

Students can modify ‘choice’

The Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC), on Tuesday, opens the door for the modification of applications for the students registered in the system who made a wrong choice in the first application. The service will be available until next Thursday. It does not matter whether or not the student obtained seats in the first sorting. **DETAILS ON P2**

SUNRISE - 05:49 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:33 AM

DHUHR - 12:11 PM

ASR - 03:39 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:28 PM

ISHA - 07:40 PM



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P13

MIDDLE EASTERN
AIRLINES SEE
5.8% INCREASE IN
DEMAND



P12

EMMA NAVARRO
BEATS GAUFF,
JOINS EXIT OF
SUPERSTARS



P20

A SHOWCASE
OF OMANI
TALENTS IN A
UK EXHIBITION



MUSCAT

OMAN, BULGARIA
REVIEW RELATIONS

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Monday, had a phone call with Ivan Kondov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria. During the conversation, the ministers discussed bilateral relations and means of expanding cooperation between the two friendly countries. They expressed a common desire to develop their mutual gains diplomatically, economically, culturally and in the fields of energy and transport. They exchanged views on regional and international developments and agreed to continue consultation and cooperation in this respect, either through bilateral communication or multilateral meetings. The two ministers also pledged to support efforts to ease the ongoing escalation and establish peace and stability.

CRUDE PRICE AT
\$76.41 A BARREL

Oman oil price for November delivery, on Monday, reached \$76.41, marking a drop of \$2.09. The average price of Oman oil for September delivery stabilised at \$83.85 per barrel, which is \$1.35 per barrel higher than the August delivery. Oil prices were little changed after falling in recent days. Brent crude held steady at \$76.91 a barrel, down more than 5 per cent from a week earlier. The firmer dollar, combined with higher bond yields, pressured gold prices to \$2,497 an ounce, short of its recent all-time high of \$2,531.60.

Royal Decrees ratify agreements with Tunisia, Tanzania

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, on Monday, issued two Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 34/2024 ratifies an agreement signed in Tunis on June 28, 2024 by the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government

of the Republic of Tunisia on air services between their territories and beyond.

Article (1) stipulates that the aforementioned agreement shall be ratified in accordance with the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) states that this Decree shall

be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 35/2024 ratifies the agreement on air services between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, signed in Dar es

Salaam on July 16, 2024.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) states that this Royal Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

EXPLORE SALALAH’S EXTENDED KHAREEF SEASON



For those who are yet to explore the Wilayat of Salalah, there is still a unique opportunity to experience the magic of the khareef season. Many visitors have returned home with the start of the new school semester, while the season is far from over. Thanks to the foresight of the Dhofar Municipality, the khareef season has been officially extended by an extra month. This extension, coupled with the daily morning and evening drizzles, offers an ideal window for those looking to visit Salalah now. **DETAILS ON P3**

Israeli fire kills
dozens in Gaza

BIDEN ACKNOWLEDGES NETANYAHU
UNDERMINING CEASEFIRE EFFORTS

CAIRO: Israeli forces killed at least 48 Palestinians in the past 24 hours across the Gaza Strip, Palestinian officials said, on Monday, while medics conducted a second day of polio vaccinations for children in the enclave.

Palestinian and UN officials said more than 80,000 children were vaccinated in central areas of Gaza on Sunday, the first day of the campaign.

Hamas and Israel have agreed to brief pauses in fighting to allow the campaign to vaccinate some 640,000 children to go ahead. No violations have been reported near vaccination facilities.

Seven Palestinians were killed in two Israeli air strikes on Gaza City, Palestinian officials said on Monday, while two air strikes killed six others in Bureij and Nuseirat, two of the Gaza Strip’s eight historic refugee camps.

UNRWA, the UN Palestinian refugee agency, repeated its call on Monday for an immediate ceasefire to help ensure a successful and safe polio vaccination campaign.

“On first day only, @UNRWA teams and partners reached around 87,000 children according to @WHO. Efforts are ongoing to provide children with this key vaccine, but what they need most is a #CeasefireNow,” it said on the X social media platform.

Parents continued bringing their infants to be vaccinated at medical facilities on Monday. The World Health Organization (WHO) says a drop in routine vaccinations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including Gaza, has contributed to the re-emergence of polio in the area.

FINAL PROPOSAL

Meanwhile, senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri, responding to US President Joe Biden’s comments that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was not doing enough for a Gaza ceasefire, said on Monday that this was a US acknowledgement that Netanyahu was undermining efforts.

Zuhri added that any proposal for a permanent ceasefire and complete Israeli withdrawal will be received positively.

Biden said on Monday he was close to presenting a final proposal for a deal to release captives held by Hamas in Gaza and said he did not think Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was doing enough to secure such an agreement. Biden was speaking to reporters at the White House after Israeli forces over the weekend recovered the bodies of six captives, including 23-year-old American Israeli Hersh Goldberg-Polin, from a tunnel in Gaza. — Agencies



A displaced Palestinian mother carries her daughter as she waits to get her vaccinated against polio, in Deir Al Balah, in the central Gaza Strip. — Reuters

Japan’s summer was joint hottest on record

TOKYO: Japan suffered its joint warmest summer this year since records began, equalling the level seen in 2023, data from the weather office showed on Monday. Climate scientists have already predicted that 2024 will be the hottest year on record for the Earth due to a warming planet.

Japan’s long-term average temperature between June and August was 1.76 degrees Celsius above the standard value, the joint highest since statistics began being kept in 1898, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency.

This July was already the hottest in Japan since records began, with temperatures across the archipelago 2.16°C higher than average. In central Tokyo alone, 123 people died of heatstroke in July, when extreme heatwaves saw a record number of ambulances mobilised in the capital, according to local authorities.

Southern Japan was also hit by a major typhoon last week, one of the strongest to affect the archipelago of 125 million people in decades. Typhoon Shanshan killed at least six people, including three family members in a landslide, and brought record rainfall to many areas.

Typhoons in the region have been forming closer to coastlines, intensifying more rapidly, and lasting longer over land due to climate change, according to a study released in July. A rapid attribution analysis by Imperial College London, using peer-reviewed methodology, calculated that Typhoon Shanshan’s winds were 26 per cent more likely due to a warming



Pedestrians shelter from the sun as the summer heat returns across the country, in the Ginza area of Tokyo.

planet. A Japanese weather agency official cited the unusual movement of westerly winds above Japan this year, which “made it easier for the archipelago to be shrouded in warm air from the south”.

“Also at play is the long-term effect of global warming, which is pushing up average temperatures,” said weather agency official Kaoru Takahashi.

Scientists say that fossil fuel emissions are worsening the length, frequency, and intensity of heatwaves across the world. From January to July, global temperatures were 0.7°C above the 1991-2020 average, according to the European Union’s Copernicus Climate Change Service.

Record temperatures have been observed in the Mediterranean Sea, Norway’s Arctic Svalbard archipelago, and the Ukrainian capital Kyiv in the past few weeks alone. Australia registered a record-high winter temperature last month, with the mercury hitting 41.6°C in part of its rugged and remote northwest coast.

In Europe, Greece has experienced 50 per cent more summer wildfires this year than in 2023, as well as its earliest heatwave and warmest winter on record. The rising temperatures are leading to longer wildfire seasons and increasing the area burnt, according to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. — AFP

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 32°C Min 28°C

SALALAH: Max 30°C Min 24°C

NIZWA: Max 38°C Min 26°C



TWO DIE, ONE CRITICALLY INJURED IN SEEB HOUSE FIRE

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 2

Two persons died and one was critically injured after a fire broke out in a house in the Wilayat of Seeb.

The firefighting teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department Authority (CDAA) rushed to the site to bring the situation.

According to CDAA, 1,539

residential fire incidents were reported in 2023, up 14.4 per cent from 1,345 in 2022.

CDAA said residential fires account for a significant part of the emergencies that the authority's firefighting teams respond to. 'Homes are filled with potential fire hazards due to the presence of electrical appliances, cooking gas and other flammable materials.

Without strict adherence to



The firefighting teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department Authority rushed to the site to bring the situation

safety measures, these elements can easily lead to devastating fires.' Some of the most common causes of fires in residential facilities include not closing the gas cylinder after cooking or when leaving the house. 'This simple oversight can result in gas leaks, which are a major fire risk.

Overloading electrical sockets is a common practice as it can cause short circuits and fires.

Leaving electrical appliances on

for extended periods can result in overheating and subsequent fires.

'Regular maintenance of electrical appliances and tools is crucial, yet often neglected. Without proper upkeep, these items can malfunction and start a fire.

Furthermore, having electrical connections installed and maintained by unqualified individuals increases the risk of faulty wiring and electrical fires.

GCC meeting focuses on cooperation in civil service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour participated in the 27th meeting of the Committee of Under-Secretaries of Civil Service and Administrative Development Agencies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The event was held in Doha, in preparation for the 20th meeting of the Committee of Civil Service Ministers, scheduled for September 3, 2024. The Ministry was represented at the meeting by Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development.



Students can modify 'wrong choice' for college seats from today

GHALIA AL DHAKHIRIYA
MUSCAT, SEPT 2

The Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC), on Monday, opens the door for modifications to applications from students registered in the system who made an incorrect choice in their initial application. This service will be available until next Thursday.

It does not matter whether or not the student obtained a seat in the first sorting, provided that the student has not completed the registration procedures for external missions or received a travel package. To avail themselves of the service, students should have obtained a competitive rate higher than or equal to the last accepted student, on the condition that a vacancy is



The student can register an unlimited number of study programmes after meeting service controls

available.

Students who were accepted for a programme will be required to withdraw from the seat they obtained in the first sorting and must commit to completing the registration procedures on the dates specified later.

The HEAC explained that students can access the service

by logging onto the HEAC website, selecting the 'Assisting Admission Services,' and submitting an application to correct their choice.

Upon entering the page, the system will display the programmes available to apply for in accordance with the service controls.

Availability of fish reduced due to storm warning

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The volume of fish arriving at the central fish market in Muttrah has decreased over the past two days due to the Asna storm warning. Fishermen were advised to avoid the deep sea due to the prevailing storm threat, limiting their catch to near-shore areas.

"Fish arrivals at the market have dropped in the last few days after the warning to stay close to shore. We are now catching our livelihood just one nautical mile from the coast," Ahmed al Hasani, a fisherman, told the Observer.

While mackerel was available, tuna and other more expensive varieties were scarce, with prawns being abundant thanks to the ongoing prawn season from September 1 to November this year.

"There are over two thousand people relying on fishing and related activities in and around Muttrah market, and the lack of fish availability is a significant challenge for us," mentioned another fishmonger.

The Muscat Governorate office has confirmed a comprehensive programme to support those dependent on Muttrah fish market for their livelihood, aimed at developing the market and improving working conditions



Fish arrivals at Muttrah fish market dropped in the last few days after the warning to stay close to shore

for fishermen.

Reports indicate that Oman's commercial fish farming has experienced significant growth in production in recent years, with an increase in financial value and a wider variety of species being farmed.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR), farmed fish production has reached 5,117 tonnes this year, with a total value of RO 15.1 million.

This represents a 7 per cent volume increase and a notable 50 per cent increase in financial value compared to 2023.

In 2022, Oman's fish production was 3,179 tonnes, worth RO 6.9 million, marking a 135 per cent increase in volume

compared to 2021. The trend of increasing production has been consistent since 2018, when output was 350 tonnes valued at RO 700,000.

The variety of farmed fish species has also expanded significantly, with the current production including 33 different species such as white shrimp, Omani abalone, finfish, European cod, sand sea cucumber, sea bass, tuna, Atlantic and Norwegian salmon, and rock oysters.

Similarly, the total shrimp production from artisanal fishing in the 2023 season was 2,761 tonnes, with 2,024 tonnes landed in Al Wusta Governorate and 717 tonnes in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. Exports amounted to 2,680 tonnes, valued at RO 6.6 million.

Bee-eater and Indian roller: Gracing the skies of Oman

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Anyone who wanders today through various natural places, whether farms or natural gardens, will notice the presence of Indian storks and bee-eaters on tree branches or near water sources. These two birds are distinguished by their beautiful colours, which attract dozens of bird-watching enthusiasts.

The Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*) is a very common bird in the north of the Sultanate of Oman and can be seen during this period in gardens and agricultural lands. Anyone who observes this bird will find that it stands quietly on a tree branch, searching for flying insects. If it sees an insect, it flies towards it, catches it with its sharp beak, and then returns to the same branch from which it took off. This bird builds its nest on sandy slopes or flat ground.

According to environmental studies, bee-eaters have one of the most complex social systems of any bird species. Many species

(but not all) are monogamous, cooperative breeders living in large colonies of over 100 birds, which can reach 200 birds if conditions are favourable. Bee-eaters of both genders alternate between being breeders and helpers within their clan. Each bird lives in an extended family with members of four overlapping generations. They appear to recognise parents, siblings, offspring, friends, and nesting neighbours, likely through voice recognition. This cooperative behaviour significantly improves the survivorship of chicks. Females leave their natal group to join their mate's family.

Environmental sources confirmed that most tropical bee-eaters are largely non-migratory, but some undertake lengthy, dramatic journeys. The carmine bee-eater performs an elaborate, three-stage migration, which is not yet fully understood.

White-fronted bee-eaters inhabit wooded savannas, sandy cliffs, African grasslands, and open scrub, especially in the Great Rift Valley of Kenya at altitudes of



Indian roller

4,593 to 6,562 feet (1,400 to 2,000 metres). They avoid dense forests. Colony sites are located on nearly vertical, bare cliff faces. Birds normally change sites during the months before the breeding season. The colony site is 2.5 to 4.4 miles (4 to 7 kilometres) from the foraging area. White-throated bee-eaters breed in a narrow band of sub-desert steppe along the southern edge of the Sahara, migrating south to the humid tropical rainforests of West and Central Africa for the non-breeding season. The rather open habitats provide more insect foraging opportunities.

All bee-eaters are earth-hole nesters, digging their tunnels



Bee-eater

with an oval chamber at the end for eggs. They lay a single clutch annually. Wildlife care specialists at the zoo and park encourage this nesting behaviour by providing the birds with tubes of sandy soil attached horizontally in a vertical wall so the birds can excavate their tunnel nests. White-fronted bee-eaters nest in colonies averaging 100 individuals, digging roosting and nesting holes in cliffs or banks of earth.

A population of bee-eaters may range across many square miles of savanna but will return to the same colony to roost, socialise, and breed.

Most bee-eaters are very vocal

birds. Flocks of migrating bee-eaters soaring high overhead are easily identifiable from the "rolling, liquid quality of their calls," while the hubbub of a large nesting colony can be heard from far away, as the Handbook of the Birds of the World eloquently explains. They have a rather musical, rolling contact call, which is frequently used. Other calls noted include those for greeting, appeasement, threat, predator alarm, courtship feeding, and the delivery of food to youngsters. Some calls are described as a "deep squeak."

The same applies to the Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*), which is found in abundance in the north of the Sultanate of Oman. It is distinguished by its blue colours and builds its nests in tree branches.

According to several studies, this bird is widely distributed across tropical Asia, from Iraq eastward across the Indian Subcontinent to Indochina, and is best known for the aerobatic displays of the male during the breeding season. They are very commonly seen

perched along roadside trees and wires, and are often spotted in open grassland and scrub forest habitats. Although not migratory, the Indian Roller undertakes some seasonal movements. The largest populations of the species are found in India, and several states in India have chosen it as their state bird.

In agricultural habitats in southern India, they have been found at densities of about 50 birds per square kilometre. They perch mainly on 3 to 10 metre high perches and feed mostly on ground insects. Nearly 50 per cent of their prey are beetles, with 25 per cent made up of grasshoppers and crickets. It has been suggested that the Indian Roller could play a role in controlling agricultural insect pests due to its feeding behaviour. The feeding behaviour and habitat usage of this roller are very similar to those of the Black Drongo. During summer, they may also feed late in the evening and make use of artificial lights to feed on insects attracted to them.



TIME TO EXPLORE SALALAH’S EXTENDED KHAREEF SEASON



For those who missed out on Salalah during the peak of the khareef season, the unique weather conditions are expected to continue well into September

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For those who are yet to explore Salalah, there is still a unique opportunity to experience the magic of the khareef season. This is due to the fact that many visitors have returned home with the start of the new school semester, while the season is far from over.

Thanks to the foresight of the Dhofar Municipality, the khareef season has been officially extended by an extra month. This extension, coupled with the daily morning and evening drizzles offers an ideal window for those looking to visit Salalah now.

Khareef season, as per official calendar, starts on June 21 and ends on August 31. So, one month of extension is in favour of ‘late visitors’.

Visitors arriving at this time

can take full advantage of off-season discounts from hotels and other hospitality providers, making it a great time to explore the city without the crowds.

For those who missed out on Salalah during the peak of the khareef season, there’s good news: The unique weather conditions are expected to continue well into September. The “off-season” for Salalah typically begins in early September, but for those willing to stay in furnished apartments scattered across the city, the off-season benefits have already started.

With the reopening of schools and other educational institutions, many domestic tourists have already left. However, the major hotels in Salalah still have high occupancy rates due to several significant events scheduled until mid-September.

After these events, there will be a brief lull before the charter season picks up again, offering an excellent opportunity for tourists who previously avoided Salalah due to high demand and prices.

“For late visitors, there are several advantages: Reduced traffic, lush green landscapes, and vibrant natural springs. The easing of crowds means more freedom to explore and dine at popular city restaurants without waiting,” said Ali who works in Salalah but has his own house on Hajaif mountain.

“Mist and fog continue to envelop the mountains, and the natural springs, replenished by consistent drizzles, are still flowing. This weather even allows visitors to enjoy the fresh air without needing air conditioning, a refreshing change from the heat of other regions,” he says.

A visitor from Muscat aptly

compared the weather between Muscat and Salalah, noting, “In Salalah, I don’t get tired at all, even after a whole day of walking and exploring. But in Muscat, the heat exhausts me, even when I’m just walking a short distance to the school bus stop.”

With traffic easing on city roads, even Salalah residents are preparing to enjoy their city once again, with many gearing up for weekend picnics. This period is the perfect time to take advantage of the extended khareef season and explore Salalah’s natural beauty without the peak-season crowds.

Whether you’re a latecomer to the khareef or a local rediscovering the city’s charm, now is the time to enjoy the serene beauty and unique weather of Salalah before the season comes to a close.

Public schools welcome 68,937 first-grade students

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 2

The total number of first-grade students enrolled in public schools in Oman is 68,937, which includes 34,836 male students, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

With the start of the new academic year, schools were keen to provide a stimulating environment to welcome new students, especially first-grade students for whom it was the first experience in their academic life.

Schools across the Sultanate organised welcoming events and activities aimed at facilitating the transition of children from the home environment to the school environment and encouraging them to adapt to the new atmosphere.

Among the activities

organised to welcome students were group games such as tug of war, which were not just a means of entertainment, but were designed to enhance self-confidence and build a spirit of cooperation among students at the beginning of their educational journey.

These activities demonstrated the schools’ commitment to providing a comprehensive educational experience that combines academic learning and the development of students’ social skills.

In a related context, parents showed great interest in accompanying their children on the first day of school, as many of them participated in the welcoming school activities, reflecting the cooperative spirit between the school and the family in providing the necessary support for students at this important stage of their lives.



Schools across the Sultanate of Oman organised welcoming events and activities aimed at facilitating the transition of children from the home environment to the school environment



NDC COMMANDANT RECEIVES INDIA DELEGATION

MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, Commandant of the National Defence College (NDC) today received at the college’s headquarters in Bait Al Falaj the delegation of the National Defence College of the Republic of India, which is currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several academic and training topics. Moreover, the guests were briefed about the NDC and its facilities. They also toured its various departments. — ONA

State Council receives delegation from Indian defence college

MUSCAT: The State Council on Monday received a delegation from the National Defence College of the Republic of India as part of its current official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The Indian delegation was received by Khalid bin Ahmed al Saadi, Secretary-General of the State Council, and members Hamad bin Nasser al Nabhani and Ali bin Mubarak al Amri and other officials at the Council. During the meeting, the two sides discussed means of boosting bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India. The visiting delegation was briefed about the role of the State Council, its development, achievements and the mechanism of functioning of its main bodies.

The delegation toured the Council’s building and took note of its various facilities. — ONA



The two sides discussed means of boosting bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India. — ONA

MoHT hosts 70 tourism firms from European markets

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT), hosted prominent tourism companies from some European markets (France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Switzerland, Spain, and the Nordic countries) under the Hello Europe campaign.

The event shows the participation of more than 70 tourism companies as part of the efforts made by the ministry to attract tourism from various tourism markets and within the promotional plan for the current year.

Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director General of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said, The ‘Hello Europe’



The ‘Hello Europe’ event is among the events that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism relies on in the field of tourism promotion and enhancing the position of the Sultanate of Oman as a tourist destination

event is among the events that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism relies on in the field of tourism promotion and enhancing the position of the Sultanate of Oman as a tourist destination on the global stage by showcasing the diversity of the Omani tourism product for the European market and communicating with

major international tourism companies in the European market, introducing companies to the most important tourism components in the Sultanate of Oman, and learning about the latest developments in the Omani tourism sector, upcoming developments, and special promotional offers.

The ‘Hello Europe’ event includes tourism experiences that aim to explore the authentic content of the cultural and natural heritage in the Sultanate of Oman and innovate in providing exceptional products and services to enhance the connection of tourists with places and people and build a

cultural interactive platform between the local community and tourists in addition to promoting the Sultanate of Oman as an exceptional destination that offers distinctive products and unforgettable experiences.

The event also includes several interactive sessions to identify the main needs

and interests of international markets and interactive discussions on developing tourism packages in addition to several brainstorming sessions to find solutions to enhance the attractiveness of the Sultanate of Oman.

And reviewing the elements of tourist attraction, vocabulary, products, and rich and diverse natural and environmental tourism patterns to complete these elements with the cultural and civilisational values that the Sultanate of Oman enjoys to provide an authentic Omani and Arab tourism experience.

The event also highlights, through visual presentations, the position of the Sultanate of Oman as a distinctive tourist destination among European tourists and the facilities.



STUDENTS WHO MOVE TO NEW SCHOOLS FACE
A HEIGHTENED RISK OF BULLYING COMPARED TO THOSE WHO
REMAIN IN FAMILIAR ENVIRONMENTS

RISK OF BULLYING IN NEW
SCHOOL TRANSITIONS

LONG-TERM
PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

SCHOOL PROGRAMMES
REDUCE BULLYING

HAS PSYCHOLOGICAL AND
PHYSICAL EFFECTS

FAMILY-SCHOOL
COLLABORATION ESSENTIAL

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As the new school year commences, parents are increasingly concerned about the risk of bullying, especially as children transition to new grades and navigate the complexities of forming new friendships. Experts and social counsellors highlight that students who move to new schools face a heightened risk of bullying compared to those who remain in familiar environments. Addressing school bullying - a pervasive global issue - has become a top priority for specialists working tirelessly to find effective solutions.

School bullying is particularly problematic among students in late childhood and early adolescence, with its impact reaching far beyond the classroom. It can deeply affect a child's psychological well-being, academic performance and ability to form healthy social relationships. Consequently, the role of school psychologists and counsellors is critical; they must promote positive behaviours, educate students on the harmful effects of bullying and enforce necessary disciplinary measures.

Bullying manifests in various forms, including physical aggression, emotional harm, verbal abuse and psychological manipulation. The family plays an essential role in shaping a child's development and has a significant responsibility to instil positive social values. Parents must model positive behaviour, as children often emulate their parents. A parent exhibiting bullying or violent behaviour can lead to a child replicating these actions at school.

Dr Youssef al Attar, an educational and psychological consultant, emphasises that 80 per cent of children's behaviours are shaped by their upbringing. He notes that bullying is a sign of a weak personality and can persist into adulthood if not addressed early. Therefore, fostering self-esteem and confidence from a young age is crucial. Recognising the global prevalence of bullying, Unicef has made combating it a priority, underscoring the potential for long-term psychological damage to victims. Institutions worldwide are increasingly focusing on the dangers

of bullying and dedicating resources to its eradication. A Unicef report identifies three key factors in bullying: intent, repetition and power dynamics, highlighting that bullying is a pattern of behaviour rather than an isolated incident.

Research also indicates that bullying can affect children's brain function, leading to reduced reward responses and impairing the brain regions responsible for memory and learning. This disruption hinders their ability to cope with challenges and process their experiences. Victims may also suffer from psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, irritable bowel syndrome and muscle pain due to ongoing stress and anxiety.

To effectively combat bullying, experts agree on the need for both family and school interventions. Families are the primary influence on a student's behaviour, and parents should neither excuse nor justify bullying. Instead, they should teach children to respect others' feelings and discourage mocking or laughing at others' expense.

Schools must also play a pivotal role in addressing bullying by developing comprehensive anti-bullying programmes that involve educational administrators, teachers, students, parents and the broader community. Studies have shown that schools implementing such programmes have seen a 50 per cent reduction in bullying cases over two years. Parents need to take several key steps to prepare their children for the new school year. This includes preparing children psychologically, physically and mentally for a positive return to school, fostering a renewed spirit and determination to overcome any negative thoughts that could hinder success.

STOP BULLYING



‘Every drop makes a difference’

DBBS LAUNCHES WEEK-LONG BLOOD DONATION CAMPAIGN

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The Ministry of Health (MoH) represented by the General Directorate of Health Services in Muscat Governorate, in cooperation with the Directorate of Blood Bank Services (DBBS) in Bausher, has launched a week-long blood donation campaign in order to inculcate the habit of blood donation among both citizens and expatriates and to generate more blood units for the various hospitals in the country. The event being held with the slogan ‘Every drop makes a difference’, witnessed hundreds of donors turning up to take part in the national blood donation drive.

The blood donation campaign will continue on Tuesday at the Al Khalihi Majlis in Baushar Council from 4 pm to 9 pm and at the Bausher Wali’s meeting place on Wednesday. This will be followed by a massive blood donation drive at the Nesto Hypermarkets on consecutive dates (Al Amerat on September 10 and at the Wadi Kabir outlet on September 11) from 4 pm to 9 pm.

Representatives from the General Directorate of



DBBS has launched a week-long blood donation campaign in order to inculcate the habit of blood donation among both citizens and expatriates

Health Services, Muscat Governorate said that Oman needs an approximate number of 200 blood donors every day as there has been a drop in donations at the Central Blood Bank lately, while the demand for blood units and its components is steadily rising. “An average of 200 blood donors and at least 100 to 140 blood units are needed every day whereas the number is steadily diminishing. We aim at helping the public continue

the habit of blood donation and to educate the people that any eligible person can donate blood every six months and not every year or two years,” said Faisal al Hanshi, Training Specialist at the Directorate General of Health Services, (DGHS Muscat). The present blood donation campaign is part of the DBBS regular blood donation campaigns in cooperation with different authorities. The DBBS requires blood units and its components for

a number of medical cases, which include RTA (Road Traffic Accidents), other accidents, some cases of childbirth, at times of surgical procedures, malignant blood diseases, bone marrow failure, certain genetic blood diseases, and cancerous tumours. “We call upon all citizens and residents to donate blood at the above-mentioned dates and places due to the severe current shortage of blood units and take part in the national drive,” he said.

Shrimp fishing season gets underway

SUR: The 2024 shrimp fishing season began in the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Dhofar and Al Wusta and will last for three months until the end of November. Salim bin Sultan al Araiimi, Director of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, stated that the total output of the Sultanate of Oman from artisanal shrimp fishing amounted to 2,761 tonnes in 2023, including 2,024 tonnes from Al Wusta Governorate and 717 tonnes from Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, while exports amounted to 2,680 tonnes worth RO 6.6 million.

In the 2022 season, the total production of shrimp in the Sultanate of Oman amounted to 1,721 tonnes, with Al Wusta Governorate accounting for 1,319 tonnes, followed by Al Sharqiyah South Governorate at 402 tonnes. Al Araiimi pointed out that the shrimp output from artisanal fishing in 2023 generated good returns for fishermen and other parties involved in the fisheries sector, noting that a kilogramme of shrimp is priced between RO 2 and RO 4, depending on supply and demand factors. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources urged its specialists to encourage fishermen to abide by the regulations and laws to sustain shrimp resources, including avoiding the use of banned fishing nets and dredging methods to ensure the sustainability of this important economic resource, Al Araiimi said. — ONA

AL BATINAH NORTH POLICE COMMAND ARREST FIVE IN BATTERY THEFT CASE

MUSCAT: The Al Batinah North Police Command apprehended five Asian nationals in connection with a series of thefts involving vehicle and truck batteries. The suspects are alleged to have stolen batteries from various vehicles and trucks owned by a local company.

The arrests follow a detailed investigation into the thefts, which had caused significant disruption and financial loss for the affected business. Authorities are now completing the necessary legal procedures against the accused, as they prepare to face charges related to the thefts.



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

Tenders Announcement

Tender No.	186/2024/MHT/HQ-43	Tender Name	Security Fencing Site Wide and Boundary Fencing for Oman Botanic Garden
	187/2024/MHT/HQ-44		Supply of CCTV Gate Barriers Parking Management for Oman Botanic Garden Project
	188/2024/MHT/HQ-45		Supply Office Hardware & Software for Oman Botanic Garden Project
Fees of Tender		186/2024/MHT/HQ-43	28.400 RO
		187/2024/MHT/HQ-44	25 RO
		188/2024/MHT/HQ-45	
Tender Document Sales End Date		19/9/2024	
Last Date for Bid Submission		9/10/2024	
Grade		Excellent, First	
E-Tendering Portal		https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om	

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- The Tenderers must acknowledge commitment to the bid.
- The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids.
- The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
	For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om or 24402200
For further information	Email: sotic@mht.gov.om Phones: 22088348 - 22088085



MUSCAT GOVERNORATE MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (24/2024)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following bidding :

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding Description	Document Fee	Deadline for obtaining bidding docs.	Deadline for inquiries submission	Deadline for submission
1	PRE-24-226	Organizing events for the Muscat Festival (2024/2025) Implementing and Managing the Consumer Exhibition at Al Naseem and Al Amerat Parks	30 Rials	10/09/2024	15/09/2024	22/09/2024
2	PRE-24-227	Organizing events for the Muscat Festival (2024/2025) International Circus at Al Naseem and Al Amerat Parks	25 Rials	10/09/2024	15/09/2024	22/09/2024
3	PRE-24-228	Organizing events for the Muscat Festival (2024/2025) Heritage Village at Al Naseem and Al Amerat Parks	25 Rials	10/09/2024	15/09/2024	22/09/2024
4	PRE-24-229	Organizing events for the Muscat Festival (2024/2025) Outdoor Cinema at Al Naseem, Al Qurm and Al Amerat Parks	25 Rials	10/09/2024	15/09/2024	22/09/2024
5	PRE-24-22	Implementation and Management of Amusement Rides at Al Naseem and Al Amerat Parks for Muscat Festival (2024/2025)	30 Rials	23/09/2024	30/09/2024	13/10/2024

Companies registered with Muscat Municipality and specialized in the above mentioned bidding field are invited to participate according to the following procedures:

- To get the bid's documents, company's registration with Muscat Municipality must be valid.
 - Document fee for the requested bid must be paid through bank deposit into the following Muscat Municipality's Bank account:
Bank Muscat 0423010702710024
 - To receive the bid's documents, a Copy of bank receipt must be submitted to the Quantity Surveying and Contracts Department at Muscat Municipality (Head office, first floor, Darsait), accompanied with the following details: (name and bid number, representative's name, contact number (mobile & office), bidder official email, commercial registration number).
 - 10.00 A.M** on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining bid documents. Any bid's document request received after the specified time will not be considered.
 - Documents must be enclosed in a plain closed envelope (without mention the company identity) and placed in the box located at Quantity Surveying and Contracts Department at Muscat Municipality (Head Office, first floor, Darsait)
- NOTES:**
- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the Muscat Municipality's website (www.mm.gov.om).
 - For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through this email (crm@mm.gov.om).
 - If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to sent their inquiries through the following e-mail (SQ.SS@mm.gov.om).
 - 10:00 AM** on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
 - Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Site Visit	Tender Price (OMR)
NESC/2024/005	SMS Gateway Solution Implementation	11/09/2024	24/09/2024	Specialized Companies	NA	1,575

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply). - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit https://supply.nama.om, under NESC vendor / E Tender.
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to Tender@supply.nama.om, using the inquiry form found in the tender document (05) Five working days before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER and supplier guidelines available at NESC Website https://supply.nama.om, under NESC vendor / E Tender.
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. - The hard copy of the bid bond should be deposited in the Tender Box at the Nama Electricity Supply Company Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 10:00 AM on the day specified for bid submission or any extended deadline. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - For IT related work a certificate confirming 60% Omanization, inclusive of subcontracting, must be provided. Alternatively, a commitment letter must be submitted, confirming the implementation of the required Omanization % within a timeframe specified by NESC during the contract's validity period. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization. - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.
Incentives and exemptions	- Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.



Nama Electricity Supply Company SAOC
PO Box 1239, PC 131, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 24250800 | CR 1/71235/7
records@supply.nama.om | www.supply.nama.om





ISRAELI FIRE KILLS DOZENS IN DEVASTATED GAZA



Palestinian walk amidst the rubble of buildings destroyed after an Israeli strike, in Khan Yunis. — Reuters

GAZA: Israeli forces killed at least 48 Palestinians in the past 24 hours across the Gaza Strip as they battled gunmen, Palestinian officials said on Monday, while medics conducted a second day of polio vaccinations for children in the enclave.

Palestinian and UN officials said more than 80,000 children had been vaccinated in central areas of Gaza on Sunday, the first day of the campaign.

Hamas and Israel have agreed to brief pauses in fighting to allow the campaign to vaccinate some 640,000 children to go ahead. No violations have been reported near vaccination facilities.

Seven Palestinians were killed

in two Israeli air strikes on Gaza City, Palestinian officials said on Monday, while two air strikes killed six others in Bureij and Nuseirat, two of the Gaza Strip's eight historic refugee camps.

The armed wings of Palestinian groups said fighters had confronted Israeli forces in north, south and in some central area of Gaza with anti-tank rockets and mortar fire.

UNRWA, the U.N. Palestinian refugee agency, repeated its call on Monday for an immediate ceasefire to help ensure a successful and safe polio vaccination campaign.

“On 1st day only, UNRWA teams & partners reached around 87,000 children according to WHO. Efforts are

ongoing to provide children with this key vaccine, but what they need most is a #CeasefireNow,” it said on the X social media platform.

Israel and Hamas have continued to trade blame for the failure to conclude a ceasefire, that would end the war, and see the release of Israeli and foreign captives held in Gaza and many Palestinians jailed in Israel.

Parents continued bringing their infants to be vaccinated at medical facilities on Monday. The World Health Organization (WHO) says a drop in routine vaccinations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including Gaza, has contributed to the re-emergence of polio in the area. Polio myelitis is a

highly infectious virus that can cause paralysis and death in infants, with under-2s most at risk.

The WHO confirmed last month that a baby was partially paralysed by the type 2 polio virus, the first such case in the territory in 25 years.

Palestinians say a key reason for the return of polio is the collapse of the health system and the destruction of most Gaza hospitals.

Israel accuses Hamas of using hospitals for military purposes, which the group denies. An estimated 40,786 Palestinians have been killed and more than 94,000 injured in Gaza, the enclave's health ministry said on Monday. — Reuters

Indonesia prepares to welcome Pope Francis

JAKARTA: Indonesia readied on Monday to welcome Pope Francis, rolling out a papal stamp, a large billboard and a life-sized cutout of the pontiff before his arrival in the populous nation.

The pope begins the longest and farthest journey of his papacy on Monday afternoon, spending three nights of a 12-day trip in the Indonesian capital Jakarta before heading to Papua New Guinea, East Timor and Singapore.

Indonesian authorities were getting the traffic-clogged megalopolis of 11 million into shape before the 87-year-old's landing for the high-profile visit, which is set to be dominated by inter-faith ties.

They closed or changed routes at the major locations he will visit — the international airport, Jakarta cathedral, the presidential palace, the national football stadium and Istiqlal Mosque, where he will give an address.

A new billboard declaring “Welcome Pope Francis” and the slogan “Faith, Fraternity, Compassion” has been put up in central Jakarta.

Outgoing President Joko Widodo said last week he would try to be by the pope's

side as much as possible during the visit. “If it is possible, I will accompany him,” he told reporters.

At Jakarta cathedral, the country's top Catholic place of worship, devotees took photos on Monday with a newly installed life-sized cutout of Francis. Pope signboards and religious drawings by schoolchildren were also put up.

People queued at the site to buy two papal stamp designs, launched by the government to celebrate the visit.

But foreign tourists and worshippers were being turned away later on Monday as organisers closed the cathedral to the public before his visit.

The cathedral sits across from Southeast Asia's largest mosque, with the two connected by a newly built ‘tunnel of friendship’.

A security detail of around 4,000 personnel will protect the pope, including snipers, soldiers, police and his security team.

The independent Jakarta Post newspaper ran an editorial on Monday hailing his ‘Papal Message of Hope’ and called on “people of all faiths” to “listen to his wisdom” on interreligious matters. Francis will be the third pope to visit Indonesia, an archipelago of 17,500. — AFP



People drive their vehicles past giant billboards displaying a welcome message for Pope Francis at the business district in Jakarta. — AFP

South Africa asks China for better balanced trade

BEIJING: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa told China's Xi Jinping on Monday he wanted to narrow his country's trade deficit with Beijing, days before the Chinese leader is due to urge a summit of 50 African nations to buy more Chinese goods.

China, which has the world's second-biggest economy, is South Africa's largest trading partner globally but last year the value of its imports from China far outstripped exports.



South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa arrives at the Beijing Capital International Airport. — Reuters

Ramaphosa's remarks point to the challenge Xi may have in convincing African leaders gathering in Beijing to absorb more of the production powerhouse's wares, particularly after China did not meet a pledge from the last Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit in 2021 to buy \$300 billion of African goods.

This meeting of the three-yearly gathering is also likely to address China's role as a major lender to Africa.

China's lending to Africa rose for first time in seven years in 2023.

“As South Africa, we would like to narrow the trade deficit and address the structure of our trade,” Ramaphosa told his host during talks at Beijing's Great Hall of the People, a statement from his presidential office said. “We urge for more sustainable manufacturing and job-creating investments,” Ramaphosa added ahead of the ninth Forum on China-Africa Co-operation

Summit.

South Africa which co-founded the BRICS group of developing economies along with Brazil, Russia, India, and China is also seeking Beijing's backing to help it move on from over a decade of economic stagnation by building up its infrastructure.

Signalling China's willingness to help South Africa put an end to the persistent power cuts, poor port processing and sub-par railways that have throttled

economic growth, Xi proposed elevating bilateral ties to the level of a “new era of all-round strategic partnership,” Chinese state media reported.

The two countries also agreed to deepen cooperation in fields such as agriculture, health, medical sciences and infrastructure development, as well as to “seize opportunities” in new areas such as artificial intelligence, the digital economy and new energy, a joint statement said. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

MANILA

Tropical storm triggers landslides in Philippines

Floods and landslides killed 11 people after a fierce tropical storm dumped heavy rain on the Philippines for a second day, officials said.

Tropical Storm Yagi slammed into the main island of Luzon after brushing past the Bicol region southeast of Manila overnight on Sunday.

As a precaution, schools and government offices across the capital were shut for the day, ferry services in some areas were suspended and 29 domestic



flights were cancelled due to the weather. More than 300 people were at evacuation camps, with local officials saying the floodwaters in the city of 210,000 people were slow to ebb. — AFP

BANGKOK

Thai PM to seek cabinet royal approval

Thailand's new cabinet has been selected and should be submitted for royal endorsement within this week, Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra said on Monday. Senior officials in her caretaker government previously said the new government should be in place by mid-September. The new cabinet is expected to retain the current finance and foreign ministers but will likely see 11 new ministers and deputy ministers.

Sorawong Thienthong,



Secretary-General of Paetongtarn's ruling Pheu Thai Party, said that the new government should account for slightly more parliamentary seats than its predecessor. — Reuters

NEW DELHI

Torrential floods kill 25 in southern India

Intense monsoon rains and floods in India's southern states have killed at least 25 people, with thousands rescued and taken to relief camps, disaster officials said on Monday.

“Lots of houses have been damaged as well,” Y. Nagi Reddy said, director general of Telangana's disaster response and fire service, noting there had 400 millimetres of rainfall within the past 24 hours.

Around 3,800 people have been rescued in Telangana and



moved to relief camps.

India's air force said on Monday it had flown in more than 200 rescue officers and 30 tonnes of emergency aid to both states. — AFP



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In brief

■ BAKU



AZERBAIJAN RULING PARTY WINS VOTE AS OPPN REJECTS

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's party has won snap parliamentary elections, the electoral commission said on Monday, as the opposition denounced widespread violations. Aliyev called the vote ahead of schedule to avoid having it coincide with the COP29 climate conference. Aliyev's Yeni Azerbaijan party won 68 seats in the 125-member legislature. Another 45 seats were won by independent candidates widely believed to be pro-government, and 11 were obtained by nine political parties supporting Aliyev. The opposition Musavat party said there were "mass violations" of the rules. — AFP

■ BUCHAREST



ROMANIA APPROVES DRAFT LAW TO GIVE PATRIOT TO UKRAINE

Romania's coalition government approved a draft law on Monday enabling the donation of a Patriot missile defence system to Ukraine and sent it to parliament for a final vote. Bucharest said in June that it would donate one of its two operational Patriot systems to Ukraine on condition that allies replace it with a similar air defence system.

"The government will be able to issue the decision that makes the donation operational," spokesman Mihai Constantin said. The draft law also states that Romania will send letters of offer and acceptance to the US for the replacement of the donated battery. — Reuters

■ WASHINGTON



TRUMP SAYS HE HAD 'EVERY RIGHT' IN 2020 ELECTION

Former US president Donald Trump, who faces federal and state charges for allegedly trying to overturn his 2020 election loss to President Biden, insists he had "every right" to interfere in the election. "Whoever heard you get indicted for interfering with a presidential election where you have every right to do it?" Trump said. A federal indictment accuses Trump of defrauding the US by preventing Congress from certifying Biden's victory and depriving voters of their right to a fair election. He faced a revised federal indictment accusing him of illegally trying to overturn his 2020 election loss. — Reuters

PUTIN SAYS ADVANCING FAST IN EASTERN UKRAINE



Investigators inspect the site of the Russian missile strike on an office building, in Kyiv.

— Reuters

MOSCOW: Russian forces are advancing faster in eastern Ukraine than they have done for a long time, taking several square kilometres per day, President Vladimir Putin said on Monday as Moscow's forces tried to smash through a major Ukrainian defensive line.

Russian forces, which control 18 per cent of Ukraine, have been advancing in eastern Ukraine since the failure of Kyiv's 2023 counter-offensive to achieve a major breakthrough.

Despite a major Ukrainian incursion into Russia's Kursk region that began on Aug. 6, the numerically stronger Russian army has in recent weeks been thrusting relatively swiftly though

settlements in eastern Ukraine on the approach to the strategically important city of Pokrovsk.

"We have not had such a pace in the offensive in Donbas (region) for a long time," Putin told children at Secondary School No. 20 in Kyzyl, Tuva, about 4,500 km east of Moscow.

"Now we are not talking about moving 200 or 300 metres forward ... The Russian armed forces are already bringing territories under control not by 200-300 metres but by square kilometres."

Pro-Russian military bloggers said on Monday that Russian forces were now fighting in the eastern Ukrainian towns of Selydove and Ukrainsk. There was no immediate comment from



The Russian armed forces are already bringing territories under control not by 200-300 metres but by square kilometres

VLADIMIR PUTIN

Russia's President

Ukraine on the reported Russian advance.

Yuri Podolyaka, an influential Ukrainian-born, pro-Russian military blogger, said that intense battles were underway in Selydove, about 20 km south of Pokrovsk, and in Ukrainsk, about 14 km south of Selydove. He said both sides were pushing forces into the battles for the towns, which had populations of over 20,000 and 10,000 respectively before full-scale war began in February 2022.

The blogger Rybar also said that fighting was going on in both towns. Russian state news agency TASS said that Ukrainian forces had been driven out of a part of Selydove.

By pushing south towards the

town of Kurakhivka, Russian forces are seeking to break through Ukrainian defensive lines while increasing their sway over the Pokrovsk-Donetsk road and encircling a chunk of territory, Russian bloggers said.

Russia has been trying to expel Ukrainian forces from its southern Kursk region after Kyiv's Aug. 6 incursion, which was designed partly to pressure Russian generals to scramble forces from other parts of the eastern front in Ukraine. Russian forces have taken control of the village of Skuchne in the eastern Donetsk region, RIA news agency cited Russia's Defence Ministry as saying on Monday.

— Reuters

Macron accelerates efforts to break PM deadlock

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday intensified efforts to find a new prime minister after almost two months of deadlock following inconclusive legislative elections, hosting two former presidents and two potential candidates.

France has been without a permanent government since the July 7 polls where the left formed the largest faction in a hung parliament with Macron's centrists and the far-right comprising the other major groups.

Two possible candidates for prime minister — former premier Bernard Cazeneuve from the centre-left and right-wing ex-minister Xavier Bertrand — were holding separate meetings with Macron.

It is traditional for the French president to consult predecessors during moments of national importance, and Macron also met on Monday at the Elysee with the two surviving former presidents — right-winger Nicolas Sarkozy and Socialist Francois Hollande.

To the fury of the left, Macron has refused to accept the nomination of a left-wing premier, arguing such a figure would have no chance of surviving a confidence motion in parliament.



Journalists wait outside the Elysee Presidential Palace in Paris. — AFP

Amid the political deadlock Macron, who has less than three years in power, has happily run down the clock as the Olympics and Paralympics took place, to the growing frustration of opponents.

But amid signs of an acceleration as France returns from holidays, Macron early on Monday hosted Cazeneuve, a former leading Socialist who headed the government in the final months of Hollande's 2012-17 presidential term.

In a sign of the potential uncertainty, Macron in the afternoon was also set to hold talks with Xavier Bertrand, the right-wing head of the northern Hauts-de-France region and a former minister. Bertrand, 59, would be a much

more palatable figure for the right as premier.

Sarkozy remains an influential figure on the right — despite a string of graft convictions after leaving office on charges he denies — and even within Macron's circle, has already made his preference clear. "The centre of gravity of French politics is on the right", he argued in the Figaro daily on Saturday. He said Bertrand would be a "good choice", while opposing Cazeneuve's nomination.

For a president who came to office in 2017 vowing radical change as to how France is ruled, naming a former prime minister from a previous administration could be seen as a negative throwback.

— AFP

Scholz urges parties to isolate far right

BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Monday urged parties to avoid collaborating with the far right, after the AfD made record gains in two regional polls and his own coalition suffered a heavy defeat a year before a general election.

In the former East German state of Thuringia, the anti-immigrant, anti-Islam AfD became the first far-right party to win a regional election since World War II, taking around 33 per cent of the vote on Sunday. The AfD was headed for a close second place in neighbouring Saxony. Germany's top-selling Bild daily described the outcome as "a political earthquake".

Scholz, whose deeply unpopular three-party coalition received a slapdown in both states, called the results "bitter" and "worrying".

"The AfD is damaging Germany. It is weakening the economy, dividing society and ruining our country's reputation," he said.

"All democratic parties are now called upon to form stable governments without right-wing extremists," he said in a message on Facebook.

Coalition governments are the norm in Germany at federal and state level, and mainstream parties have always ruled out collaboration with the far right.

But AfD co-leader Alice Weidel said she believed the "undemocratic firewall" was untenable given the party's electoral success, while fellow leader Tino Chrupalla said there would be "no politics without the AfD".

The conservative CDU, the only centrist party to perform strongly on Sunday, was quick to dismiss the idea of teaming up



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz appears in Solinge, western Germany. — AFP

with the AfD.

"Voters know that we do not form coalitions with the AfD," said Carsten Linnemann, the General-Secretary of the conservative CDU.

The AfD's controversial local leader, Bjoern Hoecke, meanwhile declared that his party was the "people's party in Thuringia". "We need change and change will only come with the AfD," he said, hailing the "historic result".

Political divisions and the complicated electoral maths mean "forming a government will be difficult" after the two regional elections, said Marianne Kneuer, a professor of politics at the Dresden University of Technology. Scholz's Social Democrats recorded meek results, scoring around seven per cent in Saxony and falling to six per cent in Thuringia. — AFP

Prudent decisions hallmark of long-term policymaking



The Sultanate of Oman and its government are known for making decisions and policies that are for the long-term benefits and for the generations to follow. The period between the end of 2014 and 2021 was very challenging for everyone in the Sultanate of Oman, especially for policymakers, because of the low crude prices for an extended period.

Things got bad towards the first quarter of 2020 when oil prices dropped to single digits.

While it did make a gradual comeback, the subsequent measures to limit the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic hampered the recovery with extended lockdowns and shutdowns.

Realising the consequences of full dependence on revenues from the oil and gas sector, the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan (MTFP) (2020-2024) was launched with a set of measures and initiatives aiming at achieving fiscal sustainability while maintaining an attractive investment climate.

As we come close to the end of MTFP, we can rightly claim its outcomes have been encouraging

though some results may take a couple of years to be visible and felt on the ground or impact our daily lives.

One positive indicator is the last week's Moody's Ratings which changed the outlook on the Government of Oman to positive from stable and affirmed its Ba1 long-term issuer and long-term senior unsecured ratings.

It also affirmed the Government of Oman's (P) Ba1 senior unsecured medium-term note programme rating.

The agency said that the key driver for the change of the outlook to positive is the ongoing improvements in the government's debt metrics, supported by elevated oil prices and prudent fiscal management, which increase the likelihood that Oman's fiscal strength could be sustained at a level consistent with a higher rating.

A declining debt burden, in particular the foreign-currency portion of the debt, increases the government's capacity to absorb shocks, such as those caused by cyclical fluctuations in the global energy markets or increases in global interest rates.

AS WE COME CLOSE TO THE END OF MTFP, WE CAN RIGHTLY CLAIM ITS OUTCOMES HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGING THOUGH SOME RESULTS MAY TAKE A COUPLE OF YEARS TO BE VISIBLE AND FELT ON THE GROUND OR IMPACT OUR DAILY LIVES

The affirmation of the Ba1 ratings is supported by Oman's high per-capita income, the government's moderate debt burden, and its improving track record of fiscal policy effectiveness, which are set against the economy's relatively modest growth dynamics and the sovereign's heavy economic and fiscal reliance on the hydrocarbon sector.

This reliance exposes government finances to sudden material deterioration in response to cyclical declines in oil prices and, in the longer term, to the negative credit effects of the global carbon transition.

The positive outlook reflects further improvements in Oman's government debt metrics observed over the past nine months, which increase the likelihood that Oman's fiscal strength could be sustained at a stronger level, the agency noted.

Further debt repayments during 2024 were supported by a fiscal surplus, which reached around one per cent of the projected full year GDP in the first half of 2024.

China rolls out red carpet for African leaders

OLIVER HOTHAM

China rolled out the red carpet on Monday for leaders from across Africa, seeking to deepen ties with the resource-rich continent it has furnished with billions in loans for infrastructure and development.

Beijing has said this week's China-Africa forum will be its largest diplomatic event since the Covid-19 pandemic, with more than a dozen leaders and delegations expected.

China has sent hundreds of thousands of workers to Africa to build its megaprojects while tapping the continent's vast natural resources including copper, gold, lithium and rare earth minerals.

Its huge loans have funded infrastructure but also stoked controversy by saddling countries with huge debts.

China, the world's number two economy, is Africa's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade hitting \$167.8 billion in the first half of this year, according to Chinese state media.

Security is tight across Beijing, with roads and bus stops bedecked with banners declaring China and Africa are "joining hands for a brighter future".

Among the leaders in the capital is South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who arrived early on Monday for a four-day trip during which he will also visit the southern tech powerhouse city of Shenzhen. Trade between China and South Africa soared to \$38.8 billion in 2023, according to the South African presidency.

Ramaphosa met Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Monday, state news agency Xinhua said.

China and South Africa are expected to sign a number of agreements focused on "enhancing economic cooperation and the implementation of technical cooperation", Ramaphosa's office said.

Xi also met Democratic Republic of Congo President Felix Tshisekedi on Monday, state news agency Xinhua said.

China has a significant presence in the DRC, where it is keen on tapping vast natural resources including copper, gold, lithium and rare earth minerals.

But it has grappled with security issues there. DRC sources said in July that a militia attack on a mining site in gold-rich Ituri province killed at least four Chinese nationals.

Leaders of Djibouti — home to China's first overseas military base — as well as Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, Mali and others, also arrived in Beijing on Sunday and Monday.

Beijing's loans to African nations last year were their highest in five years, research by the Chinese Loans to Africa Database found. — AFP

Long live Sudan... Resilience of a rich culture



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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

Learning a foreign language is often a daunting task, but our ninth-grade English teacher, John from Sudan, had a unique way of making it more than just an academic exercise. He transformed our classroom at Al Farabi Preparatory School in Salalah, Dhofar Governorate, into a space where language became a gateway to profound life lessons.

One of the most impactful stories John shared with us was about a simple village struggling with a choice: to build a bridge that would bring modern conveniences or to maintain the status quo, valuing their connection to nature and the rhythm of life that had sustained them for generations.

The village elders, representing wisdom and caution, advised against hastily altering the landscape, while the younger villagers, driven by the allure of progress, were eager to move forward. The decision ultimately fell on a young man who chose to build the bridge, symbolising a step towards modernisation. At first, the bridge seemed to signify progress and prosperity. However, the decision, made without considering the environmental and social implications, led to a catastrophic flood that devastated the village years later.

This story, narrated by John, was more than a tale of caution; it was a lesson in the value of wisdom and careful deliberation before making decisions that could irrevocably change our communities. His teachings resonated deeply with us, embodying the Sudanese virtues of patience, prudence, and a profound respect for communal well-being.

In Oman, many of us who have had the privilege of knowing Sudanese colleagues, friends, and mentors have experienced this wisdom firsthand. My own journey in academia was shaped by a Sudanese supervisor who taught me the importance of thoughtfulness in teaching. I honed my skills in translation and interpretation under a Sudanese mentor in international relations, and I continue to learn from Sudanese entrepreneurs whose resilience and foresight inspire me daily. My understanding of the post-colonial struggle and its enduring impact was profoundly influenced by reading Season of Migration to the North by the late Tayeb Salih, one of



The 76th Cannes Film Festival photocall for the film 'Goodbye Julia' in competition at Cannes, France. — Reuters file photo

the greatest Arab and African novelists, whose work captures the complexities of identity, displacement, and the longing for belonging.

GOODBYE JULIA

IN OMAN, MANY OF US WHO HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF KNOWING SUDANESE COLLEAGUES, FRIENDS, AND MENTORS HAVE EXPERIENCED THIS WISDOM FIRSTHAND

Today, the inherent wisdom of Sudan's nearly 50 million people is being tested as the country endures a brutal civil war that has dragged on for over 16 months. Yet, I hold an unshakable belief that Sudan will rise again.

This belief is rooted in the understanding that the true strength of the Sudanese people lies not in military might or political power but in their wisdom, their civility, and their capacity to draw on deep cultural and communal ties to overcome adversity.

The recently acclaimed film 'Goodbye Julia', directed by Sudanese filmmaker Muhammad Kordofani, poignantly captures the essence of Sudan's current socio-political climate. Set in Khartoum, the film explores themes of identity, guilt, and

reconciliation, offering a lens into the complex relationships between Sudan's northern and southern communities.

The narrative is a reflection on the lingering scars of postcolonial, historical, and social injustices. It underscores the pain of facing one's past, the heavy burden of guilt, and the necessity of forgiveness and reconciliation as a means to heal and move forward. Through its nuanced storytelling, 'Goodbye Julia' highlights the importance of empathy and understanding, reminding us that the path to healing lies in recognising our shared humanity and embracing the power of collective healing.

The film's message echoes the core lesson from John's story about the village and the bridge: decisions made without wisdom and foresight can lead to unintended and sometimes devastating consequences. However, 'Goodbye Julia' also offers a message of hope. Despite the deep divisions and painful histories, the film illustrates that reconciliation is possible. The characters in 'Goodbye Julia' represent the resilience, strength, and courage of the Sudanese people, showing that the path to healing and unity is rooted in wisdom, compassion, and a willingness to understand each other.

BETTER FUTURE

As we watch our Sudanese brothers and sisters navigate the tumultuous waters of war and division, we are reminded that true power does not come from conflict or force but from the wisdom to seek unity, resilience, and sustainable peace. The lessons imparted by my Sudanese mentors and the values depicted in 'Goodbye Julia' and 'Season of Migration to the North' provide a beacon of hope for a nation in turmoil. Pragmatism suggests that embracing patience, engaging in inclusive dialogue, and practicing collective decision-making are essential for building a resilient society. Sudan's future depends on the wisdom of its people to rise above short sighted regional opportunism, and focus on internal long-term strength and stability.

Long live Sudan, a land of profound wisdom, natural and cultural richness, and enduring resilience. May the strength and wisdom of its people guide them toward a future filled with peace, prosperity, and unity.

Thoughts, words and actions

Peace is what we all strive for, and aligning one's thoughts, words, and actions could bring that, say the wise. So, if we have a solution, it would be easy, you might think, but it is not quite so. Just try it.

It is when you try that you realise how often we are out of sync, leading to an almost unknown uneasiness. There are times when you feel low and uninspired, and the reason could be that you are not being true to yourself.

It seems our likes and dislikes play a big role in our decisions. Even those who consider themselves indecisive have to make numerous decisions each day.

It is interesting to wonder if emotions are connected to the decision-making process. Apparently, emotions are momentary, while mood tends to last longer.

I suppose people who can disconnect from emotions and mood can remain objective while making decisions. But how often have you postponed a decision because you didn't feel like it? You probably weren't in the mood.

Expressing our emotions is also related to our upbringing, family history, and probably our environment. Do we quietly keep our emotions to ourselves, or do we make it everybody else's business?

This probably depends on our personality, but those who can talk about and get it out of their system heal better than those who hold onto their built-up emotions.

The latter are more often ready to have an outburst, and if they do, others might also go through an upheaval of emotions in response to the outburst.

Words can slice through a person's heart, often humiliating, wounding, and scarring, sometimes forever. If we were to observe our own inner circles, we would see the network of



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STEPPING OUT OF OUR COMFORT ZONE REQUIRES US OFTEN MOVE INTO THE AREA WHERE WE ARE FORCED TO DEAL WITH NEWER EMOTIONS AND INSECURITIES

emotions triggered by words. The sensible ones will have the skill to ignore but will be smart enough not to add further pollution of thoughts with reactions. Most invariably, they are reactions when words are thrown at a person randomly. Words can even cause health issues when they are negative and are known to encourage when they are positive.

But when our intentions are one thing, our words are chosen to please others, and our actions say something else, we are in conflict. Our past conditioning influences us in many ways, but what do we do if we want a fresh beginning? Perhaps start with a new list of thoughts and vocabulary—a list of vocabulary that does not hurt us or others. It also requires us to learn new ways to handle each day and clear our way towards new goals.

Stepping out of our comfort zone often requires us to deal with new emotions and insecurities. But they say learning a new language keeps our brains flexible and alert. Emotions tend to affect health, but haven't we noticed that tough challenges make us stronger?

Every new skill we learn initially makes us think we are going to fail miserably, but by the time we think about it again, we realise it has become part of our lifestyle.

When it comes to thoughts, however, we produce thousands of them in a day, and from these, we have to discriminate what we want and then say what we mean. Then it is time to act upon what we said.

We might have genuine reasons why we could not keep our word, but when we look at people who have a reputation for keeping their word, we also realise why they are considered the most reliable.

Indeed, the skill of aligning thoughts, words, and actions is a virtue and an asset.

MEN AT WORK!



Employees work on a steel tube tower production line at a factory in Haian, in eastern China's Jiangsu province on Monday. – AFP

Far-right state win shakes fragile coalition

German state elections that dealt a heavy blow to the parties in Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government and historic wins for two anti-establishment parties are likely to aggravate instability in an already fractious ruling coalition.

With only a year to go before a national election in Europe's largest economy, Sunday's results seem set to increase the pressure on Scholz to take a tougher stance on immigration and intensify the debate over support for Ukraine, both of which were key issues during the campaign.

The German government's faltering authority could also complicate European policy, particularly when the bloc's other major power, neighbouring France, is still struggling to form a government after snap elections in June and July.

All three parties in the federal government appeared to have lost votes in the elections in Thuringia and Saxony, according to early projections, which underscored the decline of Scholz's Social Democrats (SPD) as a big-tent party. The projections by pollster Forschungsgruppe Wahlen published at 9 pm (1900 GMT) placed the SPD at just 6-7.6 per cent of the vote.

Junior coalition partners, the Greens and pro-business Free Democrats, were at risk of being evicted from the Thuringia state parliament for failing to meet the 5



Sarah Marsh

The writer is Chief Correspondent for politics coverage for Reuters in Berlin

JUNIOR COALITION PARTNERS, THE GREENS AND PRO-BUSINESS FREE DEMOCRATS WERE AT RISK OF BEING EVICTED FROM THE THURINGIA STATE PARLIAMENT FOR FAILING TO MEET THE 5 PER CENT THRESHOLD.

per cent threshold. Analysts suggest that the most likely impact of the results will be increased bickering within Scholz's ideologically heterogeneous coalition. "For us, it's going to be about asserting ourselves more strongly," Kevin Kuehnert, SPD party General-Secretary, said late on Sunday. "Not letting ourselves be led by the nose by parties that have just been kicked out of a state parliament."

The results reflect the growing fragmentation of the political landscape and the rise of anti-establishment parties across Europe as governments struggle to deal with crises including the Ukraine war and inflation.

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) was the big winner of the evening, securing 33.2 per cent in Thuringia in its first regional election and gaining almost as many votes as the conservatives in Saxony.

Meanwhile, the leftist populist Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) won more votes than all three parties in Scholz's coalition, gathering 11.5-15.6 per cent of the vote just eight months after its founding.

The strength of these anti-Nato, anti-immigration, and Russia-friendly parties will make forming ideologically coherent coalitions increasingly difficult at both state and federal levels.



Secretary-General of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) Kevin Kuehnert at the SPD party headquarters in Berlin, Germany. – Reuters

The coalition partners, in government since 2021, were at odds even before the elections, as tensions erupted late last year over the budget for this year and next year.

Their union was originally billed as a coalition of progress, but Greens co-leader Omid Nouripour last month called it a "transitional government", bemoaning the "many, many superfluous disputes" as well as fundamental ideological differences, particularly with the FDP.

FDP deputy leader Wolfgang Kubicki said on Sunday that the election results showed the coalition had "lost its legitimacy" and was harming his party, which must have consequences.

"With the 2025 budget bill still featuring a gap of some 12

billion euros (£10.2 billion), renewed coalition tensions are likely," said Carsten Nickel at Teneo in a research note. Yet Scholz's coalition is unlikely to disband altogether as it is not in the interests of the three parties, all of which are polling below their 2021 results, said Stefan Marschall, a political scientist at the University of Düsseldorf. Both the BSW and AfD have eroded their support, which has led mainstream parties to toughen their stance on migration and could undermine support for Ukraine.

"The issue will become more fraught, and Germany will likely become more paralysed, meaning others like Poland, France, and Italy will need to set the pace," said Alexander Clarkson at King's College London.

The creation of the BSW and its legitimisation in this vote could prove particularly damaging for the SPD, which has already lost more than a third of its supporters since 2021, polling around 16 per cent, and could see more left-leaning voters drawn away. The votes will likely also foment a debate about the knock-on effect of uneasy coalitions.

With the AfD unable to form a majority, it will be up to the runner-up, the conservatives—but in Thuringia, they will be unable to form a majority without support from the BSW, despite major ideological differences. That is likely to have an impact in the Bundesrat upper house of parliament too, where state governments are represented, affecting national policy-making.

Meanwhile, coalitions with either the BSW or AfD at the federal level are unthinkable given their foreign policy views. This means the stronger they get, the more mainstream parties will struggle to form coherent governing majorities, said Andre Brodocz, a political scientist at Erfurt University.

But voters could punish mainstream parties for their incoherent coalitions by voting even more for anti-establishment parties in subsequent elections, analysts say.

sport

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FEI, YOKOI BAG WTT FEEDER MUSCAT TITLES

FRENCH DUO WIN MEN'S DOUBLES, CHINA SHINE IN WOMEN'S AND MIXED DOUBLES



Women's singles champion Japan's Sakura Yokoi (second from right) and runner-up China's Yang Yiyun on the podium.



Men's champion Xue Fei of China (centre) and runner-up Japan's Ryoichi Yoshiyama with OTTA chief Abdullah Bamakhalef.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 2

Chinese paddler Xue Fei defeated Japanese Ryoichi Yoshiyama by 3-1 to snatch the men's singles title in the WTT Feeder Muscat 2024 late on Sunday at the main hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The World No 270 player delivered an impressive show in the final clash to end the tournament on a successful note. Despite Ryoichi taking the lead in the first set by 11-9, Fei bounced back strongly as he scored 11-6 win in the following set and won the third set 11-5. Fei confirmed the triumph in the fourth set by 11-9.

Fei said he claimed the title after an exciting competition with fellow players. "This is my second visit to Oman and I am delighted to win each time I come here. The competition was incredibly tough but I could manage to reach the final and secure the victory."

The Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) in direct coordination with the WTT concluded the four-day event of WTT Feeder Muscat 2024 which took place in Muscat on Thursday and concluded on Sunday with nearly 100 participants representing various countries across the world. The paddlers were from China, Japan, Chinese Taipei, India, Pakistan, France, Germany, Syria, Iran, Egypt,

Italy, Yemen and Oman. They competed in various categories including men's singles, women's singles, men's doubles, women's doubles and mixed doubles.

Sakura Yokoi from Japan blanked China's Yang Yiyun 3-0 to take the women's singles title. Yokoi won 11-5, 11-7, 13-11.

French duo of Bastien Rembert and Joe Seyfried beat Chinese duo of Yuan Lichen and Xiang Peng 3-1 (11-8, 11-8, 6-11, 11-9) to clinch the men's doubles title.

Chinese pair of Fan Shuhan and Xu Yi beat their compatriots Yang Yiyun and Zhu Sibing 3-1 (11-4, 8-11, 11-5, 11-9) to claim the women's doubles title. In another all-Chinese final, Fei Xue and Xiaotong Wang edged

Licen Yuan and Geman Zong 3-2 (11-5, 11-4, 10-12, 9-11, 11-3) to clinch the mixed doubles final.

Following the conclusion of all the final matches across various categories, Abdullah Mohammed Bamakhalef, Chairman of OTTA, along with members of the board, presented awards to the winners.

The chief of OTTA delivered the trophies to the top finishers in men's singles while Sajad bin Mohammed Baqir, Vice-Chairman and Masoud al Shaqsi, board member, awarded the top performers in the women's singles.

Adil al Balushi, Secretary-General, and Mohammed al Jassasi, board member, presented awards for men's doubles.

Maryam al Alawi, board member, honoured the winners of women's doubles while Mohammed al Oufi, OTTA treasurer, presented the awards to winners of the mixed doubles category.

TOP EFFORTS

Bamakhalef thanked all the board members, organisers, and volunteers for their tremendous efforts in making WTT Feeder Muscat 2024 a success. "This event is part of our annual commitment to host two international championships as the second competitive international event is scheduled for October-November which will feature top-ranked global players."

He also highlighted the numerous positive aspects of this year's championship, including live television broadcasts on foreign channels, attracting more international players to Oman, promoting table tennis in the country and providing a competitive environment for Omani players to improve their skills. "The WTT Feeder offered opportunities for our local players to compete with international talents and gain valuable experience."

Special thanks to all our partners and supporters especially the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth as well as private sector sponsors and media representatives," he concluded.

OCRf unveils 22nd edition of annual camel races



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, SEPT 2

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by the Oman Camel Racing Federation (OCRf), has announced the events for the 22nd edition of the annual camel races for the 2024-2025 season, which will commence on October 4, with the participation of a large number of Omani camel owners and trainers from various governorates across the Sultanate of Oman.

The OCRf's Board of Directors has approved 23 local events: 13 general races,

3 races sponsored by Shell Oman, 3 races sponsored by Occidental Oman, and 4 events featuring camel beauty contests, milk competitions and Ardah (traditional races).

The 13 general races include six that will be held on October 4 and 18, November 8 and 22, and December 6 and 20 at Al Fulaij field in the Wilayat of Barka, Al Batinah South Governorate. Concurrently, six races will take place at Al Bashayer race track in the Wilayat of Adam, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The final festival will be held in the Wilayat of Suhar, Al Batinah North Governorate, from

January 26 to 30.

The geographical diversity of these races provides camel owners and trainers with the opportunity to participate in one of these events, thereby avoiding overcrowding on the race tracks. Additionally, holding such events in different governorates supports the economic and tourism sectors.

The first camel beauty contest will be held in Barka from October 9 to 13, and the second will take place in Al Musannah from February 23 to 27. The Ardah competitions (traditional races) will be held in Barka from December 22 to 26. The

Thumrait event, which includes camel races for all categories, as well as camel beauty and milk competitions, will run from November 11 to 17.

The first Shell Oman race will take place on October 26 in Al Wusta Governorate, the second on November 2 in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, and the third on December 14 in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

The first Occidental Oman race will be held on January 11 in Al Wusta Governorate, the second on January 18 in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, and the third on February 8 in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

INCREASING DEMAND

Shaikh Saeed bin Saud al Ghafli, Chairman of the Oman Camel Racing Federation, said: "Camel racing represents an Omani heritage that is passed down from generation to generation and enjoys great interest and support from all segments of society. Camel owners and trainers compete to participate and win various prizes, in addition to the economic benefits derived from buying and selling camels in Oman and globally."

"There are other segments of society that benefit through field follow-up and meetings with camel owners and trainers.

We have seen increasing demand annually for Oman's traditional sport, especially among the youth, who have received financial and moral support from the relevant authorities to preserve the best Omani breeds for competition in Oman and the GCC countries," he added.

Al Ghafli pointed out that "the federation has a partnership with the community and the private sector, with six races being supported by Occidental Oman and Shell Oman, which will be organised in the governorates of Al Wusta, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Dhahirah."



The Oman Basketball Association's Athletes' Committee election in progress.

Saeed al Habsi elected chairman of OBA Athletes' Committee

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 2

The General Assembly of the Athletes' Committee in the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) has elected Saeed al Habsi as the committee's chairman and as its representative on the Board of Directors of the OBA for the 2024-2028 electoral period. Additionally, Ahmed al Shaibani was elected as vice-chairman and Sameer al Ismaili as secretary. Abdullah al Abdali and Nidal al Mughairi were elected as members.

The General Assembly meeting was held on Monday at the Oman Olympic Committee building, attended by the Chairman of the Election Committee, Yousef al Hadhrami, Chairman of the Appeals and Grievances Committee, Adel al Farsi, along with several members of the OBA Board of Directors, and 11 members of the Athletes' Committee General Assembly.

The Athletes' Committee is an advisory committee that aims to represent athletes before the Board of Directors of the Oman Basketball Association. The committee is committed to operating in accordance with the provisions of the association's constitution, regulations, and the decisions of the Omani, Asian and international federations. Among its key objectives and tasks are representing the rights and interests of athletes, providing recommendations concerning them, conveying their opinions on the association's decisions, and promoting awareness of

the laws specific to athletes. The committee also collaborates with sports clubs to protect the rights of club players and national team members.

Furthermore, the committee undertakes several responsibilities, including setting the general policy of the committee, overseeing its implementation, providing advice to the association and its subsidiary committees, and developing and monitoring the committee's plans and programmes. The committee also issues its internal regulations, which only become effective after being approved by the Board of Directors of the association, and it elects the athletes' representative to the board in accordance with the provisions of the constitution.

The General Assembly of the Athletes' Committee is composed of representatives of athletes registered with the association who have represented national teams in regional, international, or Olympic competitions for a period of no less than two years.

Candidates for membership in the Athletes' Committee must meet several criteria, including being of Omani nationality, having good conduct, and being at least 30 years old. The candidate must also be a retired player who has participated in national teams for a period of no less than two years. Additionally, the candidate must hold at least a General Diploma and must not have been subjected to any penalties related to doping or serious violations of the association's rules and conduct.

Oman Open Hockey5s launched

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 2

The Oman Hockey Association (OHA) held a press conference on Monday at the Oman Olympic Committee building to announce the details of the 2024 Oman Open Hockey5s Championship. The conference was attended by Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, OHA Chairman and Faisal al Balushi, Technical Director of the Championship, as well as representatives of the participating teams.

During the conference, the tournament draw was conducted. The championship will be held from September 8 to 11, featuring eight teams representing the military sector, organisations and companies. The teams include the Royal Army of Oman, the Royal Guard of Oman, the Royal Navy of Oman, Al Faiha Foundation, Security and Safety, Jindal Shadeed, Badr Al Sama Group, and 'FAP' Company.

Dr Marwan al Juma, said: "The 2024 Oman Open Hockey5s Championship aims to further boost hockey in Oman. The championship has attracted teams from military and private sectors. This tournament is a continuation of the OHA's efforts to support Hockey5s, following the success of organising the Oman International Women's Championship last year. Our national team achieved third place in the Hockey5s World Cup and is ranked second globally according to the International Federation's



OHA Chairman Dr Marwan al Juma (third left) during the launch of Oman Open Hockey5s Championship.

rankings. We expect strong competition and high excitement in this championship, with the participation of players from national teams."

Faisal bin Habib al Balushi, explained the playing system. The participating teams will be divided into two groups, with each group competing in a double round-robin format. In the final rounds, the teams placed fourth in each group will face off to determine the seventh and eighth places, while the teams placed third will compete for the fifth and sixth places.

In the semifinals, the first-placed team from Group A will face the second-placed team from Group B, and the first-placed team from Group B will face the second-placed team from Group

A. The winners of the semifinal matches will compete for the title, while the losers will play for the third and fourth places. All matches will be held at the Oman Hockey Complex in Al Amerat.

TECHNICAL RULES

The Technical Director emphasised the importance of adhering to the tournament's technical rules, including providing both primary and secondary uniforms for each team during the technical meeting, with the secondary uniform being completely different from the primary one.

The technical staff must wear a uniform different from the team's colours, and the team listed first in the schedule must sit to the right of the referee's table. Each team

consists of 10 players (8 players and 2 goalkeepers), with 5 players on the field and 5 on the bench, in addition to 4 members of the technical and administrative staff. The match duration will be 20 minutes, divided into two halves, with a 2-minute break between them.

Regarding specific game rules, Al Balushi mentioned the implementation of the 'Challenge' rule, where the attacker is not allowed to shoot directly unless the ball has moved a distance of at least 4 metres, and the goalkeeper must remain on the goal line until the ball is moved.

Other special rules include penalty strokes and intentional fouls by players, with an emphasis on adhering to international hockey5s regulations.

Atkinson stars as England wrap up Lanka series win

LONDON: Gus Atkinson continued his Lord's love affair by taking five wickets as England thrashed Sri Lanka by 190 runs in the second Test on Sunday to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in a three-match series.

Sri Lanka, set what would have been a new Test record fourth-innings winning total of 483, were dismissed for 292 after tea on the fourth day despite fifties from Dinesh Chandimal (58), Dimuth Karunaratne (55) and captain Dhananjaya de Silva (50). Fast bowler Atkinson, who scored his maiden first-class hundred in England's first-innings 427, led the attack with 5-62.

Player-of-the-match Atkinson secured a fifth mention on the dressing room honours boards in just his second Test at Lord's after taking 12 wickets on England debut against the West Indies in July.

He also became just the third England cricketer after Tony Greig and Ian Botham to score a century and take five wickets in an innings of the same Test.

Atkinson followed India's Vinoo Mankad (against England in 1952) and Botham (against Pakistan in



England's Gus Atkinson takes a selfie with young fans after winning the second Test. — Reuters

1978) as the only men to have achieved that double at Lord's. The 26-year-old Surrey paceman's latest impressive return helped England seal a seventh successive win over Sri Lanka following their five-wicket success in last week's first Test at Old Trafford.

"To get on both honours boards is incredible," Atkinson told Sky Sports. "It will take a while to sink in." This game was also a personal triumph for Joe Root.

For the first time in 145 matches at this level, Root made hundreds in both innings — 143 and 103 — to set a new record of 34 Test centuries by an England batsman.

Sri Lanka have little time to regroup before the third Test at The Oval starts on Friday. De Silva admitted he had erred in opting to field on a good batting pitch after winning the toss. "Definitely. I got it wrong," he told the BBC, before adding: "We have got to improve on the first innings whether we bat or bowl first, that's what I will be telling my boys is that we've got to start better." — AFP

Rain halts Bangla bid after Hasan, Nahid sink Pakistan

RAWALPINDI, PAKISTAN: Pacemen Hasan Mahmud and Nahid Rana shared nine wickets on Monday to set Bangladesh on course for victory over Pakistan before rain stopped play on the fourth day of the second Test.

Hasan took 5-43 while Nahid added 4-44 — both career-best figures — in dismissing Pakistan for 172 in their second innings and giving the visitors a target of 185 to secure a 2-0 series win in Rawalpindi.

Openers Zakir Hasan and Shadman Islam raced to 42 without loss, with Zakir hitting two sixes and two boundaries, before rain clouds gathered and bad light suspended play one over after the tea break. Bangladesh lead the two-match series 1-0 after a surprise win in Rawalpindi last month, their first in 14 Tests against Pakistan.

They have won only two series away from home — against the West Indies in 2009 and Zimbabwe in 2021 — and need another 143 runs on the final day on Tuesday to secure victory.

Pakistan head coach Jason Gillespie acknowledged that Bangladesh were favourites.

"The odds are probably in favour of Bangladesh and we don't shy away from that," said Gillespie, who is coaching Pakistan for his first series.

"We know what can happen, but we took six for 26 in the first innings so we know that we can have an impact with the ball."

Pakistan had been 117-6 at lunch, with Mohammad Rizwan and Salman Agha fighting to save the hosts before Hasan ended their 55-run stand.

Hasan had Rizwan caught behind for 43 and had Mohammad Ali caught in the slips on the next ball for a golden duck to leave Pakistan teetering on 136-8.

Salman, who top-scored with 47, added 27 for the last wicket with Mir Hamza before Hasan wrapped up the innings with his fifth wicket, getting Hamza caught in the slip.

"It's very joyful," Hasan said of his first five-wicket haul. "We're very happy to

win the first game and now have a chance to win another one."

"We tried to bowl according to our plans and kept taking wickets," he said. "I am delighted that I contributed to my team's good position."

The morning session belonged to 21-year-old Nahid, who dismissed Shan Masood (28), Babar Azam (11) and Saud Shakeel (two).

Pakistan took their overnight score of 9-2 to 47-2 in 10 overs on Monday before Bangladesh broke through with three wickets for 18 runs.

Saim Ayub fell for 20 to a brilliant catch by Najmul Hossain at mid-off as the opener failed to keep down a drive off fast bowler Taskin Ahmed.

Nahid then had Pakistan skipper Masood caught behind by Liton off a wild shot before getting the prized wicket of Azam, caught at slip off a sharp delivery in his next over.

Nahid grabbed his third by dismissing Shakeel and went to lunch with figures of 3-22 off five overs. — AFP



Bangladesh's Hasan Mahmud (2R) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Mohammad Ali during the fourth day of the second and last Test match between Pakistan and Bangladesh, at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi. — AFP

Leclerc sends Ferrari fans wild with Monza win

LECLERC WINS AT MONZA AFTER BOLD ONE-STOP STRATEGY

MCLAREN SECOND AND THIRD AFTER FRONT ROW START

PIASTRI SEIZED LEAD FROM NORRIS ON LAP ONE

CHAMPIONSHIP LEADER VERSTAPPEN ONLY SIXTH

MAGNUSSEN BANNED FOR A RACE



Winner Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc celebrates on the podium after the Italian Formula One Grand Prix race at Autodromo Nazionale Monza circuit, in Monza. — AFP

MONZA, ITALY: Charles Leclerc triggered wild Ferrari celebrations with a surprise home Italian Grand Prix victory on Sunday as favourites McLaren let slip a chance to go top in the Formula One championship.

The Monegasque finished 2.664 seconds ahead of McLaren's Oscar Piastri, who had seized the lead on lap one from team mate and title contender Lando Norris, as Ferrari made a bold strategy decision and reaped the rewards. Norris ended up third after starting from pole position at Monza's super-fast circuit and is now 62 points behind Red Bull's Max Verstappen, who finished only sixth, with eight races remaining.

Leclerc succeeded by making just one pitstop, to McLaren's two, and nursing a set of hard tyres for 38 of the 53 laps as he hung on for victory.

"Mamma Mia, Mamma Mia," he screamed over the team radio as former Italy soccer player Alessandro Del Piero waved the chequered flag.

"It's an incredible feeling," Leclerc said before the podium celebrations and traditional track invasion by an army of fans swamping the pit straight with a tidal wave of red shirts and flags. "I want to win Monza and Monaco every year and I have managed to do so. It is so, so special."

Leclerc, a winner at Monza in 2019 and at home in Monaco this year, was 11 seconds clear with seven laps to go and 8.3 ahead with five remaining as the crowd willed him on to his second victory of the season.

Piastri, who said the defeat hurt, had pitted for a second time on lap 39 after Norris did so at the end of lap 32.

"We considered a one-stop strategy the whole race but it was not possible with the amount of (tyre) graining I had," said Norris, who took a bonus point for fastest lap.

"We are disappointed but Ferrari drove a better race."

McLaren are now eight points behind Red Bull, down from a previous 30.

They opened the door for Ferrari on the opening lap when Piastri went past Norris at the second chicane — an aggressive move that forced the Briton to back off and allowed Leclerc, who started fourth, to speed past.

Norris took back the place by pitting earlier than Leclerc, an undercut that kept him ahead when the Ferrari came in, but the strategy then unravelled and McLaren were left with questions to answer about team priorities and tactics.



Supporters and Ferrari's fans celebrate Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc's victory after the Italian Formula One Grand Prix race at Autodromo Nazionale Monza circuit, in Monza. — AFP

ITALIAN GP RESULTS

1. Charles Leclerc (MON/Ferrari) 1hr 14min 40.727s, 2. Oscar Piastri (AUS/McLaren) at 2.664s, 3. Lando Norris (GBR/McLaren) 6.153, 4. Carlos Sainz (ESP/Ferrari) 15.621, 5. Lewis Hamilton (GBR/Mercedes) 22.820, 6. Max Verstappen (NED/Red Bull) 37.932, 7. George Russell (GBR/Mercedes) 39.715, 8. Sergio Perez (MEX/Red Bull) 54.148, 9. Alex Albon (THA/Williams) 1:07.456, 10. Kevin Magnussen (DEN/Haas) 1:08.302, 11. Fernando Alonso (ESP/Aston Martin) 1:08.495, 12. Franco Colapinto (ARG/Williams) 1:21.308, 13. Daniel Ricciardo (AUS/RB) 1:33.452, 14. Esteban Ocon (FRA/Alpine) 1

lap, 15. Pierre Gasly (FRA/Alpine-Renault) 1 lap, 16. Valtteri Bottas (FIN/Sauber) 1 lap, 17. Nico Hülkenberg (GER/Haas) 1 lap, 18. Zhou Guanyu (CHN/Sauber) 1 lap, 19. Lance Stroll (CAN/Aston Martin) 1 lap

FASTEST LAP: Lando Norris (GBR/McLaren)
DNF: Yuki Tsunoda (JPN/RB)

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS DRIVERS

1. Max Verstappen (NED) 303 pts, 2. Lando Norris (GBR) 241, 3. Charles Leclerc (MON) 217, 4. Oscar Piastri (AUS) 197, 5. Carlos Sainz (ESP) 184, 6. Lewis Hamilton (GBR) 164, 7. Sergio Pérez (MEX) 143, 8.

George Russell (GBR) 128, 9. Fernando Alonso (ESP) 50, 10. Lance Stroll (CAN) 24, 11. Nico Hulkenberg (GER) 22, 12. Yuki Tsunoda (JPN) 22, 13. Daniel Ricciardo (AUS) 12, 14. Pierre Gasly (FRA) 8, 15. Oliver Bearman (GBR) 6, 16. Kevin Magnussen (DEN) 6, 17. Alex Albon (THA) 6, 18. Esteban Ocon (FRA) 5, 19. Zhou Guanyu (CHN) 0, 20. Logan Sargeant (USA) 0, 21. Franco Colapinto (ARG) 0, 22. Valtteri Bottas (FIN) 0

CONSTRUCTORS

1. Red Bull 446 pts, 2. McLaren 438, 3. Ferrari 407, 4. Mercedes 292, 5. Aston Martin 74, 6. RB 34, 7. Haas 28, 8. Alpine 13, 9. Williams 6, 10. Sauber 0

"Oscar caught me by surprise as he got past," Norris told reporters. "I don't know what I could have done differently. If I brake a metre later, I probably would have crashed."

Carlos Sainz was fourth for Ferrari, overtaken by both McLarens in the final stages, with seven-times world champion and future Ferrari driver Lewis Hamilton fifth for Mercedes. George Russell was seventh for Mercedes after starting third but running off track and down as escape road at the start,

damaging his car.

Red Bull's Sergio Perez finished eighth, continuing a sequence of disappointment, and Alex Albon secured precious points in ninth for Williams who had Argentine Franco Colapinto finish 12th on his debut as replacement for Logan Sargeant.

Kevin Magnussen was 10th for Haas despite a 10 second penalty for causing a collision that triggered an automatic ban for the next race in Baku. — Reuters

Gauff joins exit of US Open superstars

NEW YORK: Coco Gauff joined Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz on the US Open scrap-heap on Sunday as the defending champion crashed out to Emma Navarro in a blizzard of mistakes as China's Zheng Qinwen won a record-setting 2:15 a.m. finish.

As Gauff exited, US chances were then rekindled when Frances Tiafoe and Taylor Fritz reached the men's last-eight, igniting hopes of a first home-grown male Grand Slam champion since Andy Roddick's win in New York in 2003.

Third-ranked Gauff slumped to a 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 fourth-round defeat to her fellow American on the back of 19 double faults and 60 unforced errors.

The 20-year-old's exit means Serena Williams remains the last woman to successfully defend the US Open title, in 2014.

"I lost in the first round the last two years and now to be making the quarterfinals is pretty insane," said Navarro, who will face Spain's Paula Badosa for a place in the semifinals.

Gauff's loss was another body blow to the season's final Grand Slam.

Djokovic, the defending men's

champion, was knocked out in the third round to suffer his earliest exit in 18 years.

Fellow crowd-pleaser Alcaraz, the 2022 winner in New York and reigning French Open and Wimbledon champion, was stunned in the second round.

"I gave it my all," said Gauff. "Obviously there were things execution-wise, where I was like, I wish I could serve better. I think if I did that, it would have been a different story."

Navarro had defeated Gauff at Wimbledon in July and was dominant again on Sunday from the outset.

The 23-year-old broke for 4-2 in the first set and sealed the opener in the ninth game where one rally stretched to 27 shots.

Gauff recovered from a break down in the second to level the match, but it was a brief respite as she served up three more double faults to slip a crucial break down again in the decider.

2:15 AM FINISH

Zheng reached the quarterfinals for a second time with victory over Donna Vekic in a record late finish for a women's



USA's Emma Navarro celebrates winning her women's singles round of 16 match against USA's Coco Gauff on day seven of the US Open tournament at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center. — AFP

match.

Seventh-seed Zheng won 7-6 (7/2), 4-6, 6-2 against her 24th-ranked Croatian opponent who she also defeated in the Paris Olympics final four weeks ago.

The early Monday morning finish was two minutes later than the old record of 2:13 a.m. from 2021, when Maria Sakkari

beat Bianca Andreescu in a last-16 tie.

"I like to play in the night session. Here in New York it's my first time," said Zheng in front of a few hundred spectators in the 24,000-capacity Arthur Ashe Stadium.

The powerful 21-year-old is only the second Chinese woman to appear in two quarterfinals in New York after Li Na in 2009 and 2013.

Zheng will next face world number two Aryna Sabalenka who defeated her in the last-eight in 2023 as well as in the final of the Australian Open in January. Sabalenka eased into a fourth successive quarterfinal with a 6-2, 6-4 win over Belgium's Elise Mertens.

Tiafoe joined former champions Andre Agassi, Roddick and Pete Sampras as the only American men to reach at least three US Open quarterfinals since 2000. The 20th-ranked Tiafoe notched a 6-4, 7-6 (7/3), 2-6, 6-3 victory over Alexei Popyrin, who shocked Djokovic in the previous round.

Tiafoe saved three set points in the second set and will face Bulgarian veteran Grigor Dimitrov for a place in the semifinals.

The 26-year-old became the second American man to reach the quarterfinals after Fritz defeated Casper Ruud earlier.

Tommy Paul can make it three, but he has to get past world number one Jannik Sinner on Monday. "I used to hit the ball off a wall dreaming about playing on Arthur Ashe Stadium where the Williams sisters won and where (Roger) Federer won like a million times," said Tiafoe. "I want to be part of that."

ZVEREV IN LAST EIGHT

Dimitrov, the ninth seed, put out Russian sixth seed Andrey Rublev, 6-3, 7-6 (7/3), 1-6, 3-6, 6-3 to return to the quarterfinals for the first time since 2019 when he defeated Federer on the Swiss legend's final appearance in New York.

Alexander Zverev, who blew a two-set lead to lose the 2020 final to Dominic Thiem, made his fourth quarterfinal by beating Brandon Nakashima of the United States, 3-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-2.

Up next is a last-eight clash with 12th seed Fritz who knocked out 2022 runner-up and eighth-ranked Ruud 3-6, 6-4, 6-3, 6-2 to reach his third Grand Slam quarterfinal this year. — AFP



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Lab launched to evaluate green hydrogen ecosystem readiness

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, SEPT 2

A two-week laboratory aimed at assessing and evaluating the readiness of the green hydrogen ecosystem in Oman was launched yesterday, September 2, in Muscat.

The laboratory was organised by Hydrom, the orchestrator of Oman's energy transition, in cooperation with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

In a statement, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, stressed the significance of assessing the readiness of the green hydrogen ecosystem to achieve the country's ambitious plans for the hydrogen sector.

"Oman's commitment to green hydrogen is a cornerstone of energy transition strategy and a critical pathway to achieving the ambitions set out in Oman



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Chairman of Hydrom

Vision 2040. The Ecosystem Readiness Lab is not just about preparing our infrastructure; it is about forging a unified, forward-looking strategy that aligns every sector of our economy towards a sustainable and prosperous future.

"By leveraging our natural resources, enhancing local capabilities and fostering global partnerships, we will cement Oman's position as a global leader in green hydrogen."

The laboratory will shed



Eng Abdulaziz al Shidhani Managing Director of Hydrom

light on five main sectors: construction and engineering, permits and regulatory framework, logistics, labour and manpower, and local content.

Over 127 participants from 30 government bodies and 16 private sector entities are taking part in the laboratory.

In a statement, Eng Abdulaziz al Shidhani, Managing Director of Hydrom, highlighted the significance of the laboratory sessions. "As we move towards

THE ECOSYSTEM READINESS LAB IS NOT JUST ABOUT PREPARING OUR INFRASTRUCTURE; IT IS ABOUT FORGING A UNIFIED, FORWARD-LOOKING STRATEGY THAT ALIGNS EVERY SECTOR OF OUR ECONOMY TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE AND PROSPEROUS FUTURE

our goal of producing over 1 million mtpa by 2030, our focus is on ensuring that every aspect of the ecosystem is fully prepared for the challenges and opportunities ahead, laying the groundwork for long-term economic resilience for Oman."

Adding, "These lab sessions are more than just a strategic exercise; they represent a significant step forward in ensuring that Oman's transition to green hydrogen is both inclusive and transformative."

Middle Eastern airlines see 5.8% increase in demand



Total demand, measured in revenue passenger kilometres, was up 8.0%. (Image for illustration only)

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 2

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) released data for July 2024 global passenger demand. Total demand, measured in revenue passenger kilometers (RPK), was up 8.0% compared to July 2023. Total capacity, measured in available seat kilometres, was up 7.4% year-on-year.

The July load factor was 86.0% (+0.5 ppt compared to July 2023). There was no significant negative demand impact from the CrowdStrike IT outage on July 19.

International demand rose 10.1% compared to July 2023. Capacity was up 10.5% year-on-year and the load factor fell to 85.9% (-0.3ppt compared to July 2023). Domestic demand rose 4.8% compared to July 2023. Capacity was up 2.8% year-on-year and the load factor was 86.1% (+1.7ppt compared to July 2023).

"July was another positive month. Passenger demand hit an all-time high for the industry and in all regions except Africa, despite significant disruption caused by the CrowdStrike IT outage," said Willie Walsh, IATA's Director-General.

"As the mix of travellers shifts from leisure to business, aviation's many roles are evident — reuniting families, enabling exploration and powering commerce. People need and want to fly. And they are doing that in great numbers. Load factors are at the practicable maximum.

However, persistent supply chain bottlenecks have made deploying the capacity to meet the need to travel more challenging. As much of the world returns from vacation, there is an urgent call for manufacturers and suppliers to resolve their supply chain issues so that air travel remains accessible and affordable to all those who rely on it," said Walsh.

All regions showed strong growth for international passenger markets in July 2024 compared to July 2023, with

signs that many markets are returning to long-term growth trends after the post-pandemic bounce back.

Asia-Pacific airlines' growth remained strong, with a 19.1% year-on-year increase in demand. Capacity increased 20.3% year-on-year and the load factor was 83.8% (-0.8ppt compared to July 2023). Most Asia routes have yet to exceed 2019 levels, except the Asia-Middle East route.

European carriers saw an 8.3% year-on-year increase in demand. Capacity increased 8.1% year-on-year, and the load factor was 87.5% (+0.2ppt compared to July 2023). In terms of major international routes, the Europe-Asia route expanded fastest, reflecting this is still to surpass 2019 levels.

Middle Eastern carriers saw a 5.8% year-on-year increase in demand. Capacity increased 5.5% year-on-year and the load factor was 84.1% (+0.3ppt compared to July 2023).

North American carriers saw a 5.3% year-on-year increase in demand. Capacity increased 6.3% year-on-year, and the load factor was 89.4% (-0.8 ppt compared to July 2023), the highest among regions.

Latin American airlines saw a 13.4% year-on-year increase in demand. Capacity climbed 15.7% year-on-year. The load factor was 87.5% (-1.7ppt compared to July 2023).

While hurricane Beryl had a strong localised impact in parts of the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico and southern United States, this did not significantly dampen demand region-wide.

African airlines saw a 7.4% year-on-year increase in demand. Capacity was up 6.7% year-on-year. The load factor rose to 74.3% (+0.5ppt compared to July 2023).

Domestic demand increased in July, with solid growth resulting in all key markets, bar India, reaching all-time highs. Brazil once again expanded fastest, while Japan and Australia rebounded from the previous month's negative growth.

Oman malls, corporates opt for solar lease options to go green

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 2

An innovative solar PV leasing and operating solution is behind a flurry of solar installations adorning the rooftops and carports of a number of leading shopping malls and other corporate establishments in the Sultanate of Oman.

Under the lease and operate model, the customer is spared the significant upfront cost of investing in solar PV panels, modules and other hardware necessary to be installed before being able to benefit from relatively competitive-priced solar-powered renewable electricity.

Instead, a vendor with the financial wherewithal and operating knowhow will bear the capital cost of the installation, and also maintain and operate the system against a long-term contract.

In turn, the customer pays a monthly fee, which may roughly compare with its previous energy bills based on subsidy-free, cost-reflective tariffs currently applied by electricity authorities for large commercial entities.

One such vendor that is making inroads into Oman's



Solar PV installations on the rooftops and carports of Mall of Oman.

small-scale captive PV sector based on the lease-and-operate model is Yellow Door Energy, a Dubai-based company with a presence spanning the Middle East and Africa.

"An Agreement for Equipment Lease and Operations is a long-term contract with a performance guarantee on your solar plant. There is no capital expense. You pay a monthly solar bill once the solar plant starts generating electricity," the company explained.

In Oman, the company has agreements to install and operate captive solar PV systems for five malls of Majid Al Futtaim (MAF). They include Mall of Oman, with a 2.4 MWp capacity system, City

Centre Muscat (3.7 MWp), City Centre Qurum (2.7 MWp), City Centre Sur (626 kWp) and City Centre Suhar (3.1 MWp).

In half-yearly results announced recently, Yellow Door Energy revealed that it has successfully commissioned a total of 14 solar power plants across the UAE, Bahrain and Oman, adding 20 megawatts-peak (MWp) to its portfolio.

"Additionally, Yellow Door Energy acquired five operating projects in Oman with a total capacity of 3.5 MWp, further solidifying its leadership position in the region," it noted.

According to the company, over 240 MWp of projects are in various stages of operation,

construction and planned in the Middle East. These initiatives, featuring over 46,000 solar panels, will be developed through solar leases or power purchase agreements (PPAs), it said.

Also during the first half of this year, Yellow Door Energy raised \$28 million in debt financing, which will be utilised to provide solar leases and renewable energy solutions to commercial and industrial businesses.

"This latest funding builds on the company's successful \$400 million in equity raised in 2022, which supports the ongoing development of sustainable energy projects across the Middle East and Africa," it added.

MGD set to launch 20 new showrooms in one month

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds (MGD), the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 355 showrooms across 13 countries, has unveiled the next phase of their global expansion plan, with the jewellery giant set to launch 20 new showrooms in the month of October. The showroom launches are being planned across various locations in India, the GCC and the USA. The ambitious expansion plan will mark a significant chapter in the brand's growth journey, further cementing its reputation as one of the world's largest and most trusted jewellery retail chains.

The expansion plan in India involves the launch of 3 showrooms in Uttar Pradesh, 2 showrooms each in Delhi, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan and 1 showroom each in Odisha, Telangana, West Bengal and Punjab. Internationally, Malabar Gold & Diamonds will strengthen its already robust presence in the UAE, Qatar and the KSA with new showrooms opening in Muweilah, Sharjah; Muaither and Nakheel Mall



respectively. The brand's growing presence in North America will also be bolstered with the launch of 2 new showrooms, in Artesia, Los Angeles, and Atlanta, Georgia.

Commenting on the occasion, Malabar Group Chairman, M P Ahammed said: "While the opening of these 20 showrooms aligns with our long-term vision of becoming the world's No 1 jewellery retailer, the aggressive expansion we have charted

is about growing sustainably and responsibly, ensuring that our expansion benefits not just our business, but also the society at large. Through our unwavering commitment to the causes of ethical business practices, responsible sourcing and sustainability, we are proud to call ourselves a Responsible Jeweller, having been awarded the prestigious India Gold Conference (IGC) Responsible

Jewellery House Award for 2023-24. Our brand has always stood for trust, transparency and quality, and these new showrooms will embody these values. With 5 per cent of our profits set aside towards ESG initiatives in every region we operate in, we are also committed to bringing about a positive change in the community."

Every new showroom will showcase a wide range of jewellery

collections, from traditional to contemporary designs, designed to provide an immersive shopping experience that resonates with the brand's ethos of excellence. With a focus on customer comfort and satisfaction, the showrooms will host a wide range of amenities from customised jewellery designing facility to a luxurious lounge area.

"Our decision to open 20 new showrooms in such a short span

reflects our robust growth strategy and confidence in the markets we serve. With a focus on both geographical diversification and strengthening our presence in existing markets, we are ahead of the curve in terms of market penetration. We are committed to offering not just jewellery, but an experience that delights and inspires our customers, ensuring they find pieces that resonate with their personal style and cultural heritage," commented Shamlal Ahamed, MD-International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds has been a pioneer in engineering customer-first initiatives that assure customers of unparalleled product quality, service assurance and a host of post purchase guarantees. Coined the 'Malabar Promise', every purchase from Malabar Gold & Diamonds comes with the assurance of 100 per cent exchange value on Gold & Diamonds, Free lifetime maintenance, assured buyback, fair prices, responsible sourcing and more.

NBO hackathon concludes with innovative solutions

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) recently concluded the NBO Hackathon as part of its Fintech Accelerator Programme, held from August 30 to September 1, 2024 at the NBO head office. The event was a resounding success, bringing together Oman's brightest fintech innovators to develop creative solutions and showcase their entrepreneurial skills. The winning teams were awarded cash prizes, with the first-place winner, team Archon Wallet, receiving RO 2,000, second place going to team Finsync, receiving RO 1,000 and third place was team CoinEdge, awarded RO 500. The NBO Hackathon received over 300 applications, with 90 applicants shortlisted for the 48-hour hackathon.

A special closing ceremony celebrated the event's success and winners, with several distinguished VIP attendees present, including Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive



President of the Central Bank of Oman, and Mahmoud bin Abdullah al Owaini, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance, with the presence of Amal Suhail Bahwan, Chairperson of NBO, and Abdullah bin Zahrn al Hinal, Chief Executive Officer of NBO.

Over 48 hours, 17 teams engaged in intensive brainstorming and development sessions, creating innovative fintech solutions to address real-world challenges. The event culminated in three finalist presentations to a panel of judges comprised of industry experts

and leaders, who evaluated the projects based on their innovation, feasibility and potential impact. The judging panel included members from diverse expertise, which comprised Azzan al Kindi, CEO and Co-founder of Rihal, Ghada al Kharusi, Innovation Manager at the Central Bank of Oman, Mohammed al Wahaibi, CEO of Al Jabr MENA, and Ferenc Bole, Head of Information Technology at NBO.

Mustahil bin Ahmed al Maamari, Assistant General Manager and Head of Strategy and Transformation at NBO, expressed his enthusiasm for the

outcomes: "The Hackathon was just the beginning of an exciting journey for the participants. The winners will potentially advance to the next step in our Fintech Accelerator Programme, where they will receive further support to turn their innovative ideas into fully operational ventures. We are amazed by the calibre of innovations and creativity levels the participants presented."

He added, "The NBO Fintech Accelerator is committed to nurturing Oman's fintech ecosystem, which aligns with our goals and in-country value initiatives. By fostering local talent and supporting innovative start-ups, we aim to contribute to Oman's economic diversification and our communities' sustainable development. We are excited to see these ideas develop further and make a lasting impact on both the financial sector and the broader economy."

OOMCO graduates second batch from 'Experience Hub' Programme

MUSCAT: Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) celebrated the graduation of a second batch from its pioneering 'Experience Hub' Programme. Launched in partnership with the Ministry of Labour in 2022, the initiative is designed to guide new graduates as they embark on their career paths, equipping them with the necessary skillsets and industry know-how to excel and thrive. The programme is part of OOMCO's CSR efforts to continue investing in Oman's future by developing a skilled and capable workforce, aligned with the broader objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Khamis bin Nasser al Shuaibi, GM Shared Services at OOMCO, stated, "We are very proud to graduate this new wave of young Omanis who have successfully completed the programme. The hands-on experience and



valuable insights they have gained will not only stay with them throughout their careers, enhancing their employability, but also empower them to positively contribute to the energy sector and the nation's growth."

The Experience Hub Programme offers graduates a comprehensive one-year on-the-job training experience, immersing them in various

departments across OOMCO, including Health, Safety and Environment (HSE), Marketing, Sales, Business Development, Corporate Affairs, and the Service, Food and Retail. By blending practical training with their academic foundations, the programme equips graduates with vital transferable skills essential for today's dynamic job market.

As an integral part of

OOMCO's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy, the Experience Hub Programme exemplifies the company's dedication to fostering growth and adding value to local communities. Through impactful initiatives in education, charity and environmental programmes, OOMCO is committed to making a meaningful impact to Oman's socio-economic development.

National Finance champions youth entrepreneurship



MUSCAT: National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman's leading finance company, partnered with Injaz Oman to announce the winners of 'The Company' 2024 competition at a prestigious ceremony. This event celebrated the remarkable achievements of the participants, highlighting the exceptional entrepreneurial spirit, ingenuity and potential of Omani youth. National Finance's collaboration with Injaz Oman highlights the company's commitment to supporting initiatives that foster learning and growth among the youth, equipping the next generation of leaders with the skills necessary to drive the nation's ongoing socio-economic development.

Injaz Oman's 'The Company' programme and competition provides a platform for secondary school, high school and university students to channel their ambitions, offering them practical knowledge on launching and managing successful businesses. Through this programme, participants gain valuable insights into organisational and operational procedures, the challenges and rewards of entrepreneurship and key business functions. This comprehensive approach empowers students from diverse backgrounds to

realise their aspirations, thereby making a meaningful impact on their communities. National Finance played a pivotal role as the Main Sponsor for the University category of the competition, underscoring the company's dedication to empowering the nation's youth.

Commending the young achievers, Tariq bin Suleiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, expressed his pride, stating, "It is our pleasure to witness the entrepreneurial potential of Omani youth shining brightly at the closing ceremony of the Company Programme and Competition 2024. This event provided a significant platform where innovators came together, collectively shaping the path of the country's economic progress. Through our fruitful and long-standing partnership with Injaz Oman, we embody National Finance's unwavering commitment to empowering Omani youth and supporting their entrepreneurial ideas, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040. Our aim is to build a productive and diversified economy driven by innovation, fostering sustainable and comprehensive development that propels the economic and social progress of the country towards promising and bright horizons."

KIA’S ALL-NEW EV5 LAUNCHED IN MOROCCO

HAMMAM AL BADI
MOROCCO, SEPT 2

The *Observer* was delighted to attend Kia’s launch event for the all-new EV5 electric vehicle. The event, organised by Kia Middle East & Africa, marked a significant milestone in Kia’s journey towards electric mobility.

Held in Morocco, the event attracted a distinguished audience, including media representatives, industry experts and key stakeholders.

The Kia EV5, which was the star of the show, is set to revolutionise the electric vehicle market with its advanced features and sleek design.

With this launch, Kia continues to position itself at the forefront of the electric vehicle revolution. Ahmed Soudodi, Vice-President of Product and Marketing at Kia Middle East and Africa, has underscored the exceptional performance of the new Kia EV5.

“The Kia EV5 represents a significant leap in electric vehicle technology,” said Soudodi. “It is available with three distinct powertrains — short range, long range and long range all-wheel drive — designed to meet a variety of customer needs.”

He further explained that the EV5, built on the advanced EGMP platform used in the EV6



and EV9, includes a 64.2 kWh battery for the short range model.

The long range version, offered in both front-wheel and all-wheel drive, features an 88.1 kWh battery capacity, accelerating from 0 to 100 km/h in just 6.1 seconds.

“All models are equipped with fast-charging capabilities,” Soudodi added, “ensuring unparalleled convenience and efficiency for our customers.”

Jae Yeoun Park, Senior Exterior Designer at Kia Next Design, commented on the design of the new EV5, “The exterior of the EV5 offers a distinctive blend of contrasts. From the side, the vehicle presents a profile that is both bold and robust, yet sleek

and dynamic.”

“The power fenders are seamlessly connected by fluid surfaces that convey a sense of agile movement. This design approach not only enhances spatial orientation, but also balances solidity with openness, creating a pleasant, airy and light atmosphere.” On full charge, the car can run continuously for 500 kilometres.

KEY FEATURES OF THE KIA EV5:
The Kia EV5 is a next-generation electric vehicle that exemplifies Kia’s commitment to sustainability and innovation. It is designed to offer an unparalleled driving experience, combining

performance, safety and luxury.

PERFORMANCE AND POWERTRAIN:
The EV5 is equipped with a high-performance electric motor, offering smooth acceleration and a dynamic driving experience. Its large-capacity battery provides an impressive driving range, ensuring reliability for both city and long-distance travel.

EXTERIOR DESIGN:
The vehicle’s exterior is a blend of modern aesthetics and functional aerodynamics. With its sharp lines and signature LED lighting, the EV5 stands out as a symbol of modern luxury.

INTERIOR COMFORT:

Inside, the EV5 is designed with comfort and convenience in mind. The cabin features high-quality materials, a spacious layout and a large digital display, creating an inviting and technologically advanced environment.

BATTERY CHARGING CAPABILITIES:
The EV5 is designed with advanced battery technology, offering fast-charging capabilities that significantly reduce downtime.

The vehicle supports multiple charging options, including DC fast charging, which can recharge the battery from 30 to 80 per cent in under 30 minutes.

Additionally, the EV5 is equipped with regenerative braking technology, which helps to extend the driving range by converting kinetic energy back into electrical power during deceleration.

CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY:
The EV5 comes equipped with the latest automotive technology, including an advanced infotainment system with smartphone integration, and a suite of driver assistance features such as advanced navigation, stability control and 360-degree camera systems.

ADVANCED SAFETY FEATURES:
Safety is paramount in the EV5, which is equipped with a comprehensive suite of advanced safety technologies. Key features include automatic emergency braking, forward collision warning, blind-spot monitoring, and lane-keeping assist, all of which contribute to a safer driving experience.

SUSTAINABILITY:
Reflecting Kia’s commitment to environmental stewardship, the EV5 uses eco-friendly materials and offers exceptional energy efficiency, reducing its environmental footprint.

DME rebrands to Gulf Mercantile Exchange

BUSINESS REPORTER
DUBAI, SEPT 2

The Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME), a leading energy-focused commodities exchange in the Middle East, has announced its rebranding to the Gulf Mercantile Exchange (GME). This transformative step marks the beginning of a new era for the exchange, reflecting its broader ambitions to serve the growing needs of the region’s trading community and beyond.

The decision to rebrand follows extensive strategic planning and aligns with the exchange’s commitment to innovation, expansion and market leadership. The Gulf Mercantile Exchange will build on the solid foundation established by DME, while embracing a broader vision to deliver cutting-edge trading solutions and a wider range of commodities to a more diverse and dynamic market.

“As we transition to the Gulf Mercantile Exchange, we are not just changing our name but redefining our identity,” said Raid



al Salami, Managing Director, GME. “This rebranding is a reflection of our evolution as a company and our ambition to broaden our reach and impact in the Gulf region and beyond. We are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead and are committed to delivering unparalleled value to our trading partners and stakeholders.”

Under the GME banner, the exchange will expand its offerings beyond energy commodities to include a diverse array of products.

This expansion aims to attract a wider range of market participants, providing them with access to a robust and versatile trading platform that meets the highest standards of security, transparency and efficiency.

While GME will operate under a new name, the exchange remains deeply rooted in the values and principles that have guided it since its inception. GME will continue to foster a collaborative trading environment, working closely with regulatory bodies, industry partners and market participants to ensure a secure, transparent and efficient marketplace.

The rebranding to GME represents more than just a change of name — it signifies a renewed commitment to growth, innovation and service excellence.

GME is poised to lead the region’s trading landscape into the future, embracing new opportunities and challenges with the same pioneering spirit that has defined its legacy.

Euro zone factories stuck in a rut; Asia shows signs of recovery

LONDON: Factories in the euro zone remained mired in contraction last month, surveys showed, with the data suggesting a recovery could be some way off but Asian and British manufacturers showed tentative signs of recovery.

However, analysts say prospects of slowing US growth, which is likely to lead to interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve this month, and uncertainty over the outcome of the presidential election there cloud the trade outlook.

HCOB’s final euro zone manufacturing Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI), compiled by S&P Global, stood at 45.8 in August, just ahead of a 45.6 preliminary estimate but well below the 50 mark separating growth from contraction.

“The final August manufacturing PMI reading was yet another indication the recovery of the industrial sector will neither be immediate nor vigorous, as the euro zone index remains stuck in contractionary territory,” said Riccardo Marcelli Fabiani at Oxford Economics.

A PMI covering new orders sank to its lowest since December and demand from abroad also fell at the fastest rate this year.

That decline came as euro zone manufacturers raised their prices for the first time in 16 months, driven by factories in France, the Netherlands, Greece and Italy.

Still, overall inflation in the



A worker walks in front of a blast furnace at a ThyssenKrupp steel factory in Duisburg, Germany. — Reuters

currency bloc fell to a three-year low of 2.2 per cent in August, preliminary official data showed on Friday, strengthening the case for further policy easing from the European Central Bank.

It will cut its deposit rate twice more this year, in September and December, according to more than 80 per cent of economists in an August Reuters poll, fewer reductions than markets currently expect.

The downturn in German manufacturing accelerated and in France activity contracted at the fastest pace since January.

But in Britain factories had their strongest month in more than two years as demand at home offset a

fall in exports, adding to signs of momentum in the economy.

That poses a favourable backdrop for the new government of Prime Minister Keir Starmer who is seeking to speed up growth.

Asian chip makers benefited from firm demand but economic headwinds pose a risk to the region. China’s Caixin/S&P Global manufacturing PMI rose to 50.4 in August from 49.8 in July, beating analysts’ forecasts.

The reading, mostly covering smaller, export-oriented firms, shows a more optimistic view than an official PMI survey on Saturday, which indicated an ongoing decline in manufacturing activity.

— Reuters

Oil prices extend losses on weak China data

LONDON: Oil prices slipped on Monday, extending losses from the end of last week on expectations of higher Opec + production from October while signs of sluggish demand in China and the United States raised concerns about future consumption growth.

Brent crude futures were down 8 cents, or 0.1 per cent, at \$76.85 a barrel by 1020 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate crude slipped 11 cents, or 0.2 per cent, to \$73.44.

Brent and WTI had lost 1.4 per

cent and 3.1 per cent respectively on Friday. With momentum skewed to the downside, there is a real risk that prices could revisit a range at multi-month lows, said Chris Weston, head of research at brokerage Pepperstone.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and its allies, together known as Opec+, is set to proceed with planned increases to oil output from October, six sources from the producer group said.

Eight Opec + members are scheduled to boost output by



Oil tanker is seen at a crude oil terminal in Ningbo Zhoushan port, China. — Reuters

180,000 barrels per day (bpd) in October as part of a plan to begin unwinding their most recent layer of supply cuts of 2.2 million bpd while keeping other cuts in place

until the end of 2025.

There are fears for an even larger jump in production, which could tilt the demand-supply balance even more negatively

and apply stronger downside pressure to prices, said Achilleas Georgolopoulos, investment analyst at brokerage XM.

“These stronger production increases could also come at a period when the global economy is probably slowing down, with China continuing to disappoint,” he added. Both Brent and WTI have posted losses for two consecutive months as US and Chinese demand concerns have outweighed recent disruptions in Libyan oil supply and supply risk related to conflict in the Middle

East. While Libyan exports remain halted, the Arabian Gulf Oil Company has resumed output at up to 120,000 bpd to meet domestic needs, engineers said on Sunday after the standoff between the factions shut most of the country’s oilfields.

More pessimism about Chinese demand growth surfaced after an official survey showed on Saturday that manufacturing activity sank to a six-month low in August as factory gate prices tumbled and owners struggled for orders. — Reuters



TARIQ AL BARWANI
The author is the founder of Knowledge Oman.

The impact of using the magic word ‘please’ in transforming communication

Most of my friends, relatives and business associates find it interesting when we meet at a coffee shop and see the employee at the counter smiling, calling me by name, and even remembering the type and size of coffee that I ordered.

I wish they knew that the same occurs and is replicated at home (with housekeepers, domestic workers, cleaners, gardeners, etc.), at the office (with co-workers, colleagues, etc.), and with everyone I meet, whether first time or regularly. The secret is simply using the magic word “please” ahead of anything I ask for.

Try this, make it a habit, and see the results before your own eyes. It costs nothing really yet makes a world of difference to you

(as a manager, customer, or the like) so as to the worker, friend, or whoever you are asking for something, be it for a favour or a command/instruction.

On the other hand, I want you to look closely at the people that ask and request for things without the magic word “please”.

You will notice they are at most of the time disliked, so they are not served with pleasure. In fact, the moment the worker, employee, and/or person being requested gets the chance to not be dependent on the requester (e.g., their boss), they will also disregard supporting or serving them too (let aside looking for an exit ultimately).

I have seen this personally in many instances, and it has been complained about by many individuals. I know a worker who asked to leave a job and even lose money temporarily just because

she felt unappreciated. Employees and workers that feel respected and valued are more engaged at their work. In fact, research from Harvard Business Review (HBR) reported that approximately 48 per cent of employees are less likely to put extra effort into their tasks if they feel disrespected (and not valued). Not saying or using the word “please” doesn’t mean one is disrespected, yet it definitely doesn’t contribute to creating a healthy dialogue and indeed a healthy workplace culture.

I received a lot of feedback on my last week article that revolved around using the two-word “thank you”, which of course, as a result, leads to higher productivity, as well as creating a healthy and respectful culture as well.

I realised that I missed coupling the words with a preceding magic word “please” and hence decided

to share it in this article in order to emphasise the importance as well as the quality output one may achieve from using the same effectively. The process is quite simple: for anything you ask for, use the word “please”, and once you get the answer or result, use the word “thank you”.

Regardless of the outcome, just thank first and explain whether the answer is favourable or not (i.e., was what you really wanted). I do this with everyone, and the result is high respect and recognition, as noted in the beginning of my article this week.

Another thing you would notice from using the words regularly is that others would use the same towards you, so as you will influence people around you to use the same, creating an example and a healthy working culture around you. A collaborative, supportive and

caring environment is, most of the time, the result of using these words genuinely.

Apart from respect, one would also create loyalty, quality relationships, and following too. Trust me, one would easily influence and impact others by utilising the words genuinely and appropriately.

The importance of utilising the words “please” and “thank you” in our daily communication is vital, for they truly transform our interactions profoundly, be it at a personal or professional setting and/or level.

They may seem very simple or basic, but the kind of results and support that emanate from utilising the same is titanic. Until we catch up again next week, make “please” and “thank you” a habit from now onwards, and see your life transform beautifully as well.

Oman and India: Partnership forging mutual prosperity

The centuries-old connection between Oman and India, forged through maritime trade and cultural exchange, has evolved into a strategic partnership brimming with potential.

The strength of this alliance is evident in the flourishing economic ties and the shared aspiration for a prosperous future. The numbers tell a story of remarkable growth: bilateral trade exceeding \$12 billion, over 6,000 joint ventures and investments surpassing \$7.5 billion. Yet, these figures only hint at the possibilities that arise when two nations, deeply connected by history and geography, collaborate to achieve shared prosperity.

The 5,000-year-old Oman-India relationship has fostered a vibrant Indian community of over 600,000, integral to Oman’s development. The robust economic ties, evident in the substantial bilateral trade, underscore the potential for even greater collaboration.

As both nations pursue ambitious development goals in an ever-evolving world, strategic partnerships become paramount.

Oman’s allure as a creative industries hub is undeniable, presenting promising opportunities in sectors like film, fashion, jewellery, sports, and more.

The Sultanate of Oman’s welcoming atmosphere and strategic location make it an attractive prospect for Indian talent and investment.

The article highlights the importance of existing trade agreements, but exploring a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the USA could further unlock Oman’s economic potential and diversify its trade relationships.

For India, Oman serves as a strategic gateway to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and African markets. Oman’s flourishing special economic zones, particularly in Duqm, Salalah and Suhar, offer Indian manufacturers prime opportunities to establish regional hubs.

The Sultanate of Oman’s



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investor-friendly policies and advantageous location at the crossroads of global trade routes make it a compelling proposition for Indian businesses.

The ongoing negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) demonstrate a commitment to strengthening economic ties. CEPA transcends traditional trade deals, envisioning an integrated economic landscape that could potentially double current trade and investment figures.

For Indian businesses, especially SMEs, CEPA could unlock new markets, simplify regulations and create a more predictable and favourable business environment.

Let us explore some of the key sectors that offer immense potential for enhanced cooperation:

- **Energy Transformation:** India’s expertise in renewable energy perfectly complements Oman’s ambitious goal of 30 per cent renewable electricity by 2030. Joint ventures in solar, wind and especially green hydrogen development could position both nations as leaders in the global shift towards clean energy.
- **Technology and Innovation:** India’s IT sector is a global powerhouse. This expertise can be instrumental in driving Oman’s digital transformation journey. Imagine collaborative ventures in artificial intelligence, fintech, and cybersecurity, creating a vibrant tech ecosystem that fosters innovation and economic growth. The MoU for cooperation in IT signed during His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq’s visit to India in December 2023 lays a strong foundation for such collaborations.
- **Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals:** The pandemic



has highlighted the critical importance of accessible and resilient healthcare systems. Indian pharmaceutical companies, renowned for their quality and affordability, can leverage Oman’s strategic location to establish production facilities serving the wider Middle East and African markets, improving healthcare access for millions. The first Joint Working Group meeting on Health held in February 2023 is a step in the right direction.

- **Tourism and Hospitality:** Oman’s breathtaking landscapes, rich cultural heritage and warm hospitality are a treasure trove waiting to be discovered. As we aim to welcome 11 million annual visitors by 2040, Indian expertise in hospitality can help us craft unforgettable tourism experiences, benefiting both economies. The recent MoU in the field of culture further strengthens the potential for collaboration in tourism and cultural exchange.
- **Education and Skill Development:** The future belongs to the knowledge-driven economies. Partnerships

between Indian and Omani educational institutions can foster academic exchanges, joint research programmes and skill development initiatives that equip our youth with the tools to thrive in the 21st century. The establishment of the ICCR Chair of Indian Studies-Hindi Language at Dhofar University is a commendable initiative in this direction.

To realise the full potential of our partnership, we must focus on:

1. Expediting CEPA negotiations to provide a comprehensive framework for economic cooperation.
2. Streamlining trade procedures and addressing non-tariff barriers to facilitate smoother business operations.
3. Promoting cross-border investments through targeted incentives and showcasing sector-specific opportunities. The Oman-India Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF), with its third tranche of \$300 million, is a testament to our commitment to fostering investment ties.
4. Establishing joint innovation hubs to catalyse technological advancements that

benefit both economies.

5. Enhancing cultural and educational exchanges to foster deeper understanding and cooperation. Initiatives like the ‘The Oman Collection — Archival Heritage of the Indian Community in Oman’ project contribute significantly to this goal.

The Oman-India partnership is at a crossroads. Our shared history and common aspirations beckon us towards a future of shared prosperity. Let us leverage our complementary strengths and embrace the opportunities that lie before us.

As His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq eloquently stated, “Our relations are based on a solid foundation of shared values and interests.”

Let us build upon this foundation, fortified by the spirit of collaboration and innovation, to create a partnership that not only benefits our two nations, but serves as a beacon of hope and progress for the entire region. The journey ahead is filled with promise. Let us walk it together, hand in hand, towards a future where Oman and India stand tall as partners in progress.

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ANIMAL PLANET

A Formosan black bear stays at its enclosure at the government-run bear shelter Wushikeng Research Center in Taichung, Taiwan. —Reuters



CELEBRATION

Britain's King Charles III looks at exhibits during a visit to the Royal Horticultural Society of Aberdeen's 200th Flower Show at Duthie Park, Aberdeen, Scotland. — AFP



BOLLYWOOD

Bollywood actor Salman Khan attends an unveiling ceremony of eco-friendly idols of Hindu deity Ganesha, crafted by students in Mumbai. — AFP



MUSIC

A mariachi from the group "Sol de America" performs during the 31st International Mariachi gathering accompanied by the symphony orchestra of Jalisco in Guadalajara, Jalisco State, Mexico. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Actor Jude Law attends the red carpet of the movie "The Order" presented in competition during the 81st International Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido. — AFP

art & life

TUESDAY | SEPTEMBER 3, 2024 | SAFAR 29, 1446 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



A SHOWCASE OF OMANI TALENTS IN UK EXHIBITION

The British Omani Society Art Group's UK exhibition spotlights three emerging Omani artists, offering them training, international exposure and a prestigious platform to showcase their work. This initiative strengthens cultural ties between Oman and the UK, highlighting the significance of cross-cultural artistic exchanges and the development of Omani art on a global stage... P20



Shanghai Museum welcomes feline visitors to peruse Egyptian cat imagery at 'Meow Night'

SHANGHAI MUSEUM HAS pulled in crowds this summer for an exhibition of ancient Egyptian relics including cat statues and other feline imagery, and which on Saturday nights allows up to 200 visitors to bring along their own four-legged friends. Inspired ancient Egyptians' worship of Bastet, the goddess of protection — often depicted as a cat — the museum has given cats the chance to interact with part of the exhibition called "The Secrets of Saqqara". "Egyptian archaeological teams discovered a cat temple in Saqqara and unearthed many cat mummies and cat statues. So when we were planning the event, we had cats as a theme, and then came the idea for 'Meow Night'," said Shanghai Museum Deputy Director Li Feng. The "Top of the Pyramids: Ancient Egyptian Civilisation Exhibition" began on July 19 and runs until August 17, 2025, with

"Meow Night" planned for at least 10 Saturdays. It has held six so far with tickets, including 200 bring-a-cat tickets, selling out each time. Visitors bring their cats in carriers or pet strollers and can take them out only at designated areas, such as for a photo opportunity next to a statue of Bastet. The cats are checked on entry to ensure up-to-date vaccinations and for signs of illness or stress. There are veterinarians onsite and rest areas for cats in case the stimulation from their night at the museum gets a bit much. "It's very special that you can bring a cat with you," said visitor Qiu Jiakai who was attending "Meow Night" with one-year-old puss An Mao. "I listened to the narrator's introduction saying... many of today's pet cats are related to the cats domesticated in ancient Egypt. So I thought I would have to bring my cat here to see its ancestors and the cat goddess," she said.

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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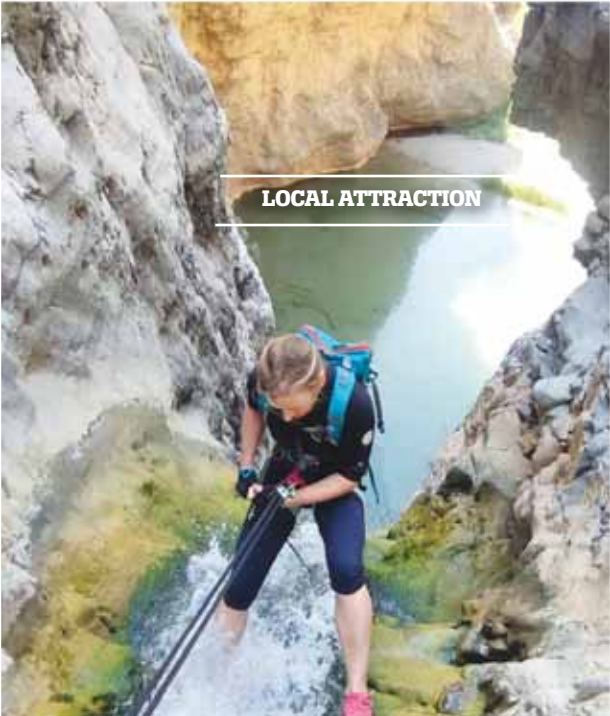
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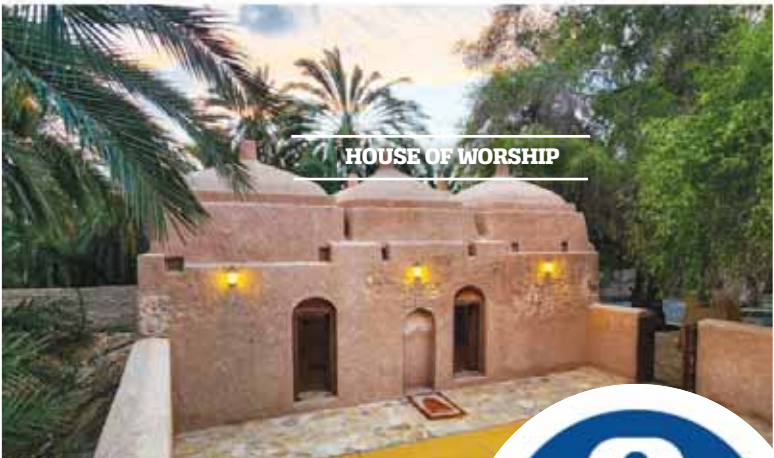
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SWISS CITY OF BASEL TO HOST EUROVISION 2025

BASEL WILL HOST the 2025 Eurovision Song Contest after the Swiss border city was chosen on Friday to stage the 69th edition of the glitzy annual TV extravaganza.

Swiss singer Nemo's 2024 Eurovision victory gave Switzerland the right to host next year's event, with a huge global audience guaranteed.

Right on the borders with France and Germany, Switzerland's third-biggest city was given the nod ahead of Geneva.

The contest will be staged at the St. Jakobshalle indoor arena, with semi-finals set for May 13 and 15, while the final is to take place on May 17.

"Basel's strategic location at the crossroads of Europe makes it the ideal setting for an event that celebrates the power of music to connect people across borders," Eurovision executive supervisor Martin Osterdahl said in a statement.

From its earnest black-and-white 1950s beginnings, Eurovision has ballooned into a colourful giant kitsch celebration that never takes itself too seriously.

The contest puts host cities in the spotlight, with 163 million viewers worldwide watching this year's event in Malmö, Sweden, where Nemo triumphed in May with the highly personal song "The Code".

Hosting also has a knock-on boost for the hotel and tourism industries as Eurovision fanatics, artists and country delegations flock in.

- FOOTBALL STADIUM PARTY ZONE -

Opened in 1976, St. Jakobshalle styles itself as Switzerland's top multi-purpose arena. The venue can hold more than 12,000 spectators.

Fans without golden tickets for the arena will be able to flock to the 40,000-capacity St Jakob-Park football stadium across the street to watch the final on a giant screen, and see performances by former Eurovision stars.

Meanwhile, the Steinenvorstadt district, known for its cinemas, will be transformed into "Eurovision Street".

"It is a great honour for Basel to be able to host the world's biggest live music event!" said Conradin Cramer, president of the Basel city authority.

On the River Rhine, Basel is an international hub for the chemical and pharmaceutical industries, hosting the headquarters of Novartis and Roche.

But it also has its cultural side, with several internationally-renowned museums, and the annual Art Basel event, the world's top contemporary art fair.

- FOUR DOWN TO ONE -

direct say on how their taxes are spent, and some were bristling at the potential costs and hassle of bringing the Eurovision circus to town.

Eurovision is a non-profit event, mostly financed by weighted contributions from participating EBU broadcasters.

Eurovision says that "given the benefits that will flow" to host cities, they must make also make a contribution.

The Basel-City authority is looking at putting in 34.9 million Swiss francs (\$41.5 million), subject to a vote in the city assembly on September 11.

- SHADOW OF CELINE DION -

Nemo's victory was only the third time Switzerland had won Eurovision.

Lys Assia won the first-ever contest in 1956 with "Refrain".

Canadian then-starlet Celine Dion triumphed for Switzerland in 1988 singing "Ne partez pas sans moi", launching her career internationally.

Switzerland staged the 1956 contest at the Teatro Kursaal in Lugano and declined to host again in 1957, while the 1989 event was held in the Palais de Beaulieu in Lausanne.

After being staged in the Italian- and then French-speaking regions, Basel will therefore bring Eurovision to the main German-speaking part of Switzerland for the first time. — **AFP**



The decision was made by the host broadcaster SRG, and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) public service media alliance which owns Eurovision.

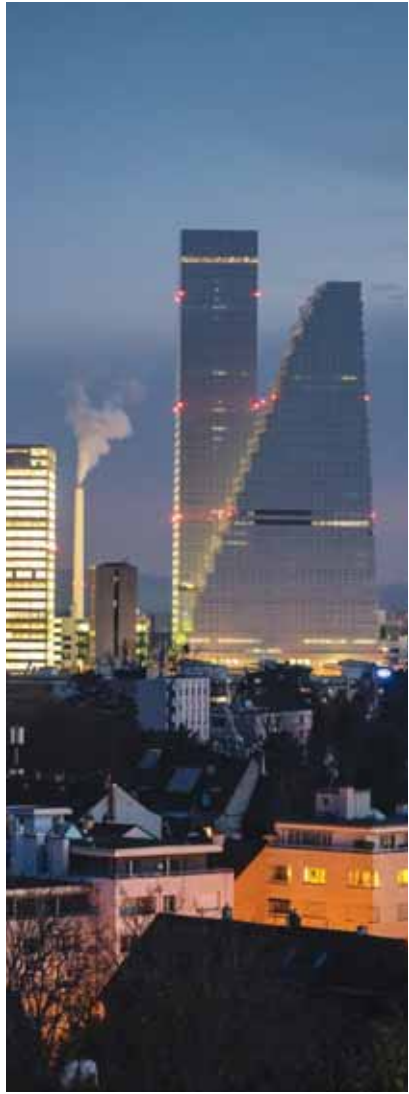
The venue, public transport links, sustainability, hotel accommodation, security, investment, event experience and the support from the city were key factors in the decision.

Following a surge of early enthusiasm from Swiss cities after Nemo's victory, only four formal bids emerged by the end of June deadline.

Zurich, plus Bern in conjunction with Nemo's hometown Biel, were eliminated in mid-July, leaving just Geneva and Basel in play.

The financial demands of hosting Eurovision — and, from a minor Christian fundamentalist party, fear of the occult — sparked threats of local referendums that could throw a spanner in the works.

Swiss voters are used to having a



CHANGING WORLD



Australian sauna helps save frogs from flesh-eating fungus

HUNDREDS OF ENDANGERED Australian Green and Golden Bell frogs huddle inside a sauna, shielded from Sydney's winter chill.

The sauna — a small greenhouse containing black-painted bricks warmed by the sun — may be pleasant, but it also protects the frogs from a deadly chytrid fungus that would otherwise drive them to extinction.

Macquarie University biologist Anthony Waddle holds one frog — no bigger than a credit card — in

extinction, making them one of the most vulnerable invertebrate groups, a recent study by the International Union for Conservation of Nature found.

Some of the biggest drivers include loss of habitat, climate change and the chytrid disease.

These drivers are difficult to tackle, but in the absence of a cure, Waddle hopes his frog saunas can help limit the losses.

"This might be the first evidence that we could cheaply and feasibly reduce that nasty yearly



his hand as its green and gold colours become more vibrant in the heat.

"Chytrid is the worst pathogen ever," he said.

It is a water-borne disease that burrows into the frogs' skin, attacking their bodies and eventually killing them.

Waddle said that globally, the disease has caused the decline of 500 amphibian species and driven 90 to extinction — six in Australia.

"Nothing has ever caused this much devastation," he said. "In Australia, we have frogs that only live in glass boxes now. This is a huge, ongoing problem."

But Waddle's dollhouse-sized saunas could change that.

In their warm interiors, the deadly chytrid fungus cannot grow on the frogs, allowing them to fight off the infection and survive.

-NO ONE SOLUTION-

Frogs play a vital role in the environment and are known as bioindicators, which are used to assess the health of ecosystems.

Without the amphibians, entire ecosystems can collapse.

Globally, 41 per cent of frog species are threatened with

die-off of frogs," Waddle said.

"For Green and Golden Bell frogs, that could mean the difference between a population going or persisting."

He said the saunas show that creative solutions ranging from the complex — such as identifying genes that could make individuals resistant to chytrid — to more simple are needed if frog populations are to survive.

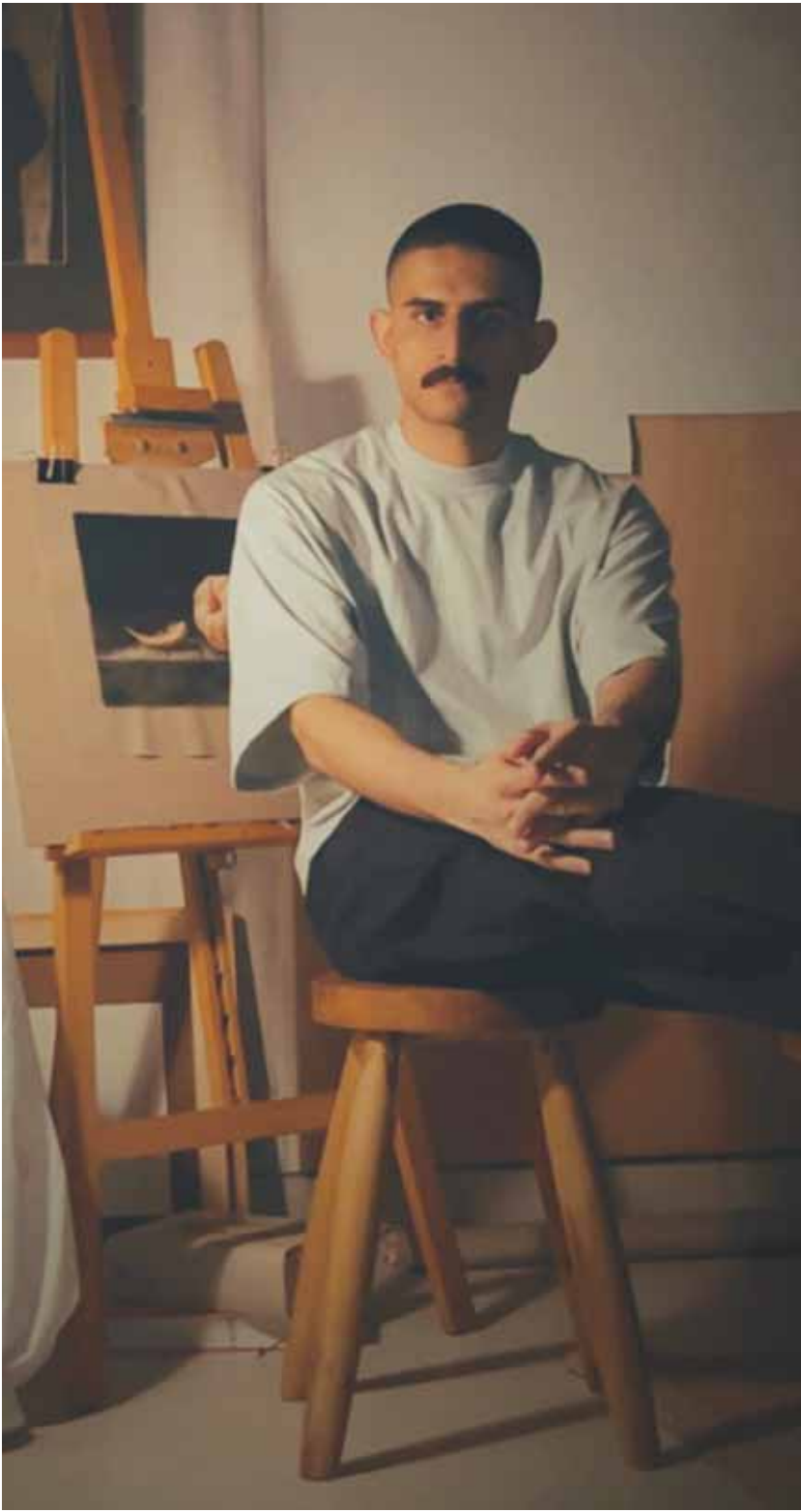
"Not one solution is going to work for everything. Frogs are so different," Waddle added.

But the beauty of Waddle's saunas is that they cost AUD\$70 (\$50) to assemble, and he has helped dozens of citizen scientists build their own backyard versions.

This has not only provided valuable data about endangered frog species, but also saved some from the deadly fungus.

Jodi Rowley, an amphibian biologist from the Australian Museum, said the saunas showed how creative solutions could have real-world benefits.

"It's easy to feel helpless in the face of biodiversity declines, but this study gives us a tangible way we may be able to help frogs battling a devastating fungal disease," she said. — **AFP**



A SHOWCASE OF OMANI TALENTS IN UK EXHIBITION

BY YERU EBUEN

This autumn marks a significant milestone for three emerging Omani artists as they journey to the United Kingdom under the auspices of the newly established British Omani Society Art Group. This initiative, which aims to strengthen cultural ties between Oman and the UK while nurturing artistic talent, will culminate in a prestigious exhibition at the British Omani Society premises from September 25 to 27.

The exhibition, held at the Society's London premises, will be open to the public from 10 am to 5 pm on September 25, 26 and 27. Society members and their guests are warmly invited to experience the artistic expressions of these emerging talents. Unlike many exclusive art events, advanced booking is not required, making the exhibition accessible to all interested parties.

On the evening of September 26, from 6 pm to 8 pm, a private viewing will be held at 34 Sackville Street. This exclusive event, open to Society members, provides a more intimate setting to engage with the artworks and the artists themselves, fostering direct dialogue and deeper appreciation. Attendees are encouraged to RSVP through the Society's website to secure their place at this distinguished gathering.

The British Omani Society Art Group's project represents more than just an opportunity for these artists to showcase their work; it is a vital platform for them to refine their craft and gain international exposure. The selection of the UK as the venue for this exhibition is particularly significant. The UK is recognised globally as a hub of cultural and artistic innovation, offering a rich history of art patronage and a vibrant contemporary art scene. For Omani artists, presenting their work in the UK not only broadens their audience, but also places them in the company of some of the world's most esteemed artists and galleries. This exposure is crucial for emerging artists from regions like Oman, where opportunities for international recognition are less frequent.

A STRUCTURED PROGRAMME OF GROWTH

The residency, taking place from September 2 to 30, 2024, is meticulously structured to offer these artists both creative and technical development. The programme includes two weeks of intensive tuition and workshops at the Welsh Academy of Art. This esteemed institution, located in Wales, is known for its dedication to classical methods of drawing and painting, providing a unique environment where tradition meets innovation. The artists will delve into landscape, portrait and still-life painting, honing their skills under the guidance of seasoned professionals.

In addition to formal instruction, the programme includes a series of visits to significant cultural sites and artistic institutions across the UK. This component of the residency is

THE IMPORTANCE OF INITIATIVES LIKE THIS CANNOT BE OVERSTATED, ESPECIALLY FOR EMERGING ARTISTS. IN A WORLD WHERE THE ART MARKET IS INCREASINGLY COMPETITIVE, PLATFORMS THAT OFFER EXPOSURE, TRAINING, AND SUPPORT ARE INVALUABLE. FOR THE PARTICIPATING OMANI ARTISTS, THIS RESIDENCY AND EXHIBITION REPRESENT A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO NOT ONLY DEVELOP THEIR CRAFT BUT ALSO TO GAIN VISIBILITY ON AN INTERNATIONAL STAGE.

designed to inspire the artists by immersing them in diverse artistic expressions and historical contexts, enriching their creative perspectives.

The importance of initiatives like this cannot be overstated, especially for emerging artists. In a world where the art market is increasingly competitive, platforms that offer exposure, training and support are invaluable. For the participating Omani artists, this residency and exhibition represent a rare opportunity to not only develop their craft, but also to gain visibility on an international stage. The support provided by various sponsors, including Renaissance Services SAOG, the London Speakers Bureau, the British Omani Society and the Oman British Friendship Association, alongside generous private sponsorship, underscores the importance of nurturing emerging talent and fostering cross-cultural understanding through the arts.

MEET THE ARTISTS

The selection process for the residency was rigorous, with a committee comprising notable figures such as Sarah Alaulaqi and Ali al Jabri, both of whom represented Oman at the Venice Biennale, and Lucy Corbett, the founder of the Welsh Academy of Art. The committee was impressed by the quality and depth of the applications, ultimately choosing four artists whose work embodies both technical skill and cultural richness.

Almuntasir Nasser: An art teacher in Oman with a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts from Sultan Qaboos University, Almuntasir's work is deeply influenced by his passion for philosophy. His artistic practice is characterised by a contemplative approach, exploring fundamental questions about existence and meaning.

Majid al Amri: A Muscat-based artist with a passion for impressionism, Majid draws inspiration from masters like Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse and Vincent Van Gogh. His work is a vibrant celebration of Omani culture, expressed through a blend of classical painting techniques and a modern, impressionistic style.

Sara al Hosni: At 28 years old, Sara has already made a significant impact in the Omani art scene. An art teacher by profession, her artistic journey began in childhood and has evolved into a diverse practice that includes painting, ceramics, sculpture and digital art. Her work is marked by a keen attention to composition and a deep appreciation for the natural world.

THE BROADER IMPACT

This exhibition and the residency leading up to it are not just about individual growth; they represent a broader cultural exchange between Oman and the UK. By bringing Omani art to a global stage, the British Omani Society Art Group is helping to raise the profile of Omani artists, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of Oman, and fostering a greater understanding and appreciation of the country's contemporary art scene.

As these artists prepare to display their work in the UK, they carry with them the hopes and aspirations of a growing community of creatives in Oman, eager to share their vision with the world.

For further information about the exhibition or to make enquiries, please contact omanart@gedneyuk.

