem at home or work, is under pressure, tired, or even sick. Stress and road safety can be complex but don't justify a lack of a responsible attitude towards people's lives.

FOOD FIGHT FESTIVAL!



A participant lies in tomato pulp, as people attend the annual food fight festival 'La Tomatina' in Bunol, near Valencia, Spain, on Wednesday. – Reuters

ACCORDING TO ROAD SAFETY EXPERTS, DETERRENCE IS LIKELY MINIMAL IF DRIVERS BELIEVE THEY CAN GET AWAY WITH A SIMPLE SLAP ON THE WRIST

Gaza mothers separated from newborns by war

MAJEDA EL BATSH

Now one year old, the triplets that Gaza-native Hanane Bayouk gave birth to in Jerusalem before the war have seen their mother just once, and she fears she will “die without them”.

The 26-year-old had to return to the Palestinian territory alone after giving birth to Najoua, Nour and Najmeh on August 24, 2023, because her Israeli travel permit had expired.

Bayouk received a permit to exit Gaza and give birth in annexed east Jerusalem's Al-Maqased hospital after seven years of painful IVF procedures.

She caught a glimpse of her children in their incubators, “barely an hour and a half”, before driving back to Gaza after her permit “expired and the hospital told me to leave”.

Bayouk was supposed to return in early October after her daughters had spent several weeks in incubators, which were in short supply in hospitals in Gaza even before the war erupted last October.

Two days after she applied for a new exit permit on October 5, Hamas commandos blasted through the Erez terminal, the only entry point from Gaza into Israel.

Israel's retaliatory military campaign has killed 40,476 Palestinians in Gaza, according to the territory's health ministry. The UN rights office says most of the dead have been women or children.

ISRAEL'S RETALIATORY MILITARY CAMPAIGN HAS KILLED 40,476 PALESTINIANS IN GAZA, ACCORDING TO THE TERRITORY'S HEALTH MINISTRY

Like Bayouk, Heba Idriss found herself surrounded by war and unable to return to Jerusalem to get her only daughter, Saida, born prematurely at the Maqased two months earlier.

The 27-year-old had hoped to bring her newborn back to her husband Saleh at their home in Shujaiya, in the northern Gaza Strip.

Instead, the couple has been displaced nine times by Israeli air strikes or evacuation orders and her husband Saleh has only seen pictures of Saida.

“I want to see my daughter, I suffer so much from being separated from her”, she said in tears.

Hanane Bayouk too has been forced from her home and now lives in a displacement persons' camp in the south, sharing a tent with seven of her in-laws.

“It drives me crazy. It took me so long to get pregnant, and now I'm crying all the time,” she said on one of the rare days she was able to get through on Gaza's struggling phone network.

“Sometimes, I think I'd like for my daughters to return to Gaza before I die because I have never kissed them, but then I get a hold of myself and tell myself it's better for them to be safe far from the war,” she said.

Back at the Maqased, neonatal

intensive care unit director Hatem Khammach says that in normal times, there would not have been space to keep Nour, Najmeh, and Najoua for so long.

But the number of births at the hospital has fallen sharply as Israel has stopped issuing travel permits to mothers from Gaza and slashed the number given to mothers from

the occupied West Bank.

With more checkpoints closed more often, even those with a permit struggle to access specialist treatment in Jerusalem. “Before the war, we had seven or eight Gaza babies in our department, which can host 30 at a time,” Khammach said.

Since October, none have come,

“and many sick people from the West Bank can't reach us”.

But the hospital's health workers keep busy, like those who call Bayouk to let her speak on the phone to her three daughters. “My husband can't do it. I do it and I cry every time we hang up. I'm afraid my daughters will grow up without knowing me,” Bayouk said. — AFP



Staff at Al Maqased Hospital say that before the war they would have been forced to discharge the triplets by now. – AFP

sport

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WTT Feeder 2024 action to begin in Muscat today

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 28

Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) is all set to commence the actions of WTT Feeder Muscat 2024 on Thursday as nearly 100 participants representing various countries across the world will vie for titles in the prestigious event.

The paddlers from China, Japan, Chinese Taipei, India, Pakistan, France, Germany, Syria, Iran, Egypt, Italy, Yemen and Oman will compete in various categories including Men's Singles, Women's Singles, Men's Doubles, Women's Doubles and Mixed Doubles. A total cash prize of \$22,500 is set for the top players and will be awarded during the final ceremony.

The five days of TT world ranking event will feature some ranking players including China's Xiang Peng (ranked 54th globally), Feng Yi from Chinese Taipei (ranked 55th), Japan's Ryoichi Yoshiyama (114th) and Iran's Amir Hossein Hodaie (148th). This edition being organised by OTTA with direct coordination with WTT will see several top women's ranking players in the main draw including Huang Yi Hua (50th), China's Yang Yuiyun (121st), Japan's Shakura Yokoi (128th) and India's Swastika Ghosh (153rd).

The main hall is set to accommodate more than five to six tables for the daily matches



while two additional halls will be designated for final warm-ups before the players enter the competitions.

OMAN SQUAD
The head coach of Oman's national table tennis team, Omid Shams Shehrbabaki, selected the players representing Oman in this international TT event. The team includes Muhannad al Balushi (ranked 595th globally) will compete in the main draw while Asaad al Raisi, Mohammed al Mutawa, Haitham al Mantheri



Abdullah Bamakhlef

and Ghassan al Ghassani will compete in the preliminary rounds.

The Omani players aim to achieve various technical goals and will work hard to reach the final stages of the competition despite the expected tough competition from international players. This championship offers an excellent opportunity for the national team to earn more points in the international rankings and gain direct experience from competing against distinguished international players. The players are currently in a domestic training camp under the supervision of coach Omid Shams, preparing physically and technically for the championship.

VITAL EVENT
Abdullah Bamakhlef, Chairman of OTTA, said that this is the first international event jointly organised by the OTTA and the WTT in this year. "This event will be followed by another higher-level international event represented by WTT Contender Muscat 2024 which will take place in end of October and early of November. In this championship we are expecting to see more world ranking players. Oman had hosted this event twice in the previous year with major success besides the World Veteran Table Tennis Championship hosted by Oman in last two years with participation of more than 1,500 paddlers," he added.



Uruguay's Izquierdo dies after collapsing during match

RIO DE JANEIRO: South American football was in mourning on Tuesday following the death of Uruguayan defender Juan Izquierdo, who collapsed on the pitch after suffering an irregular heartbeat during a Copa Libertadores game last week.

The 27-year-old had been undergoing medical treatment since collapsing during Nacional's game against Brazilian side Sao Paulo on August 22.

Izquierdo fell to the ground unconscious in the 84th minute without coming into contact with another player. He was taken off the pitch in an ambulance before being treated at the intensive care unit of Albert Einstein Hospital.

The hospital said in a

The hospital said in a statement Izquierdo had died as a result of brain death following a cardiopulmonary arrest associated with cardiac arrhythmia

statement Izquierdo had died as a result of brain death following a cardiopulmonary arrest associated with cardiac arrhythmia.

"It is with the deepest sorrow and shock in our hearts that the Club Nacional announces the death of our beloved player Juan Izquierdo," Uruguay's Nacional wrote on X.

"We express our most sincere condolences to his family, friends, colleagues and

loved ones. All of Nacional is in mourning for his irreparable loss."

The Uruguayan Football Association said the news was deeply painful, while the national governing bodies of Argentina, Peru, Paraguay and Colombia extended their condolences to Izquierdo's family and friends.

"South American football is in mourning," said Alejandro Dominguez, the president of South American soccer's governing body Conmebol.

Brazilian Football Federation President Ednaldo Rodrigues said a minute's silence would be observed in every match organised by the federation on Wednesday.

Sao Paulo said they were deeply saddened by the news, calling it a "sad day for football". — Reuters



Uruguay's Nacional defender Juan Izquierdo reacts during his Copa Libertadores match against Sao Paulo before suffering an irregular heartbeat during the game and falling to the ground unconscious, in Sao Paulo, Brazil on August 22. — Reuters



England's Dawid Malan in action during the ICC Cricket World Cup 2023 match against Pakistan at Eden Gardens, Kolkata, India. — Reuters

England's Malan retires from international cricket

LONDON: Dawid Malan retired from international cricket on Wednesday, with the batsman saying his England career "has not been easy".

Malan signed a 12-month central contract in October and was England's leading run-scorer in their woeful 50-over World Cup title defence in India in the weeks that followed.

But the left-hander, 37 next week, has not played for England since that showpiece tournament.

Yet he was repeatedly criticised for being insufficiently aggressive at the crease in an era of dynamic white-ball hitting.

Nevertheless, Malan is just one of two England batsmen, alongside Jos Buttler, to have scored hundreds in all three international formats — Tests, ODIs and T20s.

But Malan, a member of England's 2022 T20 World Cup-winning squad, has accepted now is the right time to call time on a seven-year international career of 22 Tests and 92 white-ball internationals.

"It has been an incredible journey since July 2017," said Malan, born in England but brought up and educated in South Africa. "I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to play for England in all three formats."

"Cricket, like most sports, is an industry where almost everyone eventually retires wishing they had done that little bit more."

"Whether you've played 10

Tests or 100, many step away regretting not playing just one more, scoring a few more runs, or winning more trophies.

"Right now, as I retire from international cricket, I can say I am genuinely satisfied."

He added: "It has not been easy. It may be my nature, but for whatever reason, it has always seemed that I had something to prove and often felt as if I was playing for my place."

"The pressure goes with the territory, but it does take a mental and physical toll. Even so, I look back with pride on what I have been able to achieve."

Malan, who amassed 4,416 runs for England across all formats, agreed a white-ball-only deal at English county Yorkshire earlier this year and could now spend most of his time on the global T20 franchise circuit.

England managing director Rob Key paid tribute to Malan's "pivotal" contributions.

"Dawid Malan retires after an excellent international career marked by resilience and determination," said Key.

The former England batsman added: "Early on, he had to fight for every opportunity, often facing some of the best teams in the world. His contributions were pivotal, particularly during the memorable (T20) World Cup victories in Australia, where he played an integral role in the team's success." — AFP

West Indies romp to T20 series sweep over South Africa

TAROUBA, Trinidad and Tobago: West Indies cruised to an eight-wicket victory over South Africa in a rain-disrupted match to complete a 3-0 T20 International series sweep on Tuesday.

West Indies opener Shai Hope blasted an unbeaten 42 off 24 balls while Nicholas Pooran clubbed 35 off just 13 deliveries to lay the foundation for the hosts' victory at the Brian Lara Stadium in Tarouba.

After South Africa scored 108-4 off 13 overs, West Indies were left with a victory target of 116 under the Duckworth Lewis method.

The Caribbean side reached that total at a canter, finishing on 116-2 with 22 balls remaining.

A whopping 82 runs from the West Indies total came from boundaries, with nine sixes and seven fours.

Romario Shepherd was the man-of-the-match for West Indies after a tidy bowling spell that saw him finish with figures of 2-14 off two overs as South Africa's innings stalled.

The victory was sweet for a West Indies squad who were



Shai Hope (L) and Shimron Hetmyer of West Indies walking off the field after winning the third and final T20I match against South Africa at Brian Lara Cricket Academy in Tarouba, Trinidad and Tobago. **RIGHT:** Shai Hope plays a shot. — AFP

eliminated from the T20 World Cup by the South Africans in June.

"To come and clean sweep the team which knocked us out of the World Cup was great," Shepherd said.

West Indies skipper Roston Chase added: "We wanted to win

the series 3-0. In a shortened game we want guys to go and play their natural game. The guys came out and played brilliantly."

South Africa captain Aiden Markram, who chipped in with 20 off 12 balls in the Proteas' total, said his team had room for improvement.

"Tough one today," Markram said.

"Probably got the tougher of the conditions. That being said, we can improve as a team. It's going to take a little bit of time; there's a bit we can take from it but it's never great to lose," the South Africa captain said. — AFP

Three Omani golfers ranked on world stage

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 28

The Oman Golf Association (OGA) proudly celebrated the addition of Mohammed bin Saif al Busaidi to the World Amateur Golf Ranking (WAGR). This achievement makes him the third Omani golfer to be included in the WAGR, following in the footsteps of Azzan bin Mohammed al Rumhy and Ahmed bin Khalil al Wahaibi.

Faiz bin Mohammed Riaz, Vice-Chairman of OGA, met

with Al Busaidi to congratulate him on this significant accomplishment and recognising the advanced level of Omani golfers. He expressed his wishes for continued progress and improvement in their performances, encouraging further development and achievements in the sport.

Al Busaidi earned his place in the WAGR after winning a tournament held at La Vie Golf Club last weekend which solidified his status among the world's top amateur golfers.



India's Jay Shah becomes youngest ever chief of ICC

NEW DELHI: From running the world's richest cricket board to chairing the International Cricket Council, Jay Shah's meteoric rise illustrates India's dramatic domination of the sport's global administration.

In a country where the sport and politics go hand in glove, even after Shah was named all-powerful Secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), the 35-year-old is best known for his father.

He is the son of India's powerful interior minister Amit Shah, the right-hand man of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Now, five years after taking the top BCCI job, Shah was elected unopposed as chair of the influential ICC.

He becomes the youngest person ever to take the ICC's top job, overseeing a sport beloved by a billion-plus fans — with more than 90 per cent of them in the Indian subcontinent, according to a 2018 ICC study.



BCCI secretary Jay Shah has been elected unopposed as chairman of the sport's world body, the International Cricket Council. — AFP

India's financial sway in the sport has put Shah — who already headed the ICC's Finance and Commercial Affairs Committee — in a commanding position.

Shah oversaw the rapid rise of the wildly popular Indian Premier League (IPL), attracting some of world cricket's top stars with bumper salaries in the shorter Twenty20 format of the sport.

The pioneering IPL sold its broadcast rights in 2022 for five

seasons to global media giants for an eye-popping \$6.2 billion — putting it up amongst the highest-ranked sport leagues in cost-per-match terms.

The sport's popularity has made the BCCI staggeringly powerful, with top politicians clinging to state associations for influence and benefits.

OLYMPIC DREAMS

But Shah dreams bigger.

He also heads the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) and

helped push cricket's return to the Olympic programme.

He has spoken of India's "unparalleled global fan base", and with cricket an Olympic sport in Los Angeles in 2028, dreams of using the sport to bolster India's hopes of hosting the games in 2036.

"The inclusion of our sport in the Olympics at LA 2028 represents a significant inflection point for the growth of cricket, and I am confident that it will drive the sport forward in unprecedented ways," Shah said on Tuesday, after he was elected.

Shah's swift career rise began in 2009 in his home state of Gujarat as a young man.

His father had earlier served himself as the president of the state's Gujarat Cricket Association (GCA).

In 2013, Shah became GCA joint secretary. It was under his watch that construction began turning the cricket ground in Gujarat's main city Ahmedabad

into the world's largest cricket stadium, a vast 132,000-seat arena — named after Modi.

Two years later, he also joined the top levels of the BCCI, and in 2019, then aged just 31, he was elected as the national board's secretary.

While largely avoiding direct interviews during his tenure at the BCCI, Shah tried to cultivate an image of a young, hands-on administrator willing to take tough decisions and support players.

Earlier this year, Shah warned cricketers to not prioritise the lucrative IPL tournament over domestic cricket.

"It is essential to recognise that domestic cricket forms the backbone of Indian cricket," he wrote, a rare rebuke for the country's superstar cricketers who have skipped home tournaments for lucrative franchise games.

WOMEN'S CHAMPION

Shah fashioned himself as a

champion for women's cricket as BCCI set up the Women's Premier League on the lines of the IPL in 2023.

India's rapid economic strides have helped players, coaches and ground staff with much better pay and contracts.

But the BCCI under Shah has also faced criticism for not doing enough to upgrade cricket stadiums to improve the overall comfort and viewing experience for millions of avid fans.

Critics say the BCCI's wealth and reach enable it to pull strings at the ICC.

Shah's drive also pushed cricket's inclusion in the Commonwealth Games 2022 in Birmingham and the Asian Games 2022 in Guangzhou.

"Just as he has done for Indian cricket, both men and women, players worldwide will benefit," former India great Sunil Gavaskar said of the young administrator in a column for India's *Sportstar* publication. — AFP

WHO SAID WHAT ON DAY 2 OF THE US OPEN

“I was kind of thinking of that movie, I think it was ‘Meet the Parents’ or ‘Meet the Fockers,’ where, you know, Gaylord has a shrine and all his 18th-place medals. I don’t want to be like Gaylord, so I think I’m good.”

DANIELLE COLLINS wary of agreeing to a farewell ceremony at the US Open before her retirement

“When I was putting on my outfit today, I was, like, ‘Ah, I hope this isn’t too much. Because I had the tutu and then I had the bow jacket and it was green, I feel like everyone was staring at me funny. It made me feel better, another player came up to me and asked to take a picture. I hope it was a positive picture, it wasn’t, like, ‘Oh, my God, look at her.’”

NAOMI OSAKA, who turned heads in her tulle skirt and bow-bedecked “walk-on outfit”

“It’s the longest I’ve ever been on a court. In the fourth set I had to check to see what set we were in, I wasn’t entirely sure what set we were in. I don’t really want to do that again, that’s for sure.”

ENGLAND’S DAN EVANS after beating Russian Karen Khachanov in a five-set match lasting a US Open record five hours and 35 minutes.

“My coach is scheduling everything pretty wisely, but it is tough. I played Stuttgart, Madrid, Rome, Roland Garros, and I only had, like, two days in between every tournament. If I want to perform well I’m not going to have time to do anything. It can work for few years, but what’s going to happen later if you want to keep playing at the same level? I guess it’s not going to be about really the quality of tennis.”

WORLD NUMBER ONE IGA SWIATEK on the congested WTA calendar and the number of mandatory events for top players

“They absolutely love it — I bring them everywhere. I think it’s such a great life experience for them, even though they’re so young, they don’t know any better. This is your life, travelling everywhere, meeting new people, seeing new places. I think they’ve become really open kids from that, and they adjust so well to a new bed, a new hotel room.”

FORMER WORLD NUMBER ONE CAROLINE WOZNIACKI on travelling with her two children, 3-year-old Olivia and 1-year-old James, since her return to tennis

“I cannot control the players’ reaction, and if I have something to say to someone, I go there privately, because I’m this kind of person. But, look, overall, it has been not bad.”
WORLD NUMBER ONE JANNIK SINNER on the reaction of players after he escaped a lengthy ban despite testing positive for a banned anabolic agent



Italy’s Jannik Sinner celebrates his victory over USA’s Mackenzie McDonald in the first round match of the US Open at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center. — AFP



Spain’s Carlos Alcaraz celebrates after winning his first round match against Australia’s Li Tu at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City. — AFP

OSAKA MAKES TEARFUL AND COLOURFUL RETURN TO FLUSHING MEADOWS SINNER, ALCARAZ SURVIVE WOBBLES

NEW YORK: Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz survived US Open first round wobbles on Tuesday to stay on course for a semifinal showdown as two-time champion Naomi Osaka made a tearful and colourful return to Flushing Meadows.

World number one Sinner fought back from a set and break down to defeat 140th-ranked Mackenzie McDonald in his first match since being embroiled in a doping test controversy.

Alcaraz, the third seed and 2022 champion in New York, overcame a second set blip to defeat 186th-ranked qualifier Li Tu of Australia 6-2, 4-6, 6-3, 6-1.

Italian Sinner battled to a 2-6, 6-2, 6-1, 6-2 win over American opponent McDonald on Arthur Ashe Stadium, racing away with 18 of the last 22 games.

The 23-year-old was returning to action just a week after it was revealed he had failed two drug tests in March.

“The response from fans, I feel it has been great, also throughout when the news came out, in the practice sessions, there was a lot of support,” said Sinner.

“It’s still a little bit not easy. You have to go through day by day.”

Alcaraz, who won the first of his four Grand Slam titles in New York in 2022, opened the night session against Tu who hasn’t won a match on the main tour this year.



Japan’s Naomi Osaka celebrates winning a point against Latvia’s Jelena Ostapenko.

‘HE SURPRISED ME’
However, Tu thrilled the crowd as he went about his task of facing a player who is attempting to become only the third man in the modern era to win the French Open, Wimbledon and US Open in the same year.

After being outplayed in the opening set, Tu levelled the tie on a fifth set point in the second.

But Alcaraz crushed any hint of a shock result by running away with the clash to record his 15th successive Grand Slam match win.

“He surprised me a little bit. In the first set, he was nervous but after that he grew into it and played great tennis,” said the Spanish star.

Naomi Osaka, who missed last year’s tournament after giving birth to her daughter Shai, stunned 10th

seed Jelena Ostapenko.

Former world number one Osaka, now ranked 88, came through 6-3, 6-2 for her first top 10 win in four years. The Japanese star crunched nine aces in her 19 winners and committed just five unforced errors to her opponent’s 21.

Her tennis was as striking as her outfit. Osaka arrived on court with a brightly-coloured, giant bow on the back of her jacket and a frilly skirt over her playing dress.

To complete the ensemble, the 26-year-old attached small bows to the heels of both shoes.

“Last year I was watching Coco (Gauff) play and I so badly wanted to step on these courts again,” said a tearful Osaka, a four-time major winner.

‘MEANS SO MUCH’
“I didn’t know if I could... just to win this match and just to be in this atmosphere means so much to me.”

World number one and 2022 champion Iga Swiatek defeated 104th-ranked Kamilla Rakhimova after having to save three set points in the second set.

French Open champion Swiatek saw off the Russian lucky loser 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) to extend her season-leading record to 54 match wins.

Fifth-seeded Daniil Medvedev went through with a four-set victory over Dujan Lajovic.

Greek 11th seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, who has never made the second week at the tournament, was stunned 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 6-3, 7-5 by Australia’s Thanasi Kokkinakis.

Stan Wawrinka, the 2016 champion, failed in his bid to become only the third man in last 50 years to win a main draw match at the tournament at the age of 39 or over. Wawrinka slipped to a 6-4, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 loss at the hands of Italian qualifier Mattia Bellucci.

Bianca Andreescu, the 2019 winner, lost in three sets to sixth-seeded Jasmine Paolini while 2021 champion Emma Raducanu fell to 2020 Australian Open winner Sofia Kenin.

Britain’s Dan Evans defeated 23rd seed Karen Khachanov 6-7 (6/8), 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 6-4 in the longest match in US Open history, a five-hour, 35-minute epic. — AFP



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Oman unveils key targets for digital transformation

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 28

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has outlined an ambitious agenda for advancing digital transformation in 2024 in its recently released annual report.

The ministry's strategic targets include a series of critical initiatives aimed at enhancing government digital services and infrastructure. Key among the ministry's goals is the completion of the first phase of the Government Electronic Integration Acceleration Project. This initiative, which will be executed according to a detailed plan, aims to streamline digital processes across targeted government institutions.

Additionally, the ministry plans to introduce the Readiness and Digital Services Maturity Measurement System, designed to assess and enhance the digital capabilities of government entities. The launch of the National Open Data Platform, which will enter its first



The ministry's strategic targets include a series of critical initiatives aimed at enhancing government digital services and infrastructure.

phase, is another significant milestone, aimed at increasing transparency and accessibility of data.

The report also highlights the issuance of several guidelines, including the Digital Participation Guideline and the

Digital User Experience Design Guideline, which will provide a framework for improving digital engagement and user experience across government services.

Further, the ministry will host the second edition of the Oman Digital Transformation Forum,

continuing its efforts to foster dialogue and collaboration on digital innovation. The Digital Empowerment Programme for National Talents will also see its first phase awarded and implemented, focusing on empowering local talent within

the government sector.

In terms of procedural improvements, the ministry will complete the third and fourth phases of Manjam Labs, an initiative aimed at simplifying government procedures. The launch of the National

Unified Portal for Electronic Services and the National Data Governance Framework are also on the agenda, aimed at creating a cohesive and efficient digital service environment.

As highlighted recently in the *Observer*, electronic certification systems processed 903,897 transactions utilising electronic signatures in the second half of 2023 alone. This represents a 12-per cent increase compared to the 806,500 transactions recorded in the second half of 2022. Additionally, the adoption of digital IDs has gained momentum, with 12,924,684 digital transactions completed using digital identification methods during the same period, marking a 25-per cent rise from the 10,331,000 transactions in the latter half of 2022.

These strategic initiatives reflect the ministry's commitment to driving significant advancements in the digital landscape, positioning the government to better serve its citizens and embrace the future of digital innovation.

‘Land-bridge’ boosts Hutchison Ports Sohar container volumes by 26pc

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 28

Hutchison Ports Sohar, the owner and operator of Sohar Port's modern Container Terminal, has announced an impressive 26 per cent year-on-year growth in container throughput in the first half of this year, bolstered in significant part by the deployment of a unique land-bridge solution designed to attract new business to the port.

Also contributing to this strong uptick is a tripling of transshipment volumes in the wake of the port's positioning as a land-bridge serving markets deeper into the Arabian Peninsula and beyond.

These achievements come against a backdrop of significant challenges for the global container shipping industry, as it grapples with increased ship waiting times, rising freight rates, and ongoing complexities in the Suez Canal due to the Red Sea situation, among other hurdles, key officials noted.

Described as a "critical asset", the land-bridge solution is the product of a collaborative initiative by Hutchison Ports Sohar and Sohar Port and Freezone, backed by Oman Customs and various other authorities. It enables the smooth flow of cargo to-and-from



Transshipment volumes at Hutchison Ports Sohar tripled during the first half of 2024

countries across the Gulf, thereby providing vital support to both regional and global trade.

Adding to the appeal of the 'land-bridge' solution is Hutchison Ports Sohar's modern terminal capabilities which ensure seamless 24/7 operations with no congestion issues. Notable is its investment in a cutting-edge, solar-powered Integrated Inspection Facility, which not only enhances national security, but also streamlines the cargo clearance process, significantly improving operational efficiency.

Further augmenting its performance in H1 2024, Hutchison Ports Sohar welcomed 12 new customers, bringing the total number of active customers to 175. These include carriers,

non-vessel operating common carriers (NVOCCs), and feeder operators, demonstrating the terminal's growing appeal and effectiveness in meeting diverse logistical needs, according to Anacin Kum, Chief Executive Officer, Hutchison Ports Sohar.

"Thanks to the dedicated efforts of our team, Hutchison Ports Sohar is a step closer to joining the 1.0 million TEU club. This milestone highlights our strong customer relationships, well-trained Omani workforce, and an effective Business Continuity Management strategy," the CEO stated.

Applauding Hutchison Ports Sohar on its H1 performance, Emile Hoogsteden, Chief Executive Officer, Sohar Port ,

commented: "We are very pleased that Hutchison Ports Sohar is ensuring a smooth supply chain into/out of the region during these turbulent times. The sharp rise in transshipment volumes underlines Sohar Port and Freezone's ambition to develop into a regional transshipment hub."

"I couldn't be prouder of the dedication and achievements of the team at Hutchison Ports Sohar. Our mission in Oman has always centred on continuous and shared development. The progress we've made in the Sultanate of Oman, while not without its challenges, has been made possible through unwavering support of Sohar Port and Freezone and valuable guidance from the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

We remain committed to advancing with the same enthusiasm, driving sustainable development for both the terminal and the nation," added Andy Tsoi, Managing Director of Hutchison Ports Middle East and Africa.

Hutchison Ports Sohar is a joint venture between Hutchison Ports (the world's leading port investor, developer and operator), Rakiza (Oman Infrastructure Investment Management) and other Omani investors.

OQ Salalah unveils new brand identity

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 28

OQ Salalah, an OQ Group company based in Dhofar Governorate, has announced its new brand identity, OQ Basic Industries (OQBi). The ceremony was attended by Ashraf bin Hamed al Maamari, Group CEO of OQ, Hilal bin Ali al Kharousi, Chief Executive Commercial & Downstream, in addition to officials and employees of the company.

This rebranding aims to strengthen the group's strategy to maximise investment returns in the region and establish a distinct corporate identity for its subsidiaries both domestically and internationally.

The new identity for OQ Basic Industries represents the operational plants in the Salalah Free Zone, comprising three major facilities: the ammonia plant, the Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) plant, and the methanol plant.

These facilities play a crucial role in Oman's industrial sector, particularly in advancing clean manufacturing processes and boosting exports. Notably, all products from the methanol and ammonia plants, along with 90 per cent of the LPG plant's output, are exported.

The ammonia plant has a daily operational capacity of 1,000 metric tonnes, producing ammonia used in various industries, including fertilisers, industrial fertilisers, urea, cleaning products and refrigerants.

With a daily capacity of 3,000

metric tonnes, the methanol plant supplies methanol for a wide array of industrial applications, such as the production of plastics, synthetic fibres, and medical and chemical products.

One of Oman's most significant fuel processing projects, the LPG plant is enhancing the gas value chain. It operates at a capacity of 1,000 metric tonnes per day, producing propane, butane and condensates.

Locally, LPG is used to supply cooking gas to Dhofar and Al Wusta governorates, thus increasing the added value within Oman. Additionally, 90 per cent of the plant's production is destined for export.

The launch of the OQ Basic Industries brand marks a pivotal step in solidifying the company's economic presence in the region and empowering the industrial sector.

The brand's vision, "Leadership through global solutions and exceptional talent," reflects the company's ambition and commitment to driving growth, implementing best practices and maintaining a competitive edge in global markets.

The new OQ Basic Industries identity aligns with OQ Group's ambition to support Oman Vision 2040 through "pursuing sustainable growth and operational excellence by fostering a people-centric culture, advancing decarbonisation initiatives, enhancing energy efficiency, and promoting local development."



BYD celebrates production of 8 million new energy vehicle



The production of the 8 million new energy vehicle marks a significant milestone in BYD's quest to lead the way in sustainable mobility solutions.

MUSCAT: BYD, a global leader in new energy vehicles recently celebrated the production of its 8 million new energy vehicle. This landmark event highlights BYD's ongoing commitment to innovation and sustainability within the automotive industry. The production of the 8 million new energy vehicle marks a significant milestone in BYD's quest to lead the way in sustainable mobility solutions. BYD's achievement with the 8 million new energy vehicle is only the beginning. The company plans to expand its production capabilities and introduce even more innovative and environmentally friendly vehicles to meet the rising demand for sustainable transportation. Committed to its vision of "cooling the earth by 1°C," BYD will continue to lead the way in the new energy vehicle industry.

In Oman, BYD's latest range that includes the ATTO 3, Seal, Han, Qin Plus or SONG Plus. The BYD ATTO 3, an electric SUV boasts 201 HP and a range of 420 km (based on standard test conditions). Packed with features like the BYD blade battery, panoramic sunroof and advanced safety systems, the ATTO 3 promises both performance and comfort. Meanwhile, the SEAL electric Sport AWD Sedan, equipped with 523 HP, 0-100 km/h speed in 3.8 seconds and a range of 520 km (based on standard test conditions), dazzled with its luxurious amenities and cutting-edge technology, including a 15.6-inch rotating advanced multi-media screen, multi-colour ambient cabin lighting, a head-up display and adaptive cruise control. The HAN electric luxury

AWD sedan, with its impressive 509 HP, 0-100 km/h speed in 3.9 seconds, and 521 km range (based on standard test conditions), offered attendees a glimpse into the future of automotive luxury, boasting features like a panoramic sunroof, a 360-degree camera, luxury leather upholstery with seat ventilation and heater and automatic emergency braking. Another addition to the SUV line-up, the SONG PLUS electric plug-in hybrid SUV showcased versatility with its combination of 128 HP petrol and 201 HP electric motor, promising up to 1000 km of combined range (based on standard test conditions). With features like a lithium-ion phosphate battery, a 360-degree camera, and an integrated power braking system, the SONG PLUS

exemplifies BYD's commitment to innovation. BYD's Qin PLUS DM-i hybrid vehicle is equipped with the latest dual-mode system. Utilising the power of a hybrid, it delivers a combination of 108 HP petrol and 194 HP electric motor and reaches 0-100 km/h acceleration in 7.3 seconds. The system integrates engine, motor and power battery delivering key performance factors such as power, economy and NVH. Users can experience EV/HEV driving by switching between ECO/NORMAL/SPORT working modes. The 12V power battery provides electric energy for the motor with self-charge capability, delivering up to 1000 km combined range on a fully charged battery. In Oman, BYD vehicles are distributed by Saud Bahwan Group.

TCL launches world's largest QD-Mini LED TV in Oman

MUSCAT: TCL, the world's top two TV brand and top one 98-inch TV brand, has unveiled the world's largest 115" X955 MAX Premium QD-Mini LED TV in Oman. The launch took place at the Extra Oman Store in Muscat, marking a significant milestone in TCL's expansion within the region. The event was attended by officials from Genetco, TCL's exclusive distributor in Oman, and representatives from TCL. The event was graced by the presence of Fayez al Rushaidi, captain of the Oman national football team and Genetco's brand ambassador, who officially inaugurated the launch. Fans were thrilled as he signed autographs and interacted with attendees. Also present were distinguished guests including Dr Muthanna al Durrah, CEO of Genetco, Dr Ambuj Khare, COO of Genetco, Vic Shen, Business Head of the Dubai subsidiary of TCL, and Jitendra Kulkarni, regional sales director of Dubai subsidiary of TCL, among others. The event took place at Extra Ghubra, where Fadi Shbaro, the Country Head of Extra, and his team were also in attendance.

The TCL 115" X955 MAX Premium QD-Mini LED TV is a technological marvel, boasting a peak brightness of 5,000 nits, over 20,000 local dimming zones, QLED Pro technology, a 144 Hz VRR, and an ONKYO 6.2.2 Hi-Fi system. These

cutting-edge features come together to deliver an unrivalled cinematic experience with exceptional image quality and immersive sound. Dr Muthanna al Durrah, CEO of Genetco, expressed confidence that TCL's World's Largest QD-Mini LED TV will set a new benchmark in home entertainment. Attendees had the opportunity to witness the TV's impressive visuals and audio first-hand in an immersive experience zone. They were captivated by the vibrant colours, deep contrasts and immersive sound, which created a truly memorable viewing experience. Guests particularly noted the TV's remarkable clarity, depth of display and dynamic sound quality. "The overwhelmingly positive feedback we've received today is a testament to TCL's relentless pursuit of excellence. Our goal is to push technological boundaries and deliver products that not only meet but exceed our customers' expectations. The 115" X955 MAX Premium QD-Mini LED TV is a shining example of this commitment," said Vic Shen, Business Head of the Dubai subsidiary. This event highlights TCL's unwavering commitment to innovation, continuously striving to enhance customer experiences through its advanced technology and world-class products.



The TCL 115" X955 MAX Premium QD-Mini LED TV is a technological marvel, boasting a peak brightness of 5,000 nits, over 20,000 local dimming zones, QLED Pro technology, a 144 Hz VRR, and an ONKYO 6.2.2 Hi-Fi system.

Bank Muscat expands priority with new Asalah Centre

MUSCAT: In line with its strategic plan to enhance and expand its branch and centres network, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, inaugurated a new Asalah Priority Banking Centre and a service centre at the Bank's branch in Al Khuwair-33, in the Wilayat of Bausher, Muscat Governorate. The inauguration was under the auspices of Shaikh Mohammed bin Hamed bin Ali al Ghazali, along with several esteemed customers and members of the Bank's executive management team. The decision to open the new Asalah centre in Al Khuwair-33 was driven by the area's significant population growth and thriving commercial activity. The area has recently witnessed the launch of various commercial

projects and the development of public spaces, making it an ideal location for the new facility. The newly opened centre is a valuable addition to the Asalah centre network across branches, which spans across the Sultanate of Oman, now totalling 50 centres. Bank Muscat recently launched several new centres, including those at its branches in Al Mouj Street, Al Hail and Al Khoudh-6 in Muscat Governorate. Other centres have also been opened in the Wilayat of Sinaw, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, the wilayats of Izki and Adam, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The Asalah Centre at Al Khuwair-33 branch is equipped to offer priority banking customers a range of tailored solutions within a modern and comfortable environment. Dedicated Relationship Managers



The decision to open the new Asalah centre in Al Khuwair-33 was driven by the area's significant population growth and thriving commercial activity.

and experienced staff are on hand to provide personalised assistance, reflecting Bank Muscat's commitment to delivering exceptional customer

service and keeping pace with the latest developments in the banking sector. In addition to the Asalah Centre, the new service centre

within the branch offers a variety of banking services, including account opening and delivery of debit cards. The centre is outfitted with advanced technology to ensure quick and high-quality service, supported by a team of skilled employees. This expansion aligns with Bank Muscat's vision of continuously enhancing its customer service capabilities across its branches and service centres nationwide. On the occasion, Saleh bin Mohammed al Maaini, Deputy General Manager Capital Regions, Bank Muscat, expressed pride in the ongoing expansion of the Bank's Asalah Centres, stating: "The new centre in Al Khuwair-33 will serve a large segment of priority banking customers in the Wilayat of Bausher, providing a range of

services and facilities designed to meet their needs and aspirations. Bank Muscat is dedicated to strengthening its presence in key areas experiencing rapid commercial, economic and urban growth. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all our customers for their continued trust in our services across the Sultanate of Oman. We remain committed to delivering the best banking experience to our valued clients." Asalah Priority Banking Group offers many exclusive benefits to customers, including a large number of dedicated Relationship Managers located in various governorates, in addition to Asalah banking centres spread throughout the country dedicated to providing fast service and completing transactions.

In brief

■ WASHINGTON



US CLEAN ENERGY JOBS GROWTH RATE DOUBLE THAT OF OVERALL JOBS

Jobs in the US clean energy industry in 2023 grew at more than double the rate of the country's overall jobs, and unionisation in clean energy surpassed for the first time the rate in the wider energy industry, the Energy Department said on Wednesday.

Employment in clean energy businesses — including wind, solar, nuclear and battery storage — rose by 142,000 jobs, or 4.2 per cent last year, up from a rise of 3.9 per cent in 2022, the US Energy and Employment Report said. The rate was above the overall US job growth rate of 2 per cent in 2023. — **Reuters**

■ PARIS



FRENCH CONSUMER CONFIDENCE STRONGEST SINCE EARLY 2022

French consumer confidence improved in August to the highest point since the start of the war in Ukraine, survey results published by the statistical office INSEE showed.

The consumer confidence index rose to 92 in August, in line with forecasts, from 91 in July. This was the highest since February 2022. Nonetheless, the score remained below its long-term average.

The survey showed that households were less negative about future and past standards of living. The balance of opinion corresponding to past trends gained four points to hit -68. — **dpa**

■ BERLIN



USE OF AI IN GERMAN BUSINESSES STAGNATING, SURVEY SUGGESTS

The uptake of artificial intelligence (AI) in the German economy has stagnated, a survey suggested on Wednesday, despite the widespread excitement generated by new tools such as ChatGPT.

The survey was conducted for the Economy Ministry by the Leibniz Centre for European Economic Research (ZEW).

Christian Rammer, the lead author, said the findings were “surprising” as AI has become a defining technological trend in recent years.

Germany does rank well ahead of the European Union average (8 per cent), but lags pioneering countries such as Denmark, Finland, Belgium and the Netherlands. — **dpa**

Markets await US federal reserve clarity



Four thousand US dollars are counted out by a banker at a bank in Westminster. — Reuters

earnings results from AI chip giant Nvidia, whose recent performance has captivated Wall Street. The dollar's sensitivity to equity market movements has been particularly evident this year.

Speculation is growing that the Federal Reserve will begin cutting interest rates next month, following a dovish signal from Chair Jerome Powell last week. The key question now is whether the cut will be a substantial

50-basis-point reduction.

According to the CME Group's FedWatch Tool, the probability of a larger rate cut has increased to 35 per cent, up from 29 per cent a week ago. Markets currently expect more than 100 basis points of easing by the end of the year.

Later this week, a preliminary estimate of US gross domestic product (GDP) for the second quarter is expected, alongside the core personal consumption expenditures (PCE) index, which

the Federal Reserve uses as its primary inflation gauge.

However, as the focus shifts from inflation to the broader economic outlook, the significance of this week's PCE data is “debatable,” according to Matt Simpson, senior market analyst at City Index. “Only a strong upside surprise could alter the prevailing expectation of multiple Fed rate cuts.”

Given that markets have been anticipating rate cuts

from September onwards, the downward pressure on the dollar appears to be diminishing, with key support levels forming around 100.18/30, Simpson added.

As the dollar stabilised on Wednesday, the British pound slipped 0.3 per cent to \$1.3216, after reaching its highest level since March 2022 at \$1.3269 on Tuesday. Traders are betting that the Bank of England will take a more cautious approach to monetary easing compared to the Federal Reserve. The euro also fell 0.5 per cent to \$1.11295, remaining close to a 13-month high reached earlier in the week. Investors are awaiting euro zone inflation data for August, which could offer insights into the European Central Bank's future policy moves.

Japan's yen continued to ease off Monday's three-week high of 143.45 against the dollar, trading 0.2 per cent lower at 144.30 per dollar.

The Australian dollar touched an eight-month high after data showed that domestic inflation slowed to a four-month low in July. However, the overall progress in controlling price increases was disappointing, and the currency slipped slightly to \$0.6787. In the cryptocurrency market, bitcoin fell 3.1 per cent to \$59,954 after an earlier drop of over 6 per cent, marking a one-week low. — **Reuters**

Traders eye chip giant Nvidia earnings

PARIS: European and Asian stock markets mostly rose on Wednesday as investors eagerly awaited the latest earnings results from US chip giant Nvidia, a bellwether for the tech sector.

Traders are also anticipating key US economic data due later this week, which could provide clues about the magnitude of an expected interest rate cut next month. However, all eyes are on Nvidia's second-quarter results, set to be released after US markets close on Wednesday.

“The expectations for Nvidia's Q2 results are sky-high,” said Swissquote Bank analyst Ipek Ozkardeskaya. London's FTSE 100 index was down in early afternoon trading, but Paris and Frankfurt markets were up. In Asia, Tokyo finished higher while Hong Kong saw a decline.

Ozkardeskaya highlighted Nvidia's significant impact on the broad-based S&P 500 index, noting that it has accounted for a third of the index's gains this year. “So the company's earnings announcement day is naturally a big day for the market,” she said.

The market expects Nvidia

to post sales between \$27 billion and \$32 billion, more than doubling from a year ago, Ozkardeskaya added. However, analysts have also cautioned that markets could face turbulence if Nvidia misses these forecasts.

“This is the one that could either lift all boats or sink the entire fleet,” said analyst Stephen Innes in his “Dark Side Of The Boom” newsletter. “Nvidia's influence is undeniable, making it nearly impossible to take your eyes off it.” Nvidia has seen its profits soar due to high demand for its powerful GPU chips, which have driven advancements in artificial intelligence. This success has pushed its market valuation beyond the \$3 trillion mark.

Investors are also awaiting the release of US economic growth data on Thursday, along with the Federal Reserve's preferred gauge of inflation on Friday, followed by jobs figures next week. Last week, Fed Chair Jerome Powell indicated that the central bank is prepared to cut rates, which were previously raised to a 23-year high in an effort to combat inflation. — **AFP**



A worker checks pipes and valves at Amaal oil field in eastern Libya. — Reuters File

BENGHAZI: Libya's oilfield closures escalated on Wednesday as the Sarir field almost completely halted output, two field engineers said as a result of a political dispute over control of the central bank and oil revenue.

Authorities in the east, home to most of Libya's oilfields, said on Monday that all production and exports would be halted, though some ports under eastern control operated normally on Wednesday.

Sarir was producing about 209,000 barrels per day (bpd) before output was reduced, the engineers said.

Force majeure had already been announced earlier this month on exports at the 300,000 bpd Sharara oilfield and this week Reuters has reported disruptions at El Feel, Amal, Nafoora and Abu Attifel.

Rapidan Energy Group estimated production disruptions of between 900,000 and 1 million bpd for several weeks.

Analysts, however, said even that might not drive up oil prices. Benchmark Brent oil prices were down about 1.6 per cent to \$78.28 per barrel as of 1440 GMT.

Despite the scale and length, “I'm not sure it's enough to break through this over-powering macro bearish sentiment that continues to shape the market,” Rapidan's Geopolitical Risk Service Director Fernando Ferreira said.

In July, Libya, a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, was producing about 1.18 million barrels of oil per day.

Ports in the country's hydrocarbon-rich Oil Crescent operated normally on Wednesday and had not received orders to halt exports, five engineers said.

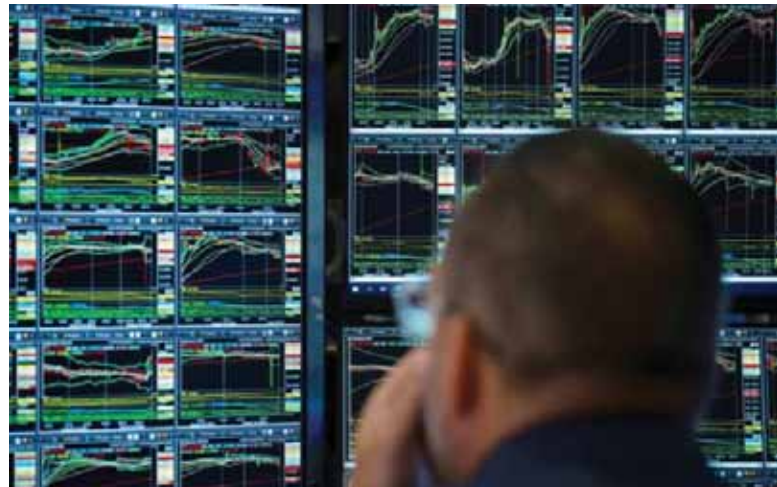
Four vessels were at ports in the central region to load 600,000 barrels each, they said - two at Es Sidra, one at Brega and one at

Zueitina.

The efforts to shut off Libya's main source of revenue are in response to the Tripoli-based Presidency Council's sacking Central Bank of Libya (CBL) chief Sadiq al-Kabir earlier this month, prompting rival armed factions to mobilise.

Prime Minister Abdulhamid al Dbeibah, installed through a UN-backed process in 2021 and head of the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity, repeated on Wednesday's previous comment that oilfields should not be allowed to be shut “under flimsy pretexts” and said it was necessary to hold accountable those responsible for shutting oilfields.

On Tuesday, US Africa Command General Michael Langley and Chargé d'Affaires Jeremy Berndt met Khalifa Haftar, the head of a force called the Libyan National Army that controls the country's east and south. — **Reuters**



Traders are biding their time ahead of the release of key figures, including Nvidia's earnings and US economic data. — Reuters

Measures necessary to alleviate poverty inflicted by human actions



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

Many countries around the world suffer from poverty inflicted by human actions, despite the earth being abundant with resources, blessings, and goodness bestowed by the Creator for all humanity. The Gulf region, in particular, is blessed with wealth represented by energy resources such as oil, gas, and minerals, as well as water resources, seas, and other blessings. Additionally, the region benefits from sovereign funds and similar institutions. Therefore, poverty should not exist in the region, and with

sound economic, financial, and social planning, people can live with dignity, prosperity and abundance without needing to rely on others for their livelihood. The Gulf region is not a place where people should live on less than \$2.15 a day, as is the case in some of the world's poorest countries—this notion is unrealistic given the substantial income of Gulf nations. However, according to a recent report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), poverty does exist in several Gulf countries, affecting more than 6 per cent of the

population. This equates to 3.3 million Gulf citizens living in poverty out of a total population of around 54 million in 2023. Additionally, there are no fewer than 6 million Gulf citizens seeking employment, while over 25 million foreign workers compete for jobs, often pushing locals toward poverty. ESCWA's data indicates that, although poverty rates in the GCC countries have declined since 2010, there is a need to develop policies that can further reduce poverty in the region. The report highlights several key factors contributing to poverty, including inequality,

where certain groups enjoy fewer rights and access to resources than others. Conflicts often exacerbate poverty by destroying economies, while hunger and malnutrition hinder people's ability to work, leading them into debt. Inadequate healthcare systems further drive poverty by draining people's wealth in pursuit of treatment. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive plans and policies to tackle the root causes of poverty, including the provision of social, health, and educational support. It is also essential to have emergency plans in place to address crises caused

by climate change, which can lead to poverty when people lose their properties. According to the World Bank, the climate crisis could push more than 130 million people into poverty by 2030. The ESCWA report not only highlights these critical figures but also urges GCC countries to implement measures to reduce poverty. These include financial reforms to diversify revenue bases, improve targeting in social protection plans, reform land allocation and public procurement policies, and invest in the skills of Gulf citizens.

Durov ordered to French court to face possible charges

PARIS: Pavel Durov, the founder and chief of Telegram, was to appear in a French court Wednesday to face possible charges of failing to curb extremist and illegal content on the popular messaging app after his arrest at the weekend. Russian-born Durov, 39, was arrested at Le Bourget airport outside Paris late Saturday. After almost four days of questioning in detention by French investigators he was handed over to judicial authorities who will decide further measures, a source close to the case said. A Paris investigating magistrate will decide whether to press charges against Durov, and the judiciary would then rule on whether he will be remanded in custody or allowed to go free, possibly under judicial control with restrictions on his movements. As part of a probe that was confidentially opened on July 8, Durov is being investigated on suspicion of 12 offences related to failing to curb extremist and criminal content on Telegram, sources close to the investigation have said. The tech mogul founded Telegram as he was in the process of quitting his native Russia a decade ago. Its growth has been exponential, with the app now reporting over 900 million users. An enigmatic figure who rarely speaks in public, Durov is a citizen of Russia, France and the United Arab Emirates, where Telegram is based. Forbes magazine estimates his current fortune at \$15.5 billion, though he proudly promotes the virtues of an ascetic life that includes ice baths and not drinking alcohol or coffee. Numerous questions have been raised about the timing and circumstances of Durov's detention, with supporters seeing him as a freedom of speech champion and detractors as a menace who wilfully allowed Telegram to get out of control. Le Monde newspaper reported Wednesday that Durov had met French President



Emmanuel Macron on several occasions prior to receiving French nationality in 2021, via a special procedure reserved for those deemed to have made a special contribution to France. The Wall Street Journal added that at one lunch in 2018, Macron — who along with his team was in the past an avid user of Telegram — had suggested it should be headquartered in Paris, but Durov refused. The Canard Enchaîné weekly newspaper said that when he was arrested Durov had claimed he was in Paris to dine with Macron, which the Elysee denied. In a post on X to address what he called “false information” concerning the case, Macron said Durov's arrest was “in no way a political decision” and it was “up to the judges to rule”. In Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the charges were very serious and thus needed “no less serious evidence”. “Otherwise this would be a direct attempt to restrict freedom of communication, and, I might even say, directly intimidate the head of a large company,” he said. The UAE meanwhile said it was “closely following the case” and had requested consular access for him. Among those voicing support for Durov is fellow tech tycoon and chief executive of X, Elon Musk, who has posted comments under the hashtag #FreePavel. Durov left Russia a decade ago as he was setting up Telegram amid an ownership squabble concerning his first project, the Russian social network VKontakte. — **Reuters**

Eastern Germany’s economic success leaves voters cold



RENE WAGNER
The author is a senior correspondent at Reuters



MARIA MARTINEZ
The author is a Reuters correspondent in Berlin covering German economics and the ministry of finance



the west, and workers in the east have seen bigger wage increases. Yet that is not how voters see it. “The economy in Thuringia is pretty weak, particularly in Eisenach,” said Louis Huettig, a 20-year-old student, in the market square of Eisenach, while he waited for a party event of the populist party Buendnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW), that combines social conservatism with left-wing economics. Economists say the narrative of the formerly communist-run eastern Germany as a perennial poor relative even decades after reunification is just no longer true. “This old story that eastern Germany is economically much worse off than West Germany is to a significant extent outdated,” says Berenberg's chief economist Holger Schmieding. Why then are mainstream parties and the central government in Berlin struggling to change people's perceptions? Not for want of trying. Politicians from established parties have in recent years been touting the progress the region has made, highlighting upgrades to its public infrastructure and speaking of its “industrial revival” driven by hi-tech investments. One reason such message falls flat is that the income and wealth gap between the west and the east may have narrowed but is not gone yet, and progress is a harder sell when the neighbour is still better off. Economists note how average monthly wages have risen between 2014 and 2022 735 euros in the east compared with 585 euros in the west, and how lower costs of living were bringing real incomes even closer. However, eastern workers' median gross pay of 3,013 euros per month, remains below the 3,655 euros workers in the west get. “The wages are still far too low compared to wages in the West for the same work,” Dieter Laudenbach, candidate of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) for the district of Gera, said. Unemployment in eastern Germany also remains higher at 7.8 per cent compared with 5.1 per cent in the west, even though it has fallen 1.7 percentage points since 2013, while the western jobless rate ticked up 0.2 points, IW data show. The gap in accumulated wealth also remains, with 98 per cent of all inheritance tax paid in the west, according to the DIW economic institute. Another factor is Berlin's green policies that make the unpopular coalition government even less popular in the east. Eastern Germany is more rural than the rest of the country with over 10 per cent of its labour force active in agriculture and forestry compared with national average of 1.2 per cent and the push for clean energy is seen as a threat to the farming sector.

LEFT BEHIND Possibly the biggest source of pessimism is the post-reunification migration from east to west that has fuelled the sense of abandonment for those who stayed behind, president of the DIW economic institute Marcel Fratzscher said. “The most important explanation for the strength of AfD and BSW in East Germany is demographics,” he said. Western urban centres such as Hamburg, Munich, Frankfurt or Cologne, despite their own problems, such as soaring rents, continue to attract the young and educated, with dire consequences for critical public services. “Where young, well-qualified people migrate, schools and hospitals close, and the vote share for AfD and BSW is much higher,” Fratzscher said. Nina Kuessau, 28, who works as a consultant in development, says that is why she left Thuringia and moved to Cologne. “There are too few teachers at schools, problems with doctors,” she said. “I think a lot of people worry that they won't be looked after and they get the feeling that they've just been left behind.” Peter Pichl, 43, who works for AfD in Gera, said the state government should offer incentives for young professionals to stay for at least five years after graduation. “A lot of young people are leaving because there are no prospects here,” he said. While the population in western Germany grew 10 per cent to 68 million between 1990 and 2022, it shrank by 15 per cent in the east to 12.6 million, according to the federal statistics office. The population in the East has also aged faster: while the share of those under 20 declined from 21 per cent to 19 per cent between 1990 and 2022, in the east it plunged from 25 per cent to 18 per cent. Immigration is another hot-button issue - named as the number one concern by voters in Saxony and Thuringia in a recent survey. — **Reuters**

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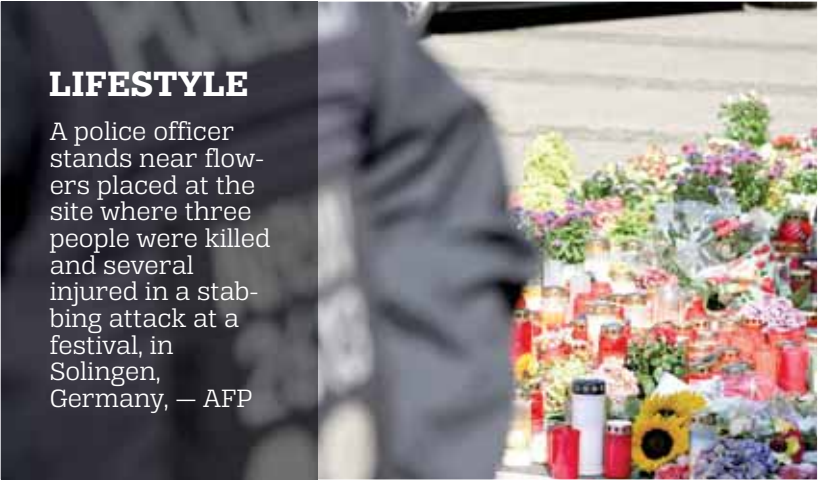
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LIFESTYLE

A police officer stands near flow-ers placed at the site where three people were killed and several injured in a stab-bing attack at a festival, in Solingen, Germany, — AFP



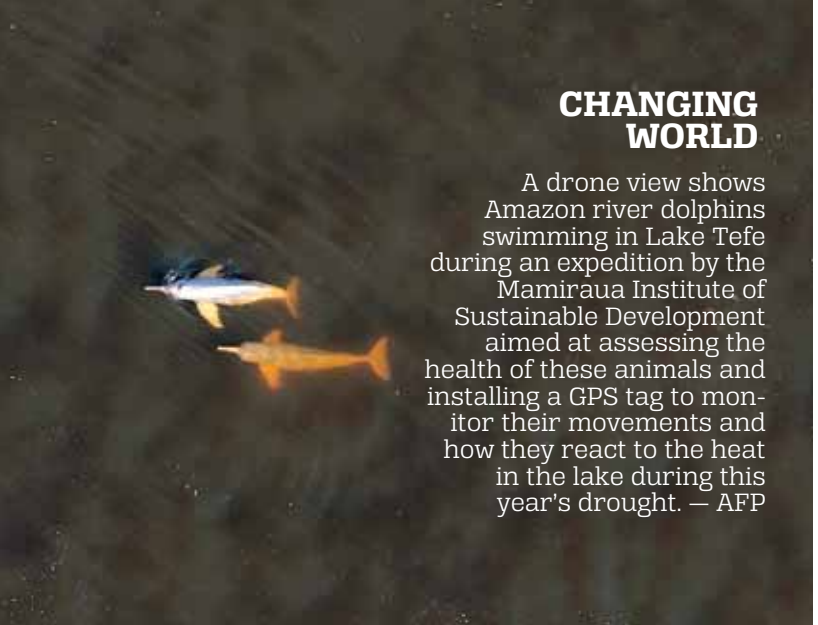
FOOD SCENE

Austrian chef Peter Lammer poses for a photo in his kitchen at the restaurant "Johanneskeller im Priesterhaus" in Salzburg, Austria. — AFP



MUSIC

James Murphy of US band LCD Soundsystem per-forms on stage during the 20th edition of the Rock en Seine music festival in Saint-Cloud, outside Paris. — AFP



CHANGING WORLD

A drone view shows Amazon river dolphins swimming in Lake Tefe during an expedition by the Mamiraua Institute of Sustainable Development aimed at assessing the health of these animals and installing a GPS tag to mon-itor their movements and how they react to the heat in the lake during this year's drought. — AFP

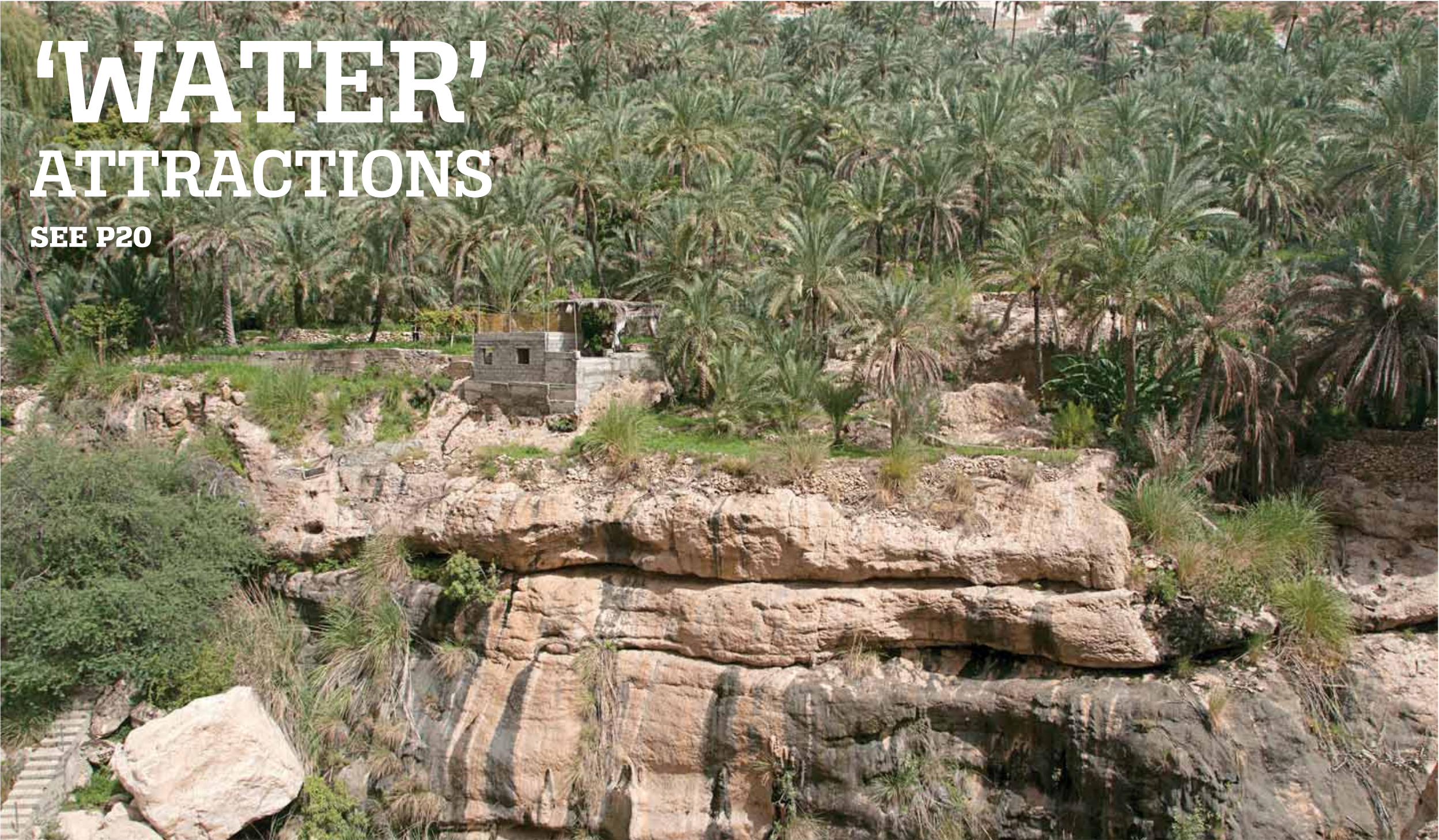


CULTURE

This pool photo taken and released by Agence Kampuchea Presse (AKP) shows Khmer artefacts returned from the United States during a repa-triation ceremony at the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh. —AFP

art & life

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BOOK FEST

Organisers 'thrilled' about Edinburgh International Book Festival

ORGANISERS HAVE SAID they are "absolutely thrilled" at the success of the Edinburgh International Book Festival which drew more than 100,000 visits this month. Writers Margaret Atwood, Richard Osman, Salman Rushdie, Philippa Gregory and Marian Keyes were among those who took part in the event which ended on Sunday, August 25. Figures from across the political spec-

trum also appeared, including Scotland's First Minister John Swinney, Home Office Minister Jess Phillips, former Green member of parliament (MP) Caroline Lucas, Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham and London Mayor Sadiq Khan. More than 100,000 visits were made to the festival's new home at the newly opened Edinburgh Futures Institute, with ticket and book sales significantly up on previous years, organisers said. There were almost 600 events and more than 200 of them sold to 90 per cent capacity or more. Jenny Niven, director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival, said: "We are absolutely thrilled with the success of the Book Festival this year. "Audiences have voted with their feet and we've seen full houses and brilliant, engaged crowds. "Debate and discussion have been relished by audiences and authors alike proving the Festival is a truly important space for people to be inspired and come together. "Edinburgh Futures Institute as a Book Festival venue has been terrific and we're already looking at the ways we can build on what we've created for next year. "We're looking forward to beginning



conversations in the Autumn with everyone who will be part of our story in our next glorious edition." During the festival audiences from 55 countries joined online for pay what you can events.

Over the course of the event, more than 4,500 school children from P1 to S6 were transported to the festival, to attend free events and claim their own free book, supported by the final instalment of Baillie Gifford's funding.

Also during August authors including Andrew O'Hagan, Amy Liptrot, Jenni Fagan and Joseph Coelho attended schools, prisons and local reading centres as part of the book festival's year-round communities programme. Jamie Crawford, incoming chairman of the Edinburgh International Book Festival Board, said: "For the past two weeks, the excitement at this new chapter in the story of the book festival, from authors, staff and audiences, has been palpable. "The new space at the Futures Institute has opened up a long-dormant part of the city, and it has clearly demonstrated its value and its huge potential for the future. "As for right now, it is crucial to reflect on the great success of this year's festival to underline the critical importance of literary culture to Edinburgh and Scotland. "It is in everyone's interests to support it and to see it thrive." The 2024 Edinburgh International Book Festival ran from August 10-25, and took place at the Edinburgh Futures Institute on Lauriston Place, with this made possible by a partnership with Edinburgh University. The book festival also worked with Underbelly at the McEwan Hall to bring audiences the Front List strand of major events. — PA Media/dpa

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



BUENOS AIRES 'TAXI DANCERS' GLIDE TOURISTS THROUGH DAUNTING TANGO SCENE

FOR MANY PEOPLE, dancing the tango while on a visit to Buenos Aires is on the bucket list. The only problem: the steps are tricky to learn and venturing unversed onto a "milonga" dance floor can be a brutal experience.

Enter the Argentine capital's "taxi dancers" -- professionals who accompany novice dancers for a night out on the town.

Without insider help, the experience can be "intimidating," taxi dancer David Tolosa, 35, said.

"The dance floor... is like a show-case. People are constantly watching you. There are many dancers, well-known dancers, who are sitting and watching the floor... You feel observed, you feel that pressure."

Experienced dancers can be impatient and "a little cruel" to outsiders new to the scene, said Tolosa, adding that the unschooled

might get elbowed out of the way or have their toes stepped on.

For women who are by themselves, it can be a frustrating experience, having to wait -- as is the custom -- for a dance invitation that may never come.

"Women prefer to hire me... because they can spend hours sitting" and waiting if they do not have a guaranteed partner, said Tolosa.

His clients are almost exclusively foreigners, "mostly women, mainly Asian, Japanese, Chinese, but also French and British" who pay about \$50 per hour.

His busiest time is August when Buenos Aires hosts an annual Tango Festival.

Even outside of the festival, regular "milongas" -- social events where people gather to dance tango -- are held year-round across the city.

LEARN BY PRACTICING

Most taxi dancers like Tolosa work independently, but the capital is also home to agencies such as TangoTaxiDancers, with 17 years of experience.

It offers private lessons but also accompanied dance outings, promising on its website: "Do not sit and wait -- dance and enjoy."

Just knowing the steps is not enough to enjoy a tango night out, say those in the know.

For this, you also need to know the art of "cabeceo," a non-verbal invitation to dance using just a head movement.

"There are certain codes in tango, such as how to... ask someone to dance," explained taxi dancer and teacher Laura Florencia Guardia, 28.



"There are still some traditional aspects, such as inviting someone to dance with a look from one table to another... People also need to learn this. That's why it's good for them to hire dancers to show them this world."

Guardia skilfully avoided the feet of Salvador Bolanos, a Mexican tango enthusiast attending one of her lessons, boasting laughingly that she had "never had a client step on my toes!"

Bolanos, a 37-year-old systems engineer, said he was in Buenos Aires to "learn about the music, in particular. I am learning about tango: the culture, the composition."

He said he enjoyed the "melancholy of the tango, but at the same time the strength it has."

Tango tourists get something from "taxi dancers" that they might otherwise miss: real-world experience in a traditional setting said Guardia.

"At first they are shy, then they gain courage," she said.

"You learn by practicing." -- AFP

MUSIC



Oasis announce 2025 worldwide reunion tour kicking off in UK

BRITISH ROCK LEGENDS Oasis announced on Tuesday they will reunite for a worldwide tour, as brothers Liam and Noel Gallagher ended an infamous 15-year feud.

The band behind hit songs including "Wonderwall", "Don't Look Back In Anger" and "Champagne Supernova", will play an initial 14 gigs next year in Cardiff, Manchester, London, Edinburgh and the Irish capital, Dublin, starting in July.

Oasis also plans to play in "continents outside of Europe later next year," according to a statement posted on their website.

Formed in Manchester, north-west England, in 1991 and credited with helping create the Britpop era of that decade, Oasis' reunion tour will be the Gallagher brothers' first performances since 2009 after they fell out.

"The guns have fallen silent. The stars have aligned. The great wait is over. Come see. It will not be televised," Oasis said, as it announced the reunion alongside the first details of the tour.

The announcement capped days of hints and heightened speculation the band was set to play again.

However, there was no announcement regarding the release of any new music, while Oasis will reportedly not play next year's Glastonbury festival despite widespread speculation.

"Oasis today end years of feverish speculation with the confirmation of a long-awaited run of UK and Ireland shows forming the domestic leg of their Oasis Live '25 world tour," the online statement added.

HOTTEST TICKETS

The tour will begin over two nights at the Principality Stadium in the Welsh capital Cardiff on July 4, 2025, followed a week later by four gigs at Heaton Park in their hometown, Manchester.

Oasis will then play London's Wembley Stadium -- on July 25 and 26 as well as August 2 and 3 -- before taking to the stage over two nights at Murrayfield Stadium in the Scottish capital Edinburgh.

The UK and Ireland gigs will conclude with two performances at Dublin's Croke Park in mid-August.

"Their only shows in Europe next year, this will be one of the biggest live moments and hottest tickets of the decade," the statement said. A press release said there had been "no great revelatory moment that has ignited the reunion -- just the gradual realisation that the time is right".

It promised "a set full of wall-to-wall classics," hailing the "charisma, spark and intensity that only comes when Liam and Noel Gallagher are on-stage together".

Tickets for the UK dates will go on sale from 9:00 am (0800 GMT) on Saturday, with Dublin tickets available from 8 am (0700 GMT) the same day.

Social media was abuzz with the news, with the band's post racking up hundreds of thousands of likes and fans sharing their excitement.

Manchester teaching assistant Michelle Locke, 45, said she was "well excited" after hearing the "great news".

"We'll be up early... trying to get tickets," she said, posing in front of a mural to the Gallaghers in south Manchester.

BEST NEWS

In Camden, the north London neighbourhood famous for live music and where Oasis were fixtures in the mid-'90s, others were equally enthused.

"It's the best news in the world... it's what we need!" said Pauline Weir, 50, manager of the Modfather clothing store.

Oasis has long been synonymous with Britpop music when it enjoyed a fierce rivalry with London band Blur, co-founded by Damon Albarn.

The Manchester outfit was also notorious for public fights between Liam and Noel.

The sibling tensions came to a head during a spat at a 2009 Paris festival when Liam broke one of Noel's guitars.

The brothers have not played together since -- but both have still regularly played the band's hits to sold-out crowds.

Until now, they had largely communicated in public through taking swipes at each other on social media.

The brothers have teased at a reconciliation before, with Noel last year saying "Never say never".

The hints became firmer more recently, with social media accounts for the brothers and Oasis all trailing Tuesday's much-anticipated announcement.

The now-confirmed reunion will take place 30 years after Oasis's 1995 album "(What's the Story) Morning Glory?", which received international critical and commercial acclaim.

Meanwhile, tracks from the first recording session for its debut album "Definitely Maybe", released a year earlier, will be put out on Friday -- a day after its 30th birthday -- Britain's Press Association (PA) news agency said. -- AFP

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WADIS FORM A UNIQUE ECOSYSTEM CHARACTERISED BY MULTIPLICITY, DIVERSITY AND NATURAL RICHNESS. THERE ARE MANY RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES AND FARMS ON THE BANKS OF THESE WADIS THAT CONTRIBUTE IN SUPPORTING LOCAL MARKETS WITH UNIQUE TYPES OF FOOD PRODUCTS



As the number of tourists to these natural sites increases, the demand for developing and improving services that directly contribute to enhancing the level of eco-tourism is also increasing. Tourist guides hope to expedite the implementation of these services, which have become a necessity, especially since the tourist season for the northern regions of Oman has started early this year.

