

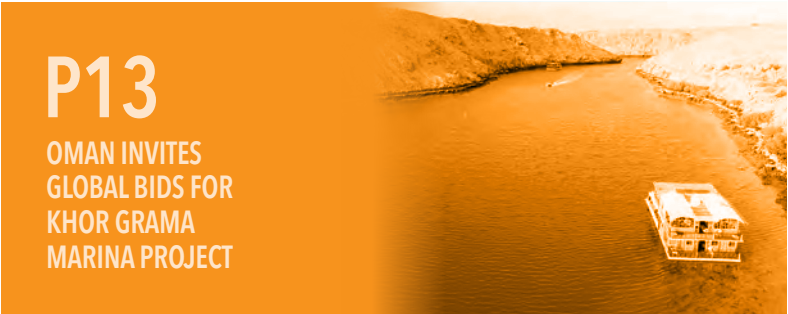
P10

INTENSIVE HOCKEY CAMP FOR U-18 NATIONAL TEAMS BEGINS



P13

OMAN INVITES GLOBAL BIDS FOR KHOR GRAMA MARINA PROJECT



P20

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE LENS OF A FORMER OMANI STUDENT



LIMA

HM GREETINGS CONVEYED TO PERU

President Dina Boluarte of the Republic of Peru received Talal bin Sulaiman al Rahbi who presented his credentials as non-resident Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Peru. The ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his wishes of good health and happiness to the president of Peru and further progress and prosperity for the Peruvian people. For her part, the president of Peru asked the ambassador to pass on her greetings to His Majesty.

JAKARTA

OMAN, INDONESIA DISCUSS ENERGY JVS

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, met Arifin Tasrif, Indonesian Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, in Jakarta, on Saturday to explore avenues for enhanced bilateral cooperation in the energy and minerals sectors. The discussions aimed at fortifying the partnership between Oman and Indonesia, focused on sharing expertise and fostering collaboration in these crucial fields. As part of the visit, Al Afi and his delegation toured several leading Indonesian energy companies.

DETAILS ON P15



HARRIS LEADS TRUMP BY 4 POINTS IN 3 STATES

US Vice-President and Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris leads Republican former president Donald Trump in three battleground states - Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan - by four points, according to polls by the New York Times and Siena College. Harris is ahead of Trump by four percentage points in those three states, 50 per cent to 46 per cent among likely voters in each state, according to the surveys conducted from August 5-9. The margin of sampling error among likely voters was plus or minus 4.8 percentage points in Michigan, plus or minus 4.2 points in Pennsylvania and plus or minus 4.3 points in Wisconsin, the report added. In total, 1,973 likely voters were interviewed for those polls. Democratic US President Joe Biden ended his re-election bid on July 21 and endorsed Harris for the November 5 vote against Trump.

OMAN CONDEMNS ISRAELI STRIKE

‘ANOTHER DAY OF HORROR’ AS ISRAEL BOMBS GAZA SCHOOL KILLING 100



A young girl cries inside a school used as a temporary shelter for displaced Palestinians in Gaza City, following an Israeli strike on Saturday. – AFP

MUSCAT: The Foreign Ministry has strongly condemned the brutal attack committed by the Israeli occupation forces on the Tabieen school in the Al Daraj quarter of the Gaza Strip which shelters displaced persons.

The attack, which occurred at dawn, resulted in the tragic loss of over 100 Palestinian lives leaving dozens of unarmed civilians injured in yet another heinous crime in the ongoing atrocities committed by the occupation against the Palestinian people.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry reaffirmed that the targeting of schools and civilian facilities constitutes a blatant violation of international humanitarian law and UN resolutions.

In the statement, the Sultanate of Oman renewed its call for an immediate international action to halt those heinous assaults, protect innocent civilians, hold Israeli forces accountable and enforce international sanctions against Israel.

The Sultanate of Oman reiterated its unwavering support for the Palestinian cause and the right of the Palestinian people to self-defence and the establishment of an independent state



A woman cries inside a school used as a temporary shelter for displaced Palestinians in Gaza City, after it was hit by an Israeli strike on Saturday. – AFP

with East Jerusalem as its capital in accordance with the Security Council's resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Turkiye denounced a “new crime against humanity” after Israel's deadly strike on a school in Gaza killed dozens of people, according to a foreign ministry statement. “Israel has committed a new crime against humanity by massacring more than a hundred civilians who had taken refuge

in a school,” the ministry said. Iran condemned a “barbaric” Israeli air strike on a school in Gaza housing displaced Palestinians that left dozens dead on Saturday, calling it a “war crime”.

The attack showed once again that Israel “does not respect any of the rules and regulations of international law and moral and human principles,” foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani said in a statement.

The EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, has said he is “horrified” after an Israeli air strike hit a school sheltering residents in Gaza on Saturday, which Palestinian authorities said killed up to 100 people.

“At least 10 schools were targeted in the last weeks. There's no justification for these massacres,” he wrote on X.

France said it condemned “in the firmest of terms” an Israeli strike on a school housing displaced people in Gaza that rescuers said killed 100 people. “For several weeks, school buildings have been repeatedly targeted, with an intolerable number of civilian victims,” the French foreign ministry said. — **Agencies**



The event concludes on August 20.

Explore Dhofar from the sky

SALALAH: The ‘Exploring Dhofar from the Sky’ activities kick-started on Saturday in Dhofar Governorate.

Organised by the Oman Air Sports Committee in collaboration with Dhofar Municipality, the event concludes on August 20.

The event stems from the committee's keenness to place aerial sports as a component of public life, enhance their role in promoting tourism in the governorate, increase public awareness of environmental and sustainability issues as well as introduce the natural diversity and cultural richness of Dhofar Governorate.

Ahmed bin Zaher al Alawi, Chairman of the Oman Air Sports Committee, said that the event will be accompanied by training and educational workshops on the basics of aerial and drone photography and scientific and practical experiments related to climate and environment to raise awareness of zero carbon neutrality.

He said that visitors could experience paragliding and enjoy aerial shows.

The event will employ artificial intelligence technologies to count visitors using drones and the participants will also enjoy observing the movement of the sun from Al Hawqain Astronomical Observatory via live broadcast technology as well as make international calls with a number of satellite and international stations via wireless broadcast devices. — **ONA**

Oman receives 2 million visitors in first half of this year

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman received around two million foreign visitors in the first six months this year, which is an increase of seven per cent from last year.

The top five nationalities visiting the country this year were Emiratis (578,351), Indians (316,890), Yemenis (107,705), Germans (83,054) and British (49,069), according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The number of visitors to the country in June included 141,188 GCC nationals, 91,038 Asians, 16,520 Europeans, 5,582 Americans, 5,523 Africans, 41,281 other Arabs, and 1,090 from Oceania. Omanis (2,808,582) topped the nationalities leaving the country in the first six months, followed by Indians (436,314), Pakistanis (261,086), Bangladeshi (144,287) and Yemenis (112,228).

As part of efforts to promote and ease services for tourists visiting Oman, nationals of 103 countries are exempted from entry visas for stays of up to 14 days. **SEE ALSO P5**



Will students get a reprieve from carrying heavy bags?

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

With just around three weeks left until back-to-school season in the Sultanate of Oman, the focus shifts to the welfare of students, especially those in lower grades who have to carry the burden of not only their studies but also the weight of heavy school bags.

Since 2023, the Ministry of Education has been taking steps to reduce the weight of school bags by limiting the number of books that students in grades 1-4 need to carry each day to school.

The plan is to restrict homework on weekends and limit the number of notebooks to two by combining subjects; one for Arabic, Islamic

studies and social studies, and a second for science and math. This will reduce the weight of school bags to below 10 per cent of the child's body weight, as per international standards.

The ministry's decision follows a longstanding demand from parents, students and teachers to reduce the size of school bags.

In a study conducted across educational governorates by the Ministry of Education, it was found that the bags of primary students, including books, a water bottle and a lunch box, weighed 4-5kg, which is more than 15 per cent of the students' body weight. According to the Ministry of Education, students in grades 1-4 have an average weight of 24-30 kg.



The Ministry of Education has been taking steps to reduce the weight of school bags by limiting the number of books that students in grades 1-4 need to carry each day to school. – File Photo

The ministry also recommended that parents and students avoid trolley bags and that schools should provide lockers for students to store some of their stationery and books. The Ministry of Education has already issued a notice in this regard and provided lockers for storing books instead of carrying them home every day, which will be supervised by specialists.

While parents welcomed the measures taken by the Ministry of Education, they argued that the actual implementation of such regulations requires cooperation from teachers. "We want our children to go to school with less burden on their shoulders, but there are some textbooks and

notebooks that they have to carry daily. Some guidelines to adjust timetables will help avoid taking all books to school every day," said Maryam al Musallami, a parent. She added that this rule should apply to students in the age group of 10 to 12 years.

Some teachers that the Observe spoke to mentioned that this circular is easy to implement if there is cooperation among all stakeholders. "Some students come to school with books for subjects that are not scheduled for the day. We cannot check all bags all the time. But overall, I welcome any step to ease the burden of students coming to school for studies," said a grade one teacher.

Development projects in Al Dakhiliyah in full swing

MAJID AL HATALI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

Al Dakhiliyah Governorate has been witnessing the implementation of development projects since the onset of the Governorates Development Programme in 2021 some of which have neared completion with 77 projects already completed at an overall value exceeding RO 8.259 million.

This was stated by Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, in an interview with Oman Arabic. He noted that 62 projects are currently under implementation at a cost of RO 24.7 million while the procedures for 21 projects worth 20.608 million will be finalised shortly with 6 new projects approved for the next phase at a cost of RO 22.150 million.

In the Wilayat of Nizwa, there are currently development projects under implementation at a total cost of RO 6.7 million. These include Nizwa Public Park, car parks in Nizwa Souq, developing the entrance to the Wilayat of Nizwa (first phase), beautification works near the Nizwa Sculpture, restoration of the gateways of Nizwa Souq. This is in addition to re-planning the car parks and roads leading to Nizwa Central Market and constructing internal roads in the Wilayat of Nizwa with a length



Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri said that 62 projects are currently under implementation at a cost of RO 24.7 million



of 18 km, the governor said.

The Wilayat of Bahla has recently received a number of development projects including the design and implementation of internal roads in the Khamilah Industrial Scheme with a length of 15 km, the establishment of a public park in the Khamilah area with funding from the Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) at a cost of RO 200,000, the establishment of air-conditioned car parking shades and the fodder market, the governor said, explaining that the cost of the projects under implementation in the Wilayat of Bahla amounts to RO 7.4 million.

The Wilayat of Al Hamra is witnessing the implementation of development projects to the tune of RO 7.1 million including establishing a municipal slaughterhouse, the implementation

of internal roads (package 1) with a length of 29 km and the implementation of internal roads (package 2) with a length of 19 km, the governor said.

The Wilayat of Adam is currently witnessing the implementation of 10 development projects at a cost of RO 1.8 million including civil works for the vegetable and fruit market, the expansion of the shoulders of the road leading to the Adam Air Base, consulting services for the design of internal roads, pavement of road links with a length of 13 km and the rehabilitation of Al Haditha Park, the governor said.

In the Wilayat of Manah, four projects are currently under implementation including the design and implementation of internal roads with a length of 10 km, the implementation of a modern irrigation system and consultancy

services to develop the commercial area, the development and the rehabilitation of Al Khatm Park, the governor said.

The Wilayat of Izki is seeing the implantation of development projects to the tune of RO 1.4 million which include the construction of an air-conditioned vegetable and fruit market, the development of Al Tawq commercial area and the design and implementation of internal roads with a length of 10 km, he said.

The cost of ongoing development projects in the Wilayat of Samayil amounts to RO 1.7 million. These include maintenance and repair of damaged roads, design and implementation of internal roads with a length of 15 km, maintenance of the municipality workers accommodation, development and rehabilitation of Hasas Park, installing 113 lamp posts for the lighting of internal roads in Al Falajin and Al Maghbaryyah, consultancy services for designing internal roads, the governor said.

The cost of the ongoing development projects in the Wilayat of Bidbid stands at RO 1.2 million including the construction of the municipality park, the implementation of internal roads with a length of 14 km, consultancy studies for the development of the commercial area in Fanja, the governor said.

FREE BREAST CANCER SCREENING CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED IN DHOFAR

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 10

The 'Early Breast Cancer Screen Campaign' in Dhofar Governorate was launched at Al Saada Health Centre on July 6 and concludes on August 30, 2024.

The cancer screening campaign embodies a critical public health endeavour aimed at fostering awareness and encouraging early detection of breast cancer among women. Operating from Sunday to Friday between 5 pm and 10 pm, the campaign ensures accessibility for working women and those with daytime commitments, thus amplifying its potential impact.

Breast cancer, a pervasive and often lethal disease, poses significant challenges to healthcare systems worldwide. However, the survival rate improves dramatically when the disease is detected in its early stages. This campaign leverages mobile mammography units, a pivotal tool in early breast cancer detection. These units, equipped with state-of-the-art imaging technology, provide accurate and swift diagnostics, thereby facilitating timely medical intervention.

Speaking to the Observer, Salim bin Awad al Najar, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Cancer Society in Dhofar Governorate, said: "We confirm that the screening vehicle is still operational, and its crew continues to work daily to receive anyone who wishes to undergo

testing and screening until August 30. The screening is free for Omanis and foreigners."

Operating previously out of the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands, the campaign also featured specialised lectures on cancer, along with workshops to raise health awareness and educate women on self-examination. There were also presentations about the association, its role and activities.

The campaign also saw significant engagement from the Office of the Wali of Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands as well as from the Shaleem Hospital and the Omani Women's Association, which played a crucial role in the campaign.

"We moved to the Wilayat of Thamrait on June 27 and stayed until July 4. The vehicle had a full team to receive women, provide all necessary guidance and collect information from those who came for screening. Last year, the vehicle was in Salalah and Taqah, where 375 cases were recorded, with approximately 20 cases referred to the hospital for further examination and additional tests," Al Najar said.

"We hope everyone understands the importance of early detection, which can prevent many risks and aid in recovery if the disease is in its early stages, sparing patients from much suffering. Financially, early detection may save around RO 8,000 in the early stages, whereas the cost of treatment in advanced stages could reach up to RO 200,000," he added.

280 SCOUTS AT GULF SCOUT CAMP

SALALAH: The Gulf Summer Scout Camp for the Advanced Scout Stage commenced on Friday at Jabal Ashur Plain in the Dhofar Governorate. Organised by the General Directorate of Scouts and Guides under the theme 'Scouting: Innovation, Sustainability, Construction', the camp will run until August 14. It brings together 280 scouts from various wilyats of Oman and scouts from Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar and Yemen. The camp aims to equip participants with new skills for self-reliance, enhance their capabilities in sustainable development, and instil the values of scouting and citizenship.

– ONA



The 'Early Breast Cancer Screen Campaign' was launched at Al Saada Health Centre

Al Saleel National Park sees record visitors in 2023

YUSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

Al Saleel National Park in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi pulled over 10,000 visitors last year including researchers, academics and students who sought to learn about the reserve's wildlife and the archaeological and geological sites.

Al Saleel National Park contains the oldest rocks in Oman that date back 700 million years in addition to a slew of archaeological sites.

The reserve produced more than 158,000 wild plants as well as thousands of trees that were distributed all over the country last year. The reserve has a dedicated exhibition that showcases and documents its history as well as the archaeological sites and biodiversity.

Ahmed bin Rashid al Maamari, acting director of Al Saleel National Park at the Environment Department, said that the reserve distributed 93,500 seedlings to all



The reserve has recorded more than eight species of mammals including the Arabian gazelle

governorates and 158,000 wild seedlings produced in its nursery in 2023 with a view of supporting the national initiative to plant 10 million trees.

The reserve is characterised by a wide spread of plants with more than 100 plant species recorded in the park so far. The largest percentage of plants and trees is concentrated in the channels and low places since seeds are carried by wind and water from high areas to low areas.

Al Maamari noted that the

reserve has recorded more than eight species of mammals including the Arabian gazelle.

The Arabian ibex, a rare and endangered species, lives on the northern edges of Al Hajar Mountains. Besides, the park is home to the red fox, the wildcat (Sanmar), the wild rabbit and other small mammals.

The reserve's environment is a safe haven for wild, resident and migratory birds with over 57 species of wild birds have been recorded in the reserve.



Salalah boosts accommodation for khareef season

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

With the khareef season in full swing, Salalah and its surrounding areas, including Auqad, Saada, and the newly popular Sahalnut, are becoming prime destinations for visitors from GCC countries.

The supply of new housing units, economy hotels and refurbished furnished apartments has significantly eased the demand for khareef accommodations this year. Visitors now have a broader range of choices and can find great deals if they explore areas like Auqad, Saada and Sahalnut. Many new houses have been constructed in these areas, offering modern amenities and comfortable living spaces.

Keeping in mind the demand for Salalah among the visitors from the GCC countries, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has taken an initiative to increase the number of hotel rooms in the Dhofar Governorate from 6,000 (at the end of last year) to 7,000 by the end of this year. This is apart from the supply of apartments



and other accommodations.

The growing popularity of Taqah and Mirbat for accommodations reflects the increasing diversity of options available to visitors. These areas provide hotels and apartments suitable for varying family sizes and budgets.

In Salalah city alone, many new housing projects were completed before the khareef season, with numerous

‘furnished house for rent’ signs appearing in Saada, Sahalnut, and North and South Auqad. The development of these areas include new roads, food outlets, bank branches and shopping centres, enhancing the overall visitor experience.

Furnished apartments remain a favourite among families visiting Salalah, offering basic facilities, including kitchens and utensils. These apartments are

The number of hotel rooms in Dhofar is set to increase from 6,000 at the end of last year to 7,000 by the end of this year

now available across the city at competitive prices, ranging from RO 40 to 100, depending on space and amenities. Most of these apartments also provide

Wi-Fi, catering to the needs of modern travellers.

Ali, a visitor from Muscat, shared his experience, “These apartments fit my budget and are perfectly convenient. With a large family, cooking in the apartment kitchen allows us to focus on exploring Salalah. The proximity to shops and restaurants is a huge plus. Some days, we skip cooking and enjoy local dining options.”

Mohammed, a frequent visitor from the UAE, prefers to explore different furnished apartments during his stays. “I usually visit Salalah for around 15 days and stay in various areas, including Auqad and Saada, to avoid the crowded city centre. These areas have more open space and new, affordable houses compared to Salalah and New Salalah.”

An official from Dhofar Municipality highlighted the ongoing housing developments: “We are seeing a range of new constructions, from individual houses and ground-floor villas to multi-storey commercial buildings. This growth is aimed at meeting the rising demand for accommodations during the khareef season.”

As Salalah continues to develop and expand its accommodation options, visitors can look forward to an increasingly comfortable and enjoyable experience during the khareef season. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism’s plans to add more hotel rooms by the end of this year promise to further enhance the governorate’s capacity to host the growing number of tourists.

Khareef season captured in stunning photography

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

Salalah is truly soul calling with its innate beauty that blossoms with the rains and the mist during the khareef.

People from across the world visiting the governorate cannot be blamed for thoroughly capturing the beauty, and professional shutterbugs, spare no time towards shifting the focus on the incomparable beauty of khareef.

One such photographer is Aji George for whom Oman has been his second home for the last 22 years who is a busy man once khareef sets in. For scores of snappers like George, who click the landscapes as a profession for fun, responsibility towards the environment is of utmost priority and they ensure nature or the birds and animals are not harmed during their various photoshoots that take place daily.



The breathtaking beauty of Salalah inspired Aji George to shift to landscape photography

Hailing from the village of Mynagappally in Kollam District, photography for George was just a passion, and never ever did he hope that cameras would turn out to be his profession one day.

What started as a weekend hobby to capture the beautiful sights in and around Muscat turned into a passion for photography. He honed his photography skills through various training and repeated practice.

“Colours...simply colours have had an impact on me since childhood and that could be the reason that I pursued my passion and today, it became my livelihood,” says George, sitting in his studio in Salalah.

A marketing professional during his tenure in Bahrain and Qatar before he moved to Oman, his longest stint is in Oman for

almost 22 years.

It was while he was working in Qatar from 2015 to 2018, George was part of an association called PhotoMuse, a group of passionate photographers with whom he dived deeper into the nuances of nature photography. He considers Nandakumar Moodadi as his mentor.

George’s main focus was capturing the beauty of birds in their natural habitats. He believes that birds are the most fascinating creations. With its distinct and colourful plumage, birds are a feast to the eyes of the beholder. He has captured the beauty of rare birds in Qatar, Oman and India.

During his annual vacation to India, he never fails to set aside a couple of days to camp at bird sanctuaries or permitted forest areas to photograph rare species of birds in their natural habitat.

George started taking nature photography as Oman is blessed with topographical marvel. He is currently living in Salalah for the past five years. The breathtaking beauty of Salalah inspired him to shift to landscape photography.

All his efforts have been paid off and Oman has honoured him with best photography of ‘Khareef photography contest 2018’, and also recognised for having contributed to the OICC Calendar of 2022.

“As a photographer, what I can’t live without is the perfect fusion of mountains, sea, springs, lakes and waterfalls during khareef in Salalah which is a sight to behold.

During weekends, George heads out before the break of the dawn to capture the beauty of Salalah. The more he turns his lens left, right and centre with acute precision and measure, the more he falls in love with nature.

Gulf Student Forum for Financial Culture concludes

SALALAH: The Gulf Student Forum for Financial Culture successfully concluded its activities in Dhofar Governorate, emphasising the importance of enhancing financial awareness among school students.

The forum stressed the need to cultivate positive financial behaviours and encouraged the exchange of knowledge and expertise between GCC countries.

Organised by the Ministry of Education under the ‘Instilling Financial Culture Principles in School Students – Khazna’ project, the forum ran for five days. It focused on equipping students with essential financial skills, knowledge and behaviours. In her address, Dr Haifa al Maamari, Director of the Financial Culture Inculcation Project (Khazna), highlighted the forum’s objective to spread financial awareness among students, particularly those studying in grades 10-12.



The event featured six working papers presented by a certified trainer in investment and financial awareness, alongside recreational and educational activities.

The forum also included dialogue sessions with successful entrepreneurs and a competition for the best project idea. Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, honoured the participants and supporting entities during the ceremony.

— ONA

Recall

Recall Date: 11 / 08 / 2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
URUS	2022 - 2024	11

Recall consequence

Because the hood latch retaining screws leave small gaps between the hood and the front bumper at high speeds (over 150 km/h) these gaps allow air to enter over time these gaps increase and the latch falls leading to the latch separating from the hood.

Recall Action

Dealers will inspect the hood parts and if necessary repair the failure part and install a striker plate free of charge.

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

هيئة حماية المستهلك
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www.pacp.gov.om

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DAILY IS RECOMMENDED

HELPS LOWER
ANXIETY, STRESS AND
IMPROVES MOOD

WALK OUTDOORS IN
NATURAL SETTINGS,
PREFERABLY IN THE
MORNING

RUQAYA AL KINDI
@ruqaya.alkindi

Walking is one of the simplest sports anyone can engage in, anytime and anywhere, regardless of age.

Recent studies show that walking acts like a comprehensive pharmacy, enhancing all physical and psychological functions.

It boosts joint and brain health, aids in weight reduction, and helps prevent diseases such as diabetes and issues related to the heart. Additionally, walking lowers anxiety and stress levels while improving mood.

Adopting walking as a daily habit is highly recommended.

To maximise its benefits, it's crucial to follow the correct walking technique.

Faisal al Malahi, a Nutrition and Holistic Health Researcher, advises walking briskly for more than 30 minutes continuously. Ideally, one should aim to walk between one to one-and-a-half hours daily, which equates to about 10,000 steps or 8 km. Walking fewer than 5,000 steps a day classifies a person as inactive.

Faisal recommends walking outdoors in natural settings like beaches, ensuring sunlight exposure. He suggests walking in the morning before eating or drinking anything to enhance fat burning and weight loss.

Walking two hours after meals can help lower blood sugar levels, and a walk an hour before bed can reduce stress and improve sleep quality.

Choosing comfortable cotton clothing and supportive shoes can enhance the walking

experience. Faisal advises maintaining silence and mental presence during walks, focusing on your body and surroundings while keeping your back straight.

Walking on a treadmill is not recommended due to potential knee and joint strain unless it is of high quality. It's preferable to walk on flat, safe surfaces.

There are many ways to incorporate more walking into your routine: Doing housework, walking instead of driving to nearby places, parking further from your destination, using stairs instead of elevators, and walking for 5-10 minutes after each prayer.

Setting an alarm every half hour to remind you to walk for a couple of minutes, using a smartwatch, walking while on the phone, walking with friends, or taking a walk when facing problems are all effective strategies.

Faisal cautions that individuals with knee issues, arthritis, severe obesity, pregnancy, diabetes, or heart problems should consult a doctor before starting a walking routine.

Elderly individuals or those new to walking should begin slowly and gradually increase their activity.



HOTELS IN OMAN IMPROVE OCCUPANCY RATE

OMAN RECEIVES 2 MILLION VISITORS IN H1 OF 2024

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The three- to five-star hotels in the Sultanate of Oman reported 47.8 per cent occupancy this year with 1,045,226 guests in the first six months of 2024 compared to 944,268 in 2023 during the same period.

The number of room nights spent by guests went up to 1,471,361 this year from 1,351,483 in 2023.

Revenues generated by these hotels were 119.5 million in 2024 which included room revenues of 68.7 million, while the number of employees in these hotels was 10,267 including 3,649 Omanis.

In June this year, the occupancy rate was 38.4 per cent in Muscat, 45.8 per cent in Al Batinah North, and 35.9 per cent in Al Dhahirah.

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, during an earlier interview with the Observer, said, “The Sultanate of Oman can offer tourists a slice of history, geography,



The number of visitors to the country during June included 141,188 GCC nationals, 91,038 Asians, 16,520 Europeans, 5,582 Americans, 5,523 Africans, 41,281 other Arabs, and 1,090 from Oceania.

natural landscape, adventure, culture and heritage, and more.”

“Tourists coming to Oman will find quality, experiences and plenty of choices. Tourists can get in contact with Omanis at different levels and therefore that is an asset by itself. Tourists are looking now for experience and direct contact with local communities, which is possible in Oman.”

The Sultanate of Oman received around two million foreign visitors in the first

six months of June this year, which is an increase of seven per cent from last year.

The top five nationalities visiting the country this year were Emiratis (578,351), Indians (316,890), Yemenis (107,705), Germans (83,054) and British 49,069, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Overall four million visitors left the country in the first six months compared to 4.1 million during the same period in 2023.

The number of visitors

to the country during June included 141,188 GCC nationals, 91,038 Asians, 16,520 Europeans, 5,582 Americans, 5,523 Africans, 41,281 other Arabs, and 1,090 from Oceania. Omanis (2,808,582) topped the nationalities leaving the country in the first six months, followed by Indians (436,314), Pakistanis (261,086), Bangladeshi (144,287) and Yemenis (112,228).

As part of efforts to promote and ease services for tourists visiting Oman, nationals of 103 countries are exempted from entry visas for stays of up to 14 days. The exemption will be subject to certain requirements including a prior and confirmed hotel booking, health insurance and a return ticket.

However, citizens from 27 out of 103 countries are exempted from visas for 14 days to enter Oman only if they have a Schengen visa in their passports or have entry visas to the USA, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, or Japan.

Gulf Science Forum to cultivate innovation, creativity among youth



The forum's core objective is to inspire participants to devise innovative solutions

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 10

The Gulf Science Forum 2024, organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, will unfold at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah from August 11 to 15.

The week-long event, which is a pivotal component of the Youth Empowerment Committee's agenda for 2024, aims to cultivate innovation and creativity among the youth of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

The forum is set to be a vibrant showcase of young talent from across the GCC. It will provide a platform for these budding innovators to present their pioneering work in a range of critical fields including energy, environment, technology and health.

The forum's core objective is to inspire young participants to devise innovative solutions to the myriad challenges faced by modern societies. It also seeks to bolster collaboration among Gulf youth in the domains of science and technology, fostering a cooperative spirit that transcends national boundaries.

This event represents a significant opportunity for emerging talents to display their ideas and projects to a wider audience. By doing so, it supports the overarching goals of Oman Vision 2040, which is focused on establishing a knowledge-based economy driven by innovation. The forum aligns with this vision by offering a platform that not only highlights individual achievements, but also contributes to the collective

advancement of scientific and technological capabilities in the region.

The Gulf Science Forum 2024 will feature several key components designed to maximise engagement and learning. Participants will have the opportunity to showcase their cutting-edge innovations and research in various scientific and technological fields. This exhibition will serve as a central attraction, drawing attention to the diverse and impactful projects developed by young innovators.

Also, there will be a series of workshops offering hands-on training in different scientific and technical areas. These sessions are intended to provide practical knowledge and skills, enhancing the participants' expertise and competencies.

The forum will also host panels featuring leading experts and specialists who will engage in discussions on the latest advancements and trends in science and technology. These discussions will provide valuable insights and foster an exchange of ideas among attendees.

To stimulate creativity and a competitive edge, the forum will organise various competitions. These contests are designed to challenge participants and encourage them to push the boundaries of their innovative thinking.

The forum will culminate in a grand ceremony on August 15, where notable achievements will be recognised and celebrated. Winners will be honoured, and the most impressive innovations will be highlighted, bringing the week-long event to a prestigious close.

Oman Botanic Garden takes part in Singapore conference



Oman Botanic Garden representatives introduced visitors to the natural diversity in the Sultanate of Oman

SINGAPORE: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, represented by the Oman Botanic Garden, recently participated in the 8th Global Botanic Gardens Conference and Exhibition, which was held in Singapore between August 6 and 9.

Ismail al Rashidi, head of the facilities operation department, presented a paper and spoke about the importance of botanic gardens in promoting the afforestation of cities and landscapes using local plants.

Dr Laila al Harthi, head of the Plant Diversity and Nature Conservation Centre, spoke about the role of the garden in documenting and preserving plant diversity

On the sidelines of the conference, an exhibition was held, where the Oman Botanic Garden corner introduced visitors to its components and scientific achievements related to plants and the natural diversity in the Sultanate of Oman

in the Sultanate of Oman in particular and the Arabian Peninsula in general.

On the second day of the conference, Saliha al

Mahrouqi, senior guidance and awareness administrator, spoke about the programmes offered in the garden for different age groups during the pre-opening phase.

Hanan al Muqbali, senior horticulture specialist, highlighted successful experiments carried out by the garden team in propagating several rare Omani plants using different propagation methods in the garden nursery.

Dr Khalid al Farsi, head of the horticulture department, spoke about the garden team's experience in planting Alalan trees, which are considered one of the trees threatened by climate change in their natural environments in Al

Hajar Mountains, and the garden's efforts in the field of planting and rehabilitating their local environment.

Digital means will be deployed at the garden to improve the visitor's experience and enrich his knowledge about Omani environments and plants.

On the sidelines of the conference, an exhibition was held, where the Oman Botanic Garden corner introduced visitors to its components and scientific achievements related to plants and the natural diversity in the Sultanate of Oman.

The corner was visited by more than 800 people from 70 countries around the world.

SALE OF VEHICLE / EQUIPMENT

Leading Construction Co. in Oman intends to dispose of their used vehicles and equipment, in **'as is where is'** condition. The items identified are presently located at their Barka Khazaen and will be offered for inspection to the public **on 14/8/2024, 15/8/2024 and 18/8/2024 between 08:00 am to 12:00 pm and 03:00 pm to 05:00 pm.**

Last date for submission of closed tender is **18/8/2024 at 05:00 pm** at our Khazaen office In Barka state.

Interested parties may contact at
Tel: (+968) 26983767 / 26983777 / 26983703
Mobile: (+968) 91354151



ISRAEL STRIKE RAINS HELL ON GAZA SCHOOL

UN RAPPORTEUR ACCUSES ISRAEL OF ‘GENOCIDE’ AFTER KILLING OVER 93 PEOPLE



A man cries inside a school used as a temporary shelter for displaced Palestinians in Gaza City. – AFP



People check the damage after an Israeli strike hit a school sheltering displaced Palestinians in Gaza City. – AFP

GAZA: White body bags littered the floor and mourning filled the air after a school housing displaced Palestinians was struck with Israeli missiles on Saturday — a horrific and increasingly common sight in the Gaza war. Dawn prayers were shattered by the early morning triple air strike from Israeli warplanes, which gutted Al Tabieen school and mosque in Gaza City.

In the hellish aftermath, body parts were strewn around the rubble and charred, bloodied

bodies slumped in the wreckage of the two-storey complex. Grim-faced volunteers piled corpses in blood-stained blankets into an ambulance, as seriously wounded men lay groaning on the ground. Gaza’s civil defence agency said at least 93 people were killed, 17 of them women and children, making it one of the war’s deadliest strikes. Israel’s military disputed the death toll, saying the school was targeted with “precision munitions”.

Such incidents have become a pattern in recent weeks. At least 14 schools sheltering Gaza’s displaced have been hit since July 6, killing more than 280 people. As the sun climbed and mourners gathered, one man stroked the face of a dead child shrouded in a plastic body bag. Mohammad Al Mughayyir, director of the supply and equipment department of Gaza’s civil defence service, said that six schools in Gaza City had been targeted in the past week

alone. Israeli military spokesperson Lieutenant-Colonel Nadav Shoshani said that about 20 Palestinian fighters were operating from the Al Tabieen complex. Later on Saturday, Gaza civil defence agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal told journalists that the strike “directly targeted” two floors of the school. The strike hit “the upper floor housing women and children and the ground floor

that was used for prayers by the displaced people,” he said. An independent, UN-appointed rights expert accused Israel of committing “genocide” in its Gaza war after an Israeli strike targeting the school. “Israel is genociding the Palestinians one neighbourhood at the time, one hospital at the time, one school at the time, one refugee camp at the time, one safe zone at the time,” Francesca Albanese, the United Nations special rapporteur on the rights

situation in the Palestinian territories, said on social media platform X. Israel was carrying out such strikes against Palestinians using “US and European weapons”, Albanese said. “May the Palestinians forgive us for our collective inability to protect them,” she added. Israel’s retaliatory military campaign in Gaza has killed at least 39,790 people, according to the health ministry in Gaza. — AFP

Russia launches new border operation

MOSCOW: Moscow on Saturday mounted a “counter-terror operation” in three border regions adjoining Ukraine to halt Kyiv’s advance deeper into Russia and warned that the fighting endangered a nuclear power plant. Ukrainian units stormed into Russia’s western Kursk region on Tuesday morning in a shock attack, the largest and most successful cross-border offensive by Kyiv of the two-and-a-half year conflict. Its troops have advanced several kilometres and Russia’s army has rushed in reserves and extra equipment — though neither side has given precise details on the forces they have committed. Russia’s nuclear agency on Saturday warned the Ukrainian attack posed a “direct threat” to the nearby Kursk nuclear power



Ukrainian service members ride a fighting vehicle, near the Russian border in Sumy region, Ukraine. – Reuters

station. At least 16,000 civilians requested state assistance to leave their homes in Russian border areas, where emergency aid has been ferried in, and extra trains to the capital Moscow have been put on for people fleeing. Russia’s army confirmed on Saturday it will still fight the Ukrainian incursion. It said Kyiv

initially crossed the border with around 1,000 troops, around 20 armoured vehicles and 11 tanks. Though it claimed on Saturday to have destroyed five times that much military hardware so far. Russia’s national anti-terrorism committee said late on Friday it was starting “counter-terror operations in the Belgorod,

Bryansk and Kursk regions ... in order to ensure the safety of citizens and suppress the threat of terrorist acts being carried out by the enemy’s sabotage groups.” Security forces and the military are given sweeping emergency powers during “counter-terror” operations. Movement is restricted, vehicles can be seized, phone calls can be monitored, areas are declared no-go zones, checkpoints introduced, and security is beefed up at key infrastructure sites. The anti-terrorism committee said Ukraine had mounted an “unprecedented attempt to destabilise the situation in a number of regions of our country.” Russia’s defence ministry on Saturday said it had hit some Ukrainian positions as far as 10 kilometres from the border. — AFP

Workers begin recovering bodies from Brazil plane crash

VINHEDO: Emergency crews on Saturday began removing the victims of a plane crash in Brazil’s Sao Paulo state that killed all 62 people aboard, as authorities sifted through the wreckage to try to determine what caused the plane’s dramatic plunge. Videos showed the ATR 72-500 plane in a sickening downward spin on Friday before it crashed into a residential area of the town of Vinhedo, some 80 kilometres northwest of Sao Paulo city.

The Voepass airlines said on Saturday that verification of the passenger list showed there were 62 people on board, not 61 as reported earlier. All 62 were Brazilian; there were no survivors. While some houses at the crash site were damaged, no injuries or deaths were reported among their residents. The crash transformed the plane’s fuselage into a mass of twisted iron. As of Saturday morning, 16 bodies had been removed, firefighters said. — AFP



This photo shows the wreckage of an aeroplane that crashed with 61 people on board in Vinhedo, Brazil. – AFP

SHORT TAKES

DHAKA

Bangladesh’s Yunus appeals for people’s unity

Bangladesh’s interim leader Muhammad Yunus appealed for people’s unity on Saturday after embracing the weeping mother of a student shot dead by police, a flashpoint in mass protests that ended Sheikh Hasina’s 15-year rule. Yunus called for calm during a visit to the northern city of Rangpur by invoking the memory of Abu Sayeed, the first student slain during last month’s unrest. “Abu Sayeed is now in every home.



The way he stood, we have to do the same,” he said. The caretaker administration Yunus helms has said that restoration of law and order is its “first priority”. — AFP

ALGIERS

Catalan separatist says would not surrender

Fugitive Catalan separatist leader Carles Puigdemont on Saturday said he had had no intention of handing himself into authorities during a brief visit to Spain earlier this week. Puigdemont defied an arrest warrant to return to Spain on Thursday. He delivered a speech to thousands gathered outside the Catalan regional parliament in Barcelona before slipping away. “I never had any intention of handing myself into a judicial author-



ity that is neither competent to persecute us... nor to render justice, but is motivated by political objectives,” Puigdemont said. On Friday, Puigdemont had revealed he was back in Belgium. — AFP

MUMBAI

Modi vows support after deadly landslide

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday visited the site of landslides that killed more than 200 people last month, vowing to extend “every possible support” to those who lost homes and loved ones. Torrential monsoon rains battered the southern coastal state of Kerala and triggered landslides on July 30, burying homes and people in Wayanad district. Modi visited camps where those who fled the landslides are recovering as well as



hospitals. “I want to assure the families of the deceased that they are not alone,” Modi said, adding that funds for relief or rehabilitation work would be provided. — AFP

Harris fights against Trump in Arizona



Nicholas Nehamas

The writer is a political correspondent, focusing on the campaign of VP Kamala Harris.



Kellen Browning

The writer is a reporter for The New York Times covering the 2024 election

As Vice-President Kamala Harris fights for the votes of Americans threatening to abandon the Democratic Party, she faces challenges across the battleground states, from working-class Nevada communities to Arab American enclaves in Michigan. But perhaps no swing state has vexed Democrats as much this year as Arizona.

A longtime Republican stronghold before President Joe Biden's victory in 2020, the state is tricky political territory for Democrats, who confront magnified concerns over the number of migrants coming across the US-Mexico border. A handful of polls in recent weeks have shown former president Donald Trump leading Harris by the mid-single digits, even as her numbers have improved in other vital states.

Harris has taken the stage in a Phoenix suburb alongside her new running mate, Gov. Tim Walz of Minnesota — part of a renewed push to put Sun Belt states back in play and keep Arizona's 11 electoral votes in the Democratic column. She faces an uphill battle there as Republicans work to paint her as the architect of the border crisis, but her allies say the energy she has brought to drained Democratic voters could also attract moderate swing voters.

"She seems to have captured some of that lightning in a bottle that the Obama campaign had," said John Giles, the Republican mayor of Mesa, Arizona, east of Phoenix, who endorsed Harris last month. Still, he cautioned, "She absolutely has to run like she's behind in Arizona, because I think she is."

Immigration consistently ranks as a top issue in Arizona, where voters will decide in November whether to make unlawfully crossing the border from Mexico a state crime. Even as border apprehensions have dropped sharply nationwide this year, they have continued to climb in Arizona. Border officials in the area south of Tucson have tallied nearly 430,000 apprehensions and other encounters since October, out of roughly 1.4 million across the entire southwestern border. That is up from about 235,000 in roughly the same time period the year before.

Trump and his allies have hammered Harris on immigration, highlighting her previous statements that "an undocumented immigrant is not a criminal" to portray her as soft on the border. They have castigated her as the "border czar" though Biden gave her the responsibility of solving the "root causes" of migration from Central America, rather than dealing with problems at the southern border.

A top pro-Trump super political action committee, MAGA Inc., released an advertisement late last month in several battleground states, including Arizona, blasting the vice-president over the border. "Why is our border a chaotic mess?" the ad asks. "Kamala Harris."

Sean McEnerney, Harris's state campaign manager in Arizona, said Trump's gamesmanship on the border deal would make for a potent argument.

The state is tricky political territory for Democrats, who confront magnified concerns over the number of migrants coming across the US-Mexico border



Vice-President Kamala Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, and her running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, at a rally at the Desert Diamond Arena in Glendale, Arizona. — NYT

"Arizona voters are not looking for people who are playing politics with this issue," he said.

Harris' campaign also believes that abortion will propel voters to her side in November, after the state Supreme Court in April reinstated an 1864 near-total ban on the procedure. The state's Legislature eventually repealed the ban, but a 15-week restriction is still in effect, and voters will weigh in on a ballot measure that would enshrine the right to an abortion until fetal viability in the state's constitution.

Harris had some good news on Thursday, when the Cook Political Report, a nonpartisan political publication, moved Arizona from "lean Republican" to "toss-up" in its ratings, along with the other Sun Belt swing states of Georgia and Nevada.

For Harris to capitalise on her momentum, she must reunite the fragile coalition that helped Biden flip Arizona in 2020 for the first time in decades:

young people, Latinos, Native Americans, white Phoenix-area suburban voters and moderates who have traditionally voted Republican.

On Thursday, the Harris campaign sought to contrast its approach with Trump's, releasing an ad in English and Spanish targeted to Latino voters. The ad highlights that Harris, who is Black and of South Asian heritage, was raised by an immigrant mother and worked at McDonald's as a young woman. It also focuses on her fight against big banks as California's attorney general and her role in the Biden administration's efforts to lower costs for expensive prescription drugs.

Early signs have emerged that Harris has galvanised her party in Arizona. At polling places during last week's primary election, Democrats in purple suburbs said they were feeling a newfound resolve.

AI gives weather forecasters a new edge



William J. Broad

The author is a science reporter at The New York Times

In early July, as Hurricane Beryl churned through the Caribbean, a top European weather agency predicted a range of final landfalls, warning that Mexico was most likely. The alert was based on global observations by planes, buoys and spacecraft, which room-size supercomputers then turned into forecasts.

That same day, experts running artificial intelligence software on a much smaller computer predicted landfall in Texas. The forecast drew on nothing more than what the machine had learned previously about the planet's atmosphere.

Four days later, on July 8, Hurricane Beryl slammed into Texas with deadly force, flooding roads, killing at least 36 people and knocking out power for millions of residents. In Houston, the violent winds sent trees slamming into homes, crushing at least two of the victims to death.

The Texas prediction offers a glimpse into the emerging world of AI weather forecasting, in which a growing number of smart machines are anticipating future global weather patterns with new speed and accuracy. In this case, the experimental programme was GraphCast, created in London by DeepMind, a Google company. It does in minutes and seconds what once took hours.

"This is a really exciting step," said Matthew Chantry, an AI specialist at the European Center for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, the agency that got upstaged on its Beryl forecast. On average, he added, GraphCast and its smart cousins can outperform his agency in predicting hurricane paths.

In general, superfast AI can shine at spotting dangers to come, said Christopher S. Bretherton, an emeritus professor of atmospheric sciences at the University of Washington. For treacherous heats, winds and downpours, he said, the usual warnings will be "more up-to-date than right now," saving untold lives.

Rapid AI weather forecasts will also aid scientific discovery, said Amy McGovern, a professor of meteorology and computer science at the University of Oklahoma who directs an AI weather institute. She said weather sleuths now used AI to create thousands of subtle forecast variations that let them find unexpected factors that could drive such extreme events as tornadoes.

Moreover, the AI models can run on desktop computers, making the technology much easier to adopt than the room-size supercomputers that now rule the world of global forecasting.

"It's a turning point," said Maria Molina, a research meteorologist



Hurricane Beryl passes over the Gulf of Mexico in a satellite image taken on July 8, 2024. — NYT

AI weather forecasting with a growing number of smart machines are anticipating future global weather patterns with new speed and accuracy

at the University of Maryland who studies AI programmes for extreme-event prediction. "You don't need a supercomputer to generate a forecast. You can do it on your laptop, which makes the science more accessible."

Reliable weather forecasts turn out to be extraordinarily hard to achieve. The trouble is complexity. Astronomers can predict the paths of the solar system's planets for centuries to come because a single factor dominates their movements — the sun and its immense gravitational pull.

In contrast, the weather patterns on Earth arise from a riot of factors. The tilts, the spins, the wobbles and the day-night cycles of the planet turn the atmosphere into turbulent whorls of winds, rains, clouds, temperatures and air pressures. Worse, the atmosphere is inherently chaotic. On its own, with no external stimulus, a zone can go quickly from stable to capricious.

As a result, forecasts can fail after a few days, and even after a few hours. The errors grow in step with the length of the prediction — which today can extend for 10 days, up from three days a few decades ago. The slow improvements stem from upgrades to the global observations as well as the supercomputers that make the predictions.

The psychology of rejection



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Ahmed is in his mid-thirties and has been on medication and therapy for an episode of depression. During our last session, he mentioned an incident that made him feel ‘unwanted.’

He was visiting his elder brother and found his other siblings were all gathered to celebrate the elder brother’s promotion. His first thoughts were ‘They do not love me’ and ‘My presence bores them.’

He tried to find excuses recalling that he had not attended a family gathering for a long time and they may have assumed that he would not attend this one as well but his mind kept ruminating about it all the time.

Social rejection can be defined as a deliberate behaviour performed by a person or a group of people to exclude others. We all must have experienced some form of rejection such as not being invited to a social event or not getting the attention we seek from a WhatsApp group discussion.

We all agree that humans are social creatures that value social interactions as it provide them with self-esteem, respect, praise, and a sense of belonging.

From a scientific perspective, the human brain is wired to seek acceptance and fear rejection with recent evidence showing that the negative emotions one experiences from rejection trigger chemical reactions in the brain similar to that induced by physical pain.

This is why most humans develop what we can call an ‘emotional radar’ that detects social rejection and swiftly corrects their behaviour to prevent negative outcomes. Developmental psychology tells us that children as young as six months old are able to read their parents’ interactions and detect signs of rejection, especially from their mothers.

This interaction will shape the type of attachment a child develops which can be secure or insecure. Secure attachment, where parents consistently meet their child’s needs with respect and balance, leads to healthy emotional development whereas insecure attachment, where parents neglect or mock their child’s needs, results in lifelong social and emotional difficulties.

A child who experiences insecure attachment is more likely to develop dependent or avoidant personality traits as an adult which impacts his

SOCIAL REJECTION CAN BE DEFINED AS A DELIBERATE BEHAVIOUR PERFORMED BY A PERSON OR A GROUP OF PEOPLE TO EXCLUDE OTHERS

social relationships as he or she constantly fears rejection and may sabotage a potentially healthy relationship by rejecting the other person to avoid being subjected to rejection.

Feelings of exclusion and rejection can lead to aggression as an attempt to regain control. A recent study from the US showed teenagers involved in school shootings were more likely to have experienced rejection at some point in their lives.

So how can we deal with rejection?

First, we need to accept that we cannot be loved by everyone and that trying to please everyone often leads to a lack of personal stability and authenticity.

Instead, we should view rejection as a natural part of life that can facilitate our personal growth and self-improvement. When facing rejection, think about it as a powerful motivator for positive change and an opportunity for new beginnings rather than an end. For example, being denied a promotion might prompt someone to seek better opportunities elsewhere.

Personal rejections can reveal the true nature of relationships, helping individuals make better decisions about who to keep in their lives.

Thai opposition likely to fight in parliament, not streets

PANU WONGCHA-UM

Four years ago, when Thai opposition party Future Forward was dissolved by the Constitutional Court for trying to amend a law protecting the monarchy from criticism, supporters took to the streets, triggering months of civil unrest.

A repeat of these mass protests is unlikely, however, even after the same court disbanded Future Forward’s successor, Move Forward, because this time the opposition group holds the most seats in parliament and its stalwarts are preparing to fight their cause in the house, and at the ballot box.

“We just went through it four years ago. So we’re not new,” party leader Pita Limjaroenrat said before the ruling. “I want to prove to the establishment, and also to the world, that dissolving parties is futile.”

Had he not been blocked by the military-appointed senate, Pita would have become Thailand’s prime minister after Move Forward, which over the past four years morphed from a youth-driven movement that came in third in the first vote since a 2014 military coup, won last year’s general elections.

Even after the ruling, the party remains the largest voting bloc in parliament, and has already said that it would set up a new political vehicle to accommodate its 143 lawmakers.

Under Thai parliamentary rules, these lawmakers can move to any political party of their choice, a defection that its opponents will seek to induce, analysts said.

In 2020, just 10 out of 81 Future Forward lawmakers defected to the conservative coalition that was in power. This time, party leaders say they believe everyone will stay on board.

“We haven’t checked the names but we are very confident that everyone will come with us,” Move Forward deputy leader Sirikanya Tansakul told reporters. Move Forward’s progressive agenda brought Thailand’s influential monarchy into the mainstream political discourse with its campaign promise to reform the strict lese majeste law.

Its 2023 victory at the polls on this agenda was built on the easing of taboos around the monarchy that was induced by the 2020 protests against Future Forward’s dissolution. The disbanding of Move Forward is the latest setback for Thailand’s major political parties, which are embroiled in a two-decade battle for power against a nexus of influential conservatives, old money families and the military. — Reuters

Paris Olympics 2024: A tale of controversy and cultural tensions



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The writer is the author of *The World According to Bahja*

FROM DAZZLING CEREMONIES TO CONTROVERSIES, THE PARIS OLYMPICS 2024 SHOWCASED GLOBAL DISCONTENT, REFLECTING DEEP-SEATED CULTURAL AND POLITICAL DIVIDES

I am not a fan of sports except the World Cup. To me, the Olympics were always about watching opening and closing ceremonies, and reading about outstanding performances and medals won.

However, as I watch France24 for news updates, they broadcast for almost a year programmes about how the French were getting ready for the Olympics.

From French dishes they are planning to dazzle their visitors with to cleaning the Seine for the triathlons (both turned out to be huge disappointments as the attendees were too broke to wine and dine in fancy restaurants and a few dozen athletes came out of the Seine vomiting due to its high contamination).

I missed the opening ceremony this time but, in the morning, Mom told me that she heard on the Monte Carlo radio station that the ceremony was so grand and successful that the Arab announcers were tearful and speechless throughout it.

I got excited and decided to watch the highlights on YouTube.

However, the first thing that came was the infamous Last Supper drag performance. The outrage was understandable of course but what wasn’t was dragging Muslims into this with mindless comments like: “If they were Muslims, you would’ve never

dared to represent them this way!”

May I remind the selectively amnesic West about Charlie Hebdo’s publishing of the offending Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) cartoons in 2012 that caused France later many unnecessary losses of lives which could’ve been avoided with a simple apology (that never came of course).

The Christians should be thankful for getting a reluctant apology a week later - after a period of denial and removal of the video from the Olympics website - along the lines of ‘not meaning to offend anyone’ and ‘just representing French secular values.’

As for France24, they broadcasted updates about the events but failed to mention problems that were occurring on an almost daily basis (some were handled with a Parisian attitude): the unexpected torrential rains in the opening ceremony that drenched the spectators and contaminated the Siene even further, mixing up between the two Koreas and not understanding the fuss afterward (how about the French being called English?), banning the participation of scarved Muslim French athletes (till they find a practical solution for the Hijab that suits their secular values, which never happened), the Olympic Village with its uncomfortable cardboard beds, suffocating rooms, crowded bathrooms

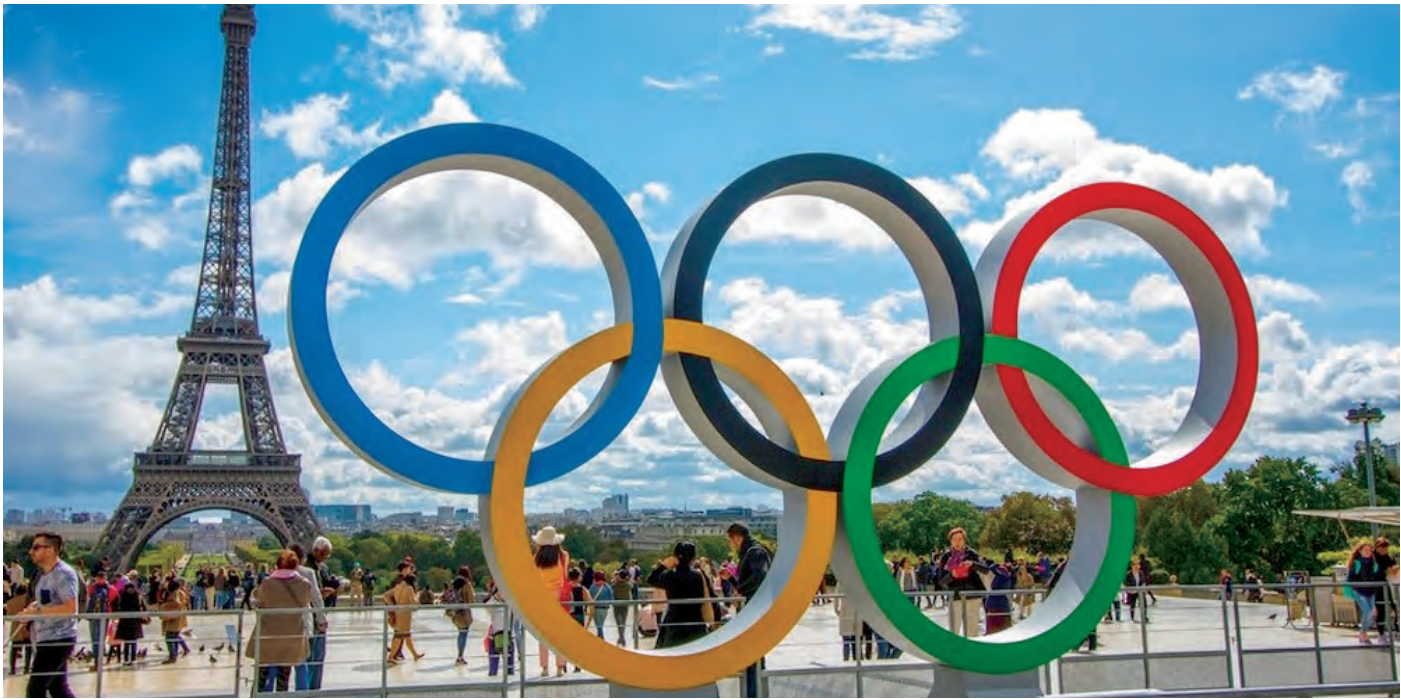
and low-quality food.

Besides, recent complaints from non-European teams- except the Americans- about discrimination and unfairness. Yet, the real highlight of the Paris Olympics was Algeria. In the opening ceremony, the Algerian athletes threw roses in the Siene when passing by the bridge where the French police had thrown and killed peaceful Algerian protestors by the hundreds in 1961, reminding France of its brutal colonial past.

Then came the case of the Algerian biological female boxer who defeated Italian Angela Carini in 46 seconds. The whole world went against her calling her unjustness, to which the organisers were dead silent for days before suspense fully revealing her feminine gender (the same world was uncertain last year about the trans-weightlifter who broke women’s records by almost 200 kgs).

Then came Kaylia Nemour, the half-French, half-Algerian gymnast who won Algeria’s and Africa’s first gold medal in gymnastics. Funny enough, the French stopped her from participating in their Olympic team on medical grounds, yet she went to represent her father’s country.

As for the closing ceremony, I think I am going to skip it. Hypocrisy and double standards were never my cup of tea.



The captivating Paris Olympics...

They're here again! That festival of sporting excellence that is the Olympic Games, as for the past fortnight, Paris, France has delivered what we want from our athletes, with excellence, mediocrity, madness, joy and despair, all on show. It is performance, pathos, and for a few, the pinnacle of their sporting careers.

It is particularly appropriate that this sporting extravaganza is 'at home' in France, given that it was a Frenchman, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, acknowledged as the 'Father of the Modern Olympics,' who fashioned sports in a way that made it for all men and women, exactly 100 years ago, in 1924.

His vision was for a games to find the best of the best in all sports, and his motto of the day was 'Citius, Altius, Fortius,' or in English "Faster, Higher, Stronger," 'borrowed' from a colleague, Father Henri Louis Didon.

Didon had himself organised sports and community events since 1891, in the town of Arcueil, with de Coubertin as his assistant, however it was the latter's global vision that was to bring the Olympics as we know them today, to pass.

That first Olympic village, in Colombes, north of Paris, was a collection of temporary huts, with catering halls, shower blocks and services such as post offices, shops, hairdressers, banks, and much more.

A 1924 map shows how, from the rowing at the Basin de Argenteuil in the North, to the equestrian events in the South-West at the Stand de Versailles and Saint Cloud Polo Fields, across to the Velodrome Municipal cycling venue in the East, while the athletics and ceremonial centrepiece was the Stade de Colombes, with capacity for 45,000 spectators. Notably, as the Stade Olympique Yves-de-Manoir, that venue is hosting the field hockey a century later.

Athletes from 44 countries, from as far away as New Zealand, whose four athletes won just one bronze medal, competed, among the others, the great Paavo Nurmi, the 'Flying Finn,' who won the 1,500m, the 5,000m, and the 3,000m cross-country, now



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FRANCE HAS DELIVERED WHAT WE WANT FROM OUR ATHLETES, WITH EXCELLENCE, MEDIOCRITY, MADNESS, JOY, AND DESPAIR ALL ON SHOW

known as the steeplechase.

Johnny Weismuller, who was subsequently to star in the movie *Tarzan*, won three swimming golds, and another in Water polo. If you have seen the film *Chariots of Fire*, about the British runners Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddle, the 100m and 400m runners, yes, that all took place in Paris 1924.

France meanwhile had its own 'star' of the games, as swordsman Roger Ducret feinted, lunged, and riposted his way to three gold medals. Clearly, he was a cut above his opponents.

The great miracle of these games was not the athletes, or the events, but how the spectators became a force for progress, as the games prior to 1924 had been very much 'athletes only' events. Yet, here they were, in and around Paris, caught up in the need to escape the horrors of the Great War of 1914-18, needing to see the best that man could do, after four horrific years of seeing the worst.

In de Coubertin's eyes, a passport to riches, even though 'his' games cost France around £4 million. He had seen that the spectators would pay, the media would pay, and as much as each sport would have its undoubted champion, sports itself would have its absolute pinnacle.

So, what of 2024? Well, the opening ceremonies were disappointing. While paying homage to the French history and culture, as a century of the Olympics do, the organiser's insistence upon promoting lifestyle diversity went 'way over the top' and has drawn a chorus of 'critique.' I'll say no more!

Performance wise, there has been controversy in the boxing ring with Imane Khelif and Lin Yu Ting, entertainer Snoop Dog a ubiquitous presence, Covid impacted Noah Lyles bid to win the 100m, 200m double, and GB's Tom Pidcock won the Mountain Bike gold after crashing at halfway. It's all 'kickin' off! Mostly in a good way.

Add in wall-climbing, break-dancing, and BMX racing, and with Parisian joi de vivre the Olympics are alive, different and diverse, yet... the same exciting, for sporty types, to couch potatoes... un paradis.

ONE RACE... HUMAN



A protester holds a sign at an anti-racism protest in Liverpool, Britain, on Saturday. – Reuters

A principled and powerful European Union

Whenever Europeans return from their summer holidays, calls for a structural overhaul of the European Union are practically inevitable. This year will be no different, though the impetus for change may be more powerful than ever.

The EU is facing numerous daunting – even existential – challenges. War rages on its doorstep, economic competitiveness lags and deep social polarisation persists. Political uncertainty in France and indecision in Germany compound the EU's fragility, precisely when an unpredictable leadership transition in the United States, which threatens to usher in a prolonged period of American isolationism, leaves Europe with little choice but to take its fate into its own hands.

The EU has managed to overcome severe disruptions in recent years, from sovereign-debt crises to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom. But, in today's geopolitical environment, it is weak, vulnerable and ill-prepared to handle the challenges it faces. The enduring influence of populist forces — which weaponise concerns over illegal migration and openly defy European unity — is a major reason why.

For example, Hungarian Prime



Ana Palacio
The writer is a former minister of foreign affairs of Spain and a visiting lecturer at Georgetown University

IN A WORLD INCREASINGLY DEFINED BY GEOPOLITICAL POWER PLAYS AND REALPOLITIK, THE EU'S MORAL AUTHORITY AND COMMITMENT TO VALUES-BASED GOVERNANCE ARE INCREASINGLY VIEWED AS QUAINT AND INEFFECTIVE

Minister Viktor Orbán, who has led Hungary's government since 2010 (after previously holding office from 1998-2002), has seemingly made it his mission to erode the rule of law in Hungary and across the EU, while undermining European cohesion. And last month, his government assumed the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU.

Within days, Orbán carried out surprise visits to Kyiv, Moscow and Beijing to discuss a potential Ukraine peace deal — a clear bid both to exploit the EU's institutional apparatus and to undermine it strategically. He also attended — again, with no coordination or warning — the summit of the Organisation of Turkic States, which includes as an "observer" the unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

EU leaders scrambled to clarify that Orbán had no mandate to represent the Union externally, let alone to negotiate any kind of Ukraine peace deal. To highlight that Orbán was acting out of turn, the EU's foreign-policy chief, Josep Borrell, stripped Hungary of the right to host the next meeting of foreign and defence ministers — normally the job of the Council of the EU president.

Unfazed, Orbán proceeded to announce a new fast-track visa system that would enable citizens of eight countries, including Russia and Belarus, to enter Hungary without security checks, raising fears about the integrity of the Schengen Area of border-free travel and EU security more broadly. Orbán has also sought, together with his counterparts in Slovakia, to use EU levers to force Ukraine to end its ban on the transit of Russian oil through the Druzhba pipeline that runs through its territory. Most recently, Hungary blocked a joint EU statement on the "irregularities" of the presidential elections in Venezuela, prompting Borrell to issue a separate statement.

EU leaders can do all the

damage control they want, but Orbán is achieving his goal of making the Union appear confused, discordant and weak. Having internalised key lessons of the Soviet era, he knows that empires and institutions begin to falter once they become objects of ridicule.

This has contributed to the growing impression that in a world increasingly defined by geopolitical power plays and realpolitik, the EU's moral authority and commitment to values-based governance are quaint and ineffective — relics of the past. A lack of visionary leadership and cohesion among key members have only compounded the problem. Not only has the once-

powerful Franco-German engine of European integration run out of steam; European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's new mandate — which she secured by crafting an ambiguous platform that sought to appeal to a broad spectrum of interests — seems unlikely to bring profound change. Against this backdrop, forging a coherent vision on critical issues like competitiveness, innovation and defence will prove difficult, at best. Those who stand to gain the most from this situation are spoilers, such as Orbán, who have learned how to exploit disunity and ambiguity.

During past crises — from the Brexit negotiations to the EU's previous dealings with Hungary over Orbán's assaults on democracy and the rule of law — the EU has relied largely on a legalistic and technocratic approach, which has often left it worse off.

But calls for the EU to start speaking the "language of power" have remained unheeded. And while proposals for strengthening the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy's mandate have been advanced, they represent little more than cosmetic changes.

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Within days, Orbán carried out surprise visits to Kyiv, Moscow and Beijing to discuss a potential Ukraine peace deal.



OSSA ALL SET FOR SCHOOL BEACH GAMES IN SALALAH

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

The Oman School Sports Association (OSSA) and the sports committees of the educational directorates are all set to commence the actions of the third edition of the School Beach Games Championship on Sunday. OSSA completed all the technical and logistics arrangements to kick off the competitions of beach handball and beach volleyball.

The purpose of the School Beach Games Championship is to discover the talented students and potential athletes who can join the national teams of beach handball and beach volleyball in future. The five-day event of the School Beach Games will feature attendance of 102 students representing various educational directorates across Oman and competing in two sports including beach handball and beach volleyball.

"We are very eager to commence the actions of the third edition of the School Beach Games Championship which will start in Dhofar. Thanks to all the educational governorates who confirmed their attendance at this event. It is a very crucial sporting championship which targets to discover students' talents in beach volleyball and beach handball. We expect to see intense and exciting matches between the participating educational directorate teams. There is no doubt that holding this championship during the Khareef season in Dhofar gives participants the opportunity to showcase their skills and also allows us to make the most of these conditions for the sports activities organised by Oman School Sports Association." Yousuf Bait Saleem, OSSA Board member said.

The action begins on Sunday with

six matches in beach handball and with the same amount of matches in beach volleyball. The draw for the championship takes place in today's morning session.

In the beach handball competition, nine teams will compete and they will be divided into two groups. The teams include: Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Musandam, Dhofar, Muscat, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South.

In the beach volleyball competition, ten teams will take part in the event and they will be distributed into two groups including teams of Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Dhofar, Muscat, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Buraimi and Al Wusta.

The championship aims to promote high moral values and sports culture among school students, raise awareness of the importance of sports and physical activity, discover and develop students' talents in beach sports, foster friendships and cooperation among students from different educational governorates, promote the infrastructure and sports facilities in Dhofar and build constructive cooperation with various national sports federations and committees in Oman.

It also seeks to help students make good use of their leisure time through beneficial sports activities, enhance the concept of sports as a means to boost domestic tourism and use sports activities as an effective tool to serve various educational and instructional goals.

Muscat educational team had managed to win the handball title in the previous championship while the Al Batinah North team had claimed the beach volleyball title.

Intensive hockey camp for U-18 national teams begins

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

The hockey camp for the national teams under-18 for both males and females began at the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat. The camp will continue for 10 consecutive days, from August 6 to 16.

The event includes intensive training aimed at improving the technical and skill aspects of the players, with a focus on implementing tactical plans and participating in friendly matches.

The programme also includes recording and analysing matches and holding technical meetings with the administrative and technical bodies to evaluate the players' performance and identify candidates to join the initial lists of the national teams.

74 male and female players from various hockey preparation centres in the governorates of Oman are participating in this camp. The training includes separate periods for both males and females, with a focus on developing their skills and tactical abilities.

Mohammed al Gharabi, administrator of the national hockey teams, stressed the importance of the camp in refining the skills of male and female players and selecting the elite among them to represent the national teams under 18-years-old.



74 male and female players from various hockey preparation centres in the governorates of Oman are participating in this camp. The training includes separate periods for both males and females, with a focus on developing their skills and tactical abilities

that the camp represents an opportunity to evaluate the performance of 28 players

selected from different governorates, as they possess the basic skills that qualify them to join the team. He stressed that the players have high ambitions and love for the game, which contributes to achieving the goals of the camp.

Salah al Saadi, coach of the national team under-18 for men, indicated that preparations for this camp began a long time ago, with the formation of a technical committee to evaluate the performance of the players and select the best. He added that the camp witnessed great interaction from the players who expressed their keenness to present their best to convince the technical committee to nominate

them to join the national team.

The men's training in the camp is supervised by Siegfried Eikman, the national team coach, along with the head coach of the U-18 men's team, Salah bin Nasser al Saadi. The technical staff also includes match analyst Wajdi Hassan Sanjour, goalkeeping coach Muzaffar Abbas, therapist Adeel Akhtar, and team manager Mohammed al Gharabi.

The women's training in the camp is supervised by coach Mohammed Sharif, head coach of the U-18 women's team Mohammed Bait Jandal, goalkeeping coach Tamadhar al Balushi, and therapist Dr Yasmine al Sayed.

Oman Sail celebrates 16 years of global success

MUSCAT: Oman Sail recently celebrated its 16th anniversary with an event at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Muscat. The celebration was held under the auspices of Dr Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group), Dr Khamis bin Sulaiman al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, along with strategic partners, sponsors and Oman Sail staff, who shared the success of Oman Sail over the past 16 years.

Founded as a national initiative aimed at reviving Oman's maritime heritage and promoting the Sultanate of Oman globally through the sport of sailing, Oman Sail has consistently championed the

Sultanate of Oman in the global sailing arena, boosted investment opportunities and the Omani economy, and focused on empowering Omani youth.

These efforts have resulted in a series of impressive achievements, including winning international trophies and individual medals at youth and senior levels, and hosting and organising continental and international events all across Oman to promote the nation's capabilities as a major global sporting venue.

Dr Khamis bin Salim al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, who expressed his delight at the accomplishments said: "Oman Sail has achieved numerous international successes and



Community Sailing Programme

hosted major continental and international events, enhancing Oman's position as a global sports venue and organiser.

It has also promoted Oman's readiness to attract business and investments and our activities and programmes continue to

make significant contributions to achieving 11 out of 12 national priorities outlined in Oman Vision 2040."

Since its inception, Oman Sail has focused on translating a clear vision for success through several core pillars: sailing sports, tourism, commercial activities, health, and the environment. Each one emphasises developing team competencies and empowering people of all ages and abilities by encouraging them to practice sailing and develop personal skills and boost their employability. As a result, Oman has become a preferred destination for many global sailing regattas and attracts some of the world's most prominent sailors to compete

and train each year. Dr Al Jabri pointed out that these achievements and successes are clear proof of the efforts and high competency of the team. Each event has a positive impact on the community and makes a significant contribution to the country's sustainable development goals.

Dr Al Jabri also highlighted Oman Sail's commitment to partnering with the private sector and sharing the benefits of these events. A successful partnership enables Omani companies to expand their services to a broader international audience and capitalise on the networking and investment opportunities these events provide.

TOLA WINS MEN’S MARATHON, KIPCHOGE DROPS OUT

PARIS: Ethiopia’s Tamirat Tola broke the Olympic record to win the men’s marathon on Saturday as Victor Wembanyama’s France looked to topple the mighty USA in a dream basketball final.

Tola, the 2022 world champion, dominated the marathon on the sun-drenched streets from central Paris to Versailles as Eliud Kipchoge’s bid for a third straight gold went up in smoke.

The race kicked off the penultimate day of sporting action, with eight medals up for grabs in the final session of track and field and China chasing a clean sweep of golds in diving and table tennis.

The United States and China are neck-and-neck at the top of the medals table, with 33 golds apiece.

Tola delivered a masterclass in solo front running to clock a time of 2hr 06min 26sec, 21 seconds clear of Belgium’s Bashir Abdi, the bronze medallist from Tokyo, with Kenya’s Benson Kipruto taking bronze.

“I’m happy today. I was 2022 world champion and now I’m Olympic champion,” said Tola.

“It’s the greatest day in my life. This was my goal.”

Former world record holder Kipchoge, the 39-year-old Kenyan who won golds in the 2016 Rio Games and in Tokyo in 2021, pulled up late in the race.

- France target mighty USA -

The star-studded US basketball team, led by LeBron

James and Stephen Curry, were made to sweat by Serbia in Thursday’s semi-final before an exhilarating fourth-quarter comeback, with Curry scoring 36 points.

The four-time defending champions will be favourites to beat France in a repeat of the gold medal match at the Tokyo Games in 2021.

But James, going for his third Olympic gold, knows it is unlikely to get any easier against the host nation, who can boast NBA Rookie of the Year Wembanyama.

“Super competitive. Obviously, this is Wemby’s (Wembanyama’s) first Olympics, but that team has been playing together for quite a while,” he said.

“They’ve been feeding off the crowd, so we look forward to that match-up.”

The Stade de France will play host to a packed programme of athletics later on Saturday, with the United States seeking to extend their dominance.

Qatar’s Mutaz Essa Barshim and Italy’s Gianmarco Tamberi shared high jump gold in one of the most memorable moments of the Tokyo Games.

But this time both come into the competition with questions over their fitness.

Tamberi was pictured in hospital this week complaining of a high temperature and kidney pain, while Barshim appeared to injure his left calf

during qualifying.

Reigning world champion Tamberi, who has jumped a highest of 2.37 metres in 2024, wants his rival alongside him.

“I hope he will be fine by Saturday,” said the Italian. “I need him on the field. I have to be fit myself but I want him to be there in the competition.”

The men’s 800m and 5,000m finals and the women’s 100m hurdles and 1,500m finals also feature in the programme, with the 4x400m relays closing the show.

- Hayes factor -

Emma Hayes’ US women take on Brazil in the women’s football final.

The US won four of the first five Olympic women’s titles after the competition was introduced in 1996 but have not taken gold since the London 2012 Games.

The team are resurgent under new coach Hayes, the English coach who won a stack of trophies during her time as Chelsea boss.

The Brazilians will be attempting to make it third time lucky after losing to the same opponents in the Athens final in 2004 and in Beijing in 2008.

Brazil great Marta, 38, appearing at her sixth and likely last Olympics, is hoping to sign off with gold to go with her two silver medals.

“Marta has changed the game of soccer around the world,” said US star Trinity Rodman.

“She is such a talented soccer



Tamirat Tola of Ethiopia celebrates as he crosses the finish line at Invalides to win gold. — Reuters

player but also a great human. I have always looked up to her. She has a legacy forever, but we want that gold.”

At Le Golf National, New

Zealand’s two-time medallist Lydia Ko is on nine under par with one round to go, level with 137th-ranked Morgane Metraux of Switzerland.

China are chasing a final diving gold to complete a clean sweep of eight, with the men’s 10m platform rounding off the competition.

— AFP

US women chase record basketball gold against France team lifted by ‘love’

PARIS: The all-conquering US women’s basketball team chase an historic eighth straight Olympic gold on Sunday against French opponents fuelled by the “love” of their fans.

The US women have won basketball gold at the past seven Olympic Games, starting at Atlanta in 1996.

An eighth straight triumph would give them the record for most consecutive gold medals in any team sport at the Olympic Games -- breaking a tie with the US men, who won seven basketball titles in a row from 1936 to 1968.

“I think the gold medal is the standard,” US forward Alyssa Thomas said. “No matter where we are in the world, it’s our goal and that’s what we came here for.”

It promises to be an emotional affair at Bercy Arena, where for the first time in Games history the men’s and women’s finals featured identical match-ups.

Delirious fans erupted in joy



when France’s women polished off European Champions Belgium in overtime in the semi-finals, Gabby Williams scoring nine of her 18 points in the extra session as the hosts rallied from a 17-point deficit.

“It’s a love letter to our fans and supporters,” said an ecstatic Williams, who won two US collegiate titles with the University of Connecticut and a EuroLeague Women

championship with Sopron Basket in 2022.

Nevada-born, Williams qualifies to play for France through her mother, Therese, and she was part of the team that won bronze at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Games three years ago.

Now France are back in the final for the first time since 2012, with a chance to grab the last gold medal of the Paris Games.

“The atmosphere has made us

want to cry every single game,” said Williams.

“What I love is our connection between us and our love for each other. If anything is going to bring gold, it is going to be that.”

Whether it will be enough against a well-oiled US machine is another matter.

“We all understood, coming into this team, what our strengths were,” said WNBA sharp-shooter Sabrina Ionescu.

“When we play, it looks effortless and easy, because we just make simple plays,” she said.

“I love it because that’s kind of the style that I play. Moving the ball, being able to play off it, on it.”

Ionescu is also relishing the chance to play alongside the best in her league.

“There’s not that many opportunities to play with the best players in the world, seeing how they play, and how to improve as a player as well,” she said.

Jokic triple-double helps Serbia to Olympic basketball bronze



Moritz Wagner of Germany in action against Nikola Jokic of Serbia. — Reuters

PARIS: Nikola Jokic recorded a triple-double as Serbia defeated Germany 93-83 to claim Olympic men’s basketball bronze on Saturday, avenging their loss in last year’s World Cup final.

Jokic scored 19 points to go along with 12 rebounds and 11 assists as Serbia came away with consolation medals after their heartbreaking semi-final loss to the United States.

Three-time NBA MVP Jokic sat out the 2023 World Cup as Germany won the title for the first time, but with the Denver Nuggets star present in Paris the Serbians snatched the final podium spot.

For Jokic it was a second Olympic medal, adding to the silver he won as part of the Serbia team at the 2016 Rio Games. Bogdan Bogdanovic, who had 16 points, was also a

member of that squad.

Vasilije Micic matched Jokic with 19 points as six Serbia players hit double figures in a game they controlled from start to finish.

“It’s a huge, huge success to win a bronze medal at the Olympics,” said Bogdanovic.

“Of course there is some sadness behind that game against the USA, but we cannot go backwards. We can only be proud about what we achieved today.”

Franz Wagner scored 18 points for Germany. His elder brother Moritz contributed 16 while Dennis Schroder – the hero of their World Cup triumph – was limited to 13.

“Everybody is obviously heartbroken,” said Schroder. “Everybody’s unhappy right now, but we’re going to look forward.”— AFP



New Zealand's gold medalist Lisa Carrington reacts after winning in the women's kayak single 500m final of the canoe sprint competition at Vaires-sur-Marne Nautical Stadium in Vaires-sur-Marne. — AFP

CARRINGTON GRABS MORE GOLD FOR NZ, DOSTAL WINS FOR CZECH REPUBLIC

PARIS: New Zealand's Lisa Carrington completed a stunning clean sweep of gold medals in her Olympic events at by winning the women's kayak single 500 metres title in her third and final competition at the Vaires-sur-Marne Nautical Stadium on Saturday.

Hungary's Tamara Csipes came second to take the silver medal, with Denmark's Emma Aastrand Jorgensen picking up the bronze. Carrington grabbed victory after another manifestation of her strong stroking and stubborn will to win.

In the men's kayak single 1000m race, Josef Dostal of the Czech Republic pulled off an incredible victory, holding off the strong late challenge of silver medalist Hungary's Adam Varga and Balint Kopasz, who won gold in Tokyo but had to be content with bronze in Paris.

In the final race of the Olympic regatta, Canada's Katie Vincent won the women's 200m canoe single race by one-



Hungary's silver medalist Tamara Csipes, New Zealand's gold medalist Lisa Carrington and Denmark's bronze medalist Emma Aastrand Jorgensen celebrate in Vaires-sur-Marne. — AFP

hundredth of a second from American Nevin Harrison, with Cuba's Cirilo Duboys picking up the bronze.

After a strong start, Harrison's slender lead evaporated over the last 50 metres, allowing Vincent to snatch victory after a photo finish.

Carrington, often called "The GOAT (Greatest Of All Time) In The Boat" back home, closed out her Olympics by blazing to

the win in the solo race in an Olympic record 1:47.36 to add to the golds she won in the kayak four and double events.

Hungary's Csipes put the Kiwi under enormous pressure, briefly taking the lead, but Carrington came roaring back to win by just over a second, with Jorgensen edging out New Zealand's Aimee Fisher to take the bronze medal.

Saturday's gold was Carrington's eighth Games

triumph, making her by far the most successful New Zealand Olympian.

"The Olympics has given me so much more than medals, I don't think you can calculate how much I've learned and grown over the last five years, or whatever it's been," an elated Carrington said.

"I think it was just really sticking to my plan, and it's really hard to do that when you're out there and the girls are so strong, so I just had to be super-disciplined and trust my fitness in the back end of the race."

The men's race got off to a flying start as Portugal's Fernando Pimenta took the lead, but his challenge faded as Kopasz and Dostal reeled him in. Dostal then edged in front, paddling frenetically to hold off a late surge from the Hungarian pair to claim the gold in a time of 3:24.07, 0.69 seconds ahead of Varga.

(Reporting by Philip O'Connor; Editing by Ken Ferris and Christian Radnedge)

Slovenia's climbing queen Garnbret wins boulder and lead gold

PARIS: Slovenia's Janja Garnbret cemented her reputation as the world's greatest sport climbing athlete by battling her way to a back-to-back Olympic title with a victory in the boulder and lead event at the Paris Games on Saturday.

Her win gave Slovenia its second gold medal in Paris and the 25-year-old a place in history as the first Olympic champion in the boulder and lead event.

American Brooke Raboutou took the silver and Austria's Jessica Pilz won the bronze.

Climbing made its second Olympics appearance but this was the first Games to split the boulder and lead discipline from the speed event as is the norm for the sport.

In an atmosphere starkly different from the audience-less Tokyo Games three years ago, Garnbret, already a legend in her field, drew raucous cheers from the sold-out Le Bourget crowd as she strode confidently onto the stage for her first climb.

Her early performance met the high expectations as she topped the first of the four boulders in just half-a-minute, leaving 3-1/2 minutes on the clock and an easy smile on her face.

In boulder, athletes rack up points by negotiating four boulder "problems" on a 4.5-metre-high wall, while in lead, they aim to climb a 15-metre wall as high as possible in a single attempt. The scores are added up to decide the rankings.

However, after appearing to pick up a finger injury along the way, Garnbret had trouble on the final boulder, leaving her with an unusually small gap, of just 0.4 points, to second-placed Raboutou going into the lead stage.

That left the race for the top prize extremely close, requiring Garnbret to fight hard to rack up the points on the lead route.

In the end, she managed the feat, bringing the rapturous crowd to their feet and Garnbret crumbling to the floor in tears of joy.

Garnbret earned a total of 168.5 points, followed by Raboutou's 156.0 and Pilz's 147.4. — Reuters



Gold medalist Slovenia's Janja Garnbret (C), silver medalist US' Brooke Raboutou (L) and bronze medalist Austria's Jessica Pilz (R) pose on the podium of the women's sport climbing boulder and lead event. — AFP

Belgian Thiam wins third straight heptathlon gold

PARIS: Belgium's Nafissatou Thiam won her third successive Olympic women's heptathlon gold medal on Friday, producing a huge javelin throw to hold off Britain's Katarina Johnson-Thompson who battled to the silver.

Thiam, the first multi-event athlete in Olympic history to win three titles, scored 6,880 points, overtaking Johnson-Thompson in the javelin to move ahead of the Briton by 121 points going into the final 800m, which was the equivalent to an 8.6-second advantage. Twice world champion Johnson-Thompson needed the 800 race of her life for gold and although she clocked a career best two minutes 4.90 seconds, it was only enough to finish with 6,844 points as the Belgian ran a career-best 2:10.62.



Gold medalist Belgium's Nafissatou Thiam celebrates after the women's heptathlon. — AFP

"I knew (Johnson-Thompson) was going to go for it because she had nothing to lose," Thiam said. "But I worked hard in the 800, I was confident. I tried to keep her in my vision the whole time and never let go. I'm very proud of myself for being able to achieve that dream."

Belgium's Noor Vidts claimed bronze with a score of 6,707.

Thiam trailed the 31-year-old Johnson-Thompson by 45 points before she unleashed a huge 54.04 metres javelin throw in the penultimate event. Johnson-Thompson had been the overnight leader of the seven-discipline event after getting off to a dream start with a big shot put personal best and 1.92m in the high jump. She struggled, however, in Friday's long jump event, aborting her first

effort at take-off and giving up a precious 34cm on take-off on her second before posting 6.40m on her third. Thiam, whose career best javelin is some 13 metres better than her British rival's, hurled the spear a season's best 54.04m as Johnson-Thompson could only manage 45.49.

Johnson-Thompson's medal was her first in four Olympics after finishing 13th in London in 2012, suffering major disappointment in finishing sixth in 2016 despite a huge high jump.

She rebounded to win the 2019 world championships before suffering a ruptured Achilles tendon ahead of the Tokyo Olympics, where she was in medal position before tearing her calf in the 200m, the final event of the opening day. — Reuters



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Al Rifaa

Oman invites global bids for Khor Grama marina project



Floating chalets navigate the waters of Khor Grama. The lagoons in Khor Grama offer unique features, such as its multiple meanders, calm waters and soft sands, not only enhance its natural beauty, but also its suitability for a high-profile marina and recreational hub.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is poised to unveil an international tender for the ambitious Khor Grama Project located in the Wilayat of Sur, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. This venture marks a significant milestone in the Sultanate of Oman's efforts to bolster its maritime infrastructure and enhance its coastal tourism offerings.

The tender process, set to commence with the opening of bids next month, seeks to attract global expertise in designing and supervising the multifaceted development.

Interested parties were invited to purchase tender documents starting from August 8, 2024, with a pre-bid clarification deadline set for August 15, 2024. The cut-off date for bid submissions and the opening of technical bids is slated for September 1, 2024, while the commercial bids will be revealed on September 22, 2024.

Khor Grama, strategically located just 14.4 kilometres from the Ras Al Hadd, is renowned for its serene waters and historical significance as a safe harbour for maritime trade. The project aims to leverage this strategic location to create a modern marina capable of accommodating 75 luxury yachts and 20 excursion boats.

Additionally, it will feature a dedicated Fishermen Bay, a water entertainment sports area and comprehensive infrastructure developments including breakwaters, shaded car parking and extensive landscaping over a 300,000-sqm area.

The development blueprint also encompasses essential services such as emergency and security facilities, new road construction and maintenance plans for existing roads, dredging of a channel and marina basin and the installation of fuel pump facilities.

The consultant's role will extend to preparing construction tenders and providing technical support and supervision services to ensure the project's seamless execution.

As of August 10, 2024, a total of 23 reputable consultancy firms have acquired the tender documents, showcasing the project's international appeal.

Khor Grama's development is part of a broader vision by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, which earlier this year announced plans for a future city in the area.

This vision underscores the importance of Khor Grama and Ras Al Hadd in Oman's trade and tourism landscape, given their historical role in facilitating maritime connections between the Gulf states, the Arab world and Africa.

The lagoon's unique features, such as its multiple meanders, calm waters and soft sands, not only enhance its natural beauty, but also its suitability for a high-profile marina and recreational hub.

The planned development is expected to significantly boost local and international tourism, drive economic growth, and reinforce Khor Grama's position as a pivotal maritime and commercial landmark.



OMAN AND INDONESIA COLLABORATE ON ENERGY AND MINERAL VENTURES

JAKARTA: Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auli, Minister of Energy and Minerals, convened yesterday with Arifin Tasrif, Indonesian Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, in Jakarta to explore avenues for enhanced bilateral cooperation in the energy and minerals sectors. The discussions aimed at fortifying the partnership between Oman and Indonesia, focusing on sharing expertise and fostering collaboration in these crucial fields.

DETAILS ON PAGE 15

شركة عمان للاستثمارات والتمويل

OMAN INVESTMENT & FINANCE Co. SAOG



Report of the Board of Directors

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I have the pleasure to present the unaudited financial results for the six months period ended 30th June 2024.

Operating & Financial Performance

The Group made a net profit after tax of RO. 4.564 million for the six months period ended 30th June 2024, compared to RO. 2.198 million during the corresponding period of the previous year. The net profit after tax of the Parent Company was RO. 4.470 million for the six months period ended 30th June 2024, compared to RO. 2.371 million during the corresponding period of the previous year.

The Group made a profit before investment income & finance cost for the six months period ended 30th June 2024 of RO 0.594 million compared to a profit of RO 0.892 million in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Investments

The Parent company holds the following Investments in associates:

S	Company Name	Holding %	
		June 2024	June 2023
1	Sohar International Bank SAOG	13.02%	15.52%
2	The Financial Corporation Co. SAOG (FINCORP)	21.86%	21.86%

The shares in profits or losses from associates are accounted as per the standards laid down by the International Financial Reporting Standards. The reduction in the holding in Sohar International Bank is primarily due to the merger between Sohar International Bank and HSBC which was concluded in August 2023.

The Parent Company holds the following Investment in subsidiaries

S	Company Name	Holding %	
		June 2024	June 2023
1	Wasel Exchange SAOC	100%	100%
2	Afaq Al Musanah LLC	92%	92%

The Financial statement of the subsidiary companies have been consolidated as per the standards laid down by the International Financial Reporting Standards.

Business Outlook

The company is currently going through a renewal phase of its awarded contracts related to operations and collections especially for electricity, water and telecom. Despite facing multiple challenges, the entry of new competitors and the decline of revenue generated from these contracts, the company aspires to maintain its position as a major partner in these businesses. Further, the company is engaged with multiple principles from the public and private sectors to explore new business opportunities, aside from operations and payment collections. This is with the objective of enhancing and diversifying its income and mitigating the risks associated with depending on a specific business. Added to this, it is actively working on areas for pruning costs and increasing efficiencies while maintaining the quality of its services and its work environment.

Acknowledgement

The Board of Directors wishes to express its sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, coupled with heartfelt prayers to the almighty Allah to endow his Majesty with divine assistance to lead the country to achieve further progress and prosperity.

The Company appreciates the support received from Financial Services Authority, Authority of Public Services Regulation and the Central Bank of Oman. It also wishes to extend its sincere gratitude to its partners and principals from the public and private sectors, shareholders for their continued support.

Khalid Said Al Wahaibi
Chairman – Board of Directors

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Income for the period ended 30th June 2024

Group	Group	Parent	Parent
30-Jun-24	30-Jun-23	30-Jun-24	30-Jun-23
RO'000	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
Operating income	7,552	8,508	5,337
Operating expenses	(6,671)	(7,580)	(4,857)
Doubtful debts	45	70	45
Depreciation	(331)	(389)	(190)
Investment income	360	353	337
Other Income	27	13	41
Reversal of Liabilities	20	421	15
Other expenses	(408)	(504)	(306)
	594	892	422
Share of profit in associates	6,654	3,784	6,654
Finance charges	(2,683)	(2,462)	(2,606)
Profit before taxation	4,565	2,214	4,470
Taxation	(1)	(16)	-
Net profit attributable to OIFC shareholders	4,564	2,198	4,470
Attributable to:			
Equity holders of the Parent company	4,562	2,201	4,470
Non-controlling interests	2	(3)	-
Profit for the period / year	4,564	2,198	4,470
Basic Earnings per share (RO)	0.018	0.009	0.018

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Financial Position at 30th June 2024

Group	Group	Group	Parent	Parent	Parent
As on	As on	As on	As on	As on	As on
30-Jun-24	30-Jun-23	31-Dec-23	30-Jun-24	30-Jun-23	31-Dec-23
RO'000	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
ASSETS					
Non-Current Assets					
Property and equipment and intangible	3,076	3,616	3,218	1,135	1,372
Investment properties	1,785	1,785	1,785	1,785	1,785
Deferred Tax asset	872	1,317	867	867	1,317
Investment in associates and subsidiary	105,168	98,557	102,431	115,991	109,580
Financial Asset at FVOCI	7,683	7,895	7,271	7,683	7,895
Deposits	100	100	100	-	-
	118,684	113,270	115,672	127,461	121,949
Current Assets					
Inventories	384	418	380	34	53
Trade and other receivables	11,703	9,721	10,518	9,388	6,852
Investments at fair value through profit & loss	2,208	1,588	3,282	2,208	1,588
Cash and bank balances	4,679	3,557	4,403	1,898	326
	18,974	15,284	18,583	13,528	8,819
	137,658	128,554	134,255	140,989	130,768
Total Assets	137,658	128,554	134,255	140,989	130,768
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES					
Shareholders Funds					
Share Capital	24,885	24,885	24,885	24,885	24,885
Legal Reserve	8,327	7,697	8,327	8,215	7,598
Change in fair value through OCI	(272)	(689)	(813)	(272)	(689)
Associate reserves	(319)	(255)	(319)	(319)	(255)
Properties revaluation reserve	526	565	526	526	565
Retained earnings	33	(3,396)	(3,534)	6,839	2,022
Shareholder's equity	33,180	28,807	29,072	39,874	34,126
Non-controlling interest	(117)	(12)	(119)	-	-
Total equity	33,063	28,795	28,953	39,874	34,126
Non-current liabilities					
Non-current portion of term loan	55,988	61,664	59,195	55,535	60,837
Other non current liabilities	776	829	775	751	751
End of service benefits	519	428	511	256	217
Deferred tax liability	36	42	36	35	42
	57,319	62,963	60,517	56,577	61,861
Current liabilities					
Bank borrowings	5,616	3,455	5,300	5,400	3,455
Trade and other payables	24,777	22,848	24,912	23,661	21,378
Current portion of term loan	16,855	10,440	14,520	15,465	9,942
Taxation	28	53	53	12	6
	47,276	36,796	44,785	44,538	34,781
Total Liabilities	104,595	99,759	105,302	101,115	96,642
Total Equity and Liabilities	137,658	128,554	134,255	140,989	130,768
Net Assets	33,063	28,795	28,953	39,874	34,126
Net assets per share (RO)	0.124	0.111	0.117	0.152	0.132

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BMW M Motorsport teams prepare for Esports World Cup



MUSCAT: The three BMW M Motorsport teams in Automotive Gaming – B S + C O M P E T I T I O N , MOUZ, and Redline – are currently undergoing intensive preparation for the 2024 Esports World Cup (EWC) taking place from 22nd to 25th August in Riyadh (KSA).

A key part of the programme was a joint training week. It took the drivers from the BMW M Driving Experience in Maisach (GER) on a road trip with five BMW M4 Competition Coupés to Formula Medicine in Viareggio (ITA), where they worked on their mental and physical fitness under the guidance of sports doctor Dr. Riccardo Ceccarelli.

During the ESL R1 online season, which included six racing events, the drivers qualified for the EWC, competing for a total prize pool of 500,000 US dollars. The competition will be held on the “Rennsport”.

Simulation platform. BMW M Team Redline finished the online season in first place in the team standings with 337 points, with BMW M Team MOUZ driver Maximilian Benecke (GER) entering the EWC as the reigning champion.

The joint preparation week began with a BMW M Driving Experience in Maisach, offering an exciting mix of real driving experience and the innovative BMW M Mixed Reality Experience.

This journey strengthened team spirit and created unforgettable moments.

SQU and SOHAR Port join forces to drive research, development and innovation

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and SOHAR Port and Freezone (SOHAR) have entered a groundbreaking partnership aimed at bolstering research, development and innovation.

This collaborative agreement, signed by HH Sayyid Dr Fahad bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU, and Eng Abdullah bin Khalfan al Jabri, Chairman of the Board of Directors of SOHAR, marks a significant step towards fostering sustainable economic growth through impactful academic and industrial synergies.

By integrating SQU’s academic strengths with SOHAR’s industry expertise, this partnership aims to address key challenges in the logistics and industrial sectors, driving meaningful contributions to Oman’s national economy.

The alliance will leverage SQU’s theoretical insights to enhance SOHAR’s practical capabilities, creating a powerful blend of knowledge and application.

A core objective of this partnership is to establish a sustainable educational ecosystem that promotes knowledge



dissemination and experience sharing.

This will be achieved through various initiatives, including conferences, workshops, and seminars, as well as joint scientific publications.

These efforts are aligned with Oman Vision 2040, emphasising the importance of innovation and the adoption of advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, the Internet of Things, and Autonomous

Vehicles. Furthermore, the partnership will support university graduation projects, advancing scientific research and engineering solutions to logistical challenges.

The collaboration extends to the Oman AI-enhanced Drone Competition, an annual event organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

This competition trains university and college students in drone technologies and their integration with artificial intelligence, fostering autonomous capabilities.

SOHAR will facilitate field visits and practical training for SQU students, providing them with invaluable hands-on experience in the industrial and logistics sectors.

Building on their successful past cooperation, such as monitoring structural integrity on SOHAR Port’s marine platform, this partnership reinforces both institutions’ positions as leaders in technological advancements and sustainable practices in the region.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL REVAMPS ITS CALL CENTRE IVR SYSTEM

MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman’s Best Bank, is proud to announce the revamp of its Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems within the call centre. This enhancement is part of the bank’s ongoing commitment to providing exceptional services and personalised digital experiences to its valued customers.

In addition to phone support, customers can now access the bank’s call centre through various communication channels, including web chat, which will instantly address frequently asked questions. This multi-channel approach ensures that assistance is always just a click or call away, no matter where customers are.

The revamped IVR system includes advanced self-service options, enabling customers to perform several tasks independently and seamlessly, saving waiting time in queues.

These options include self-authentication via IVR, card activation (Credit and Prepaid Cards), PIN reset, and account balance check.

Moreover, the priority of blocking cards, Mobile Banking App, and Internet Banking as protection tools



for our esteemed customers. Going beyond measures, with subject matter experts dedicated to applications of retail products and services, it will make it easier for both our existing and new customers to conveniently request their preferred product/ service.

This empowers Sohar International’s customers to manage their banking needs at their convenience – anytime, anywhere.

“At Sohar International, we continuously strive to enhance our customer experience by leveraging the latest technology,” said Abdul Qader al Sumali, Chief Retail and

Premier Banking Officer. “The revamp of our IVR system is a testament to our dedication to providing superior, personalised services and ensuring that our customers can access the assistance they need, whenever they need it. Our focus remains on the augmentation of our customers’ experience which constitutes a cornerstone of Sohar International’s strategy.”

The upgraded IVR system introduces a host of new features designed to streamline interactions and offer tailored services to meet the diverse needs of clientele. Sohar International’s new IVR system is meticulously designed to ensure every customer interaction is smooth and efficient, with a keen emphasis on personalised services.

The structured IVR system now includes tailored call routing that categorises customers based on their specific segments. Understanding the unique needs of diverse clientele, Sohar International has introduced dedicated lines that cater specifically to Conventional, Islamic and Corporate clients.

Tap’N’Go service from Bank Muscat new convenient payment solution



MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to provide cutting-edge payment solutions to enhance customers’ experience, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, offers the Tap’N’Go payment service enabled with the Near Field Communication (NFC) feature.

The service facilitates transactions by eliminating the need of having a physical terminal to accept payments.

The new payment service allows merchants and business owners including home business owners to accept card payments directly on their Android phones and smart devices.

All NFC-enabled payment cards may be used for customers to initiate payment transactions via the Tap’N’Go application. This digital service is available for Bank Muscat and Meethaq customers alike.

To benefit from this service, merchants have to open a merchant account that allows business to accept card payments, in addition to opening a Bank Muscat corporate account.

The launch of Tap’N’Go application adds to the

Bank’s growing portfolio of customer-centric services and facilities, including payment options such as Samsung Pay and QR code. Customers can benefit as well from other digital services including, the Soft Token App authentication.

Internet Banking transactions, instant opening of Themaar Savings Plan, viewing access for minor accounts, payments to Pakistan and Bangladesh wallet, Speed transfer to Egypt.

Friendi Mobile Top Up, payment to government for Value added Tax (VAT).

Excise Tax and Corporate income Tax, VAT statement for Corporate customers, Group Bill Payments which allow users to submit multiple Bill Payment transactions in a single click, setting SMS Language instantly by Internet Banking & Mobile Banking, performing QR payment by doing a phone shake.

MEDC electricity prepaid & post-paid payment, Muscat Finance and National Finance Loan Instalment payment and payments to new educational institutes, in addition to the NFC feature available on ATMs & CDMs.

BYD celebrates grand opening of 300th store in Asia-Pacific region

MUSCAT: Recently, BYD officially announced the grand opening of its 108th store in Thailand and 300th store in the Asia-Pacific region. This achievement underscores BYD’s commitment to expanding its network in Thailand and marks a significant milestone in the company’s growth across the Asia-Pacific.

Ke Yubin, Assistant General Manager of BYD’s Asia-Pacific Auto Sales Division and General Manager of BYD Thailand, stated at the event: “By the end of 2024, we aim to have over 150 stores throughout Thailand, covering all 77 provinces.

This expanding network not only boosts market confidence but also lays a strong foundation for future sales growth. The opening of our 300th store in the Asia-Pacific region reinforces BYD’s leading position in the market.”

The newly opened store, located in Ubon Ratchathani in



north eastern Thailand, spans 13,000 square meters and offers various functional areas including a new energy vehicle exhibition area, a test drive experience area, a sales negotiation area, a customer lounge, and an after-sales service area, providing customers with a comprehensive service experience.

BYD is dedicated to offering every customer an exceptional car-buying experience through innovative technology and superior service.

Additionally, the store is equipped with advanced charging facilities, ensuring that customers can enjoy convenient charging services after purchasing their vehicles.

As one of the important markets in the Asia-Pacific region, the strategic placement of the 300th store in Thailand highlights BYD’s long-term commitment and confidence in the Thai market.

The new store aims to provide local consumers with more

convenient and efficient services, further driving the adoption and development of new energy vehicles in Thailand.

BYD remains dedicated to leveraging technological innovation to meet people’s aspirations for a better life, continuously improving product and service quality and is committed to providing global consumers with more environmentally friendly and efficient travel solutions.

Looking ahead, BYD plans to increase investment and expand its footprint in the Asia-Pacific region, addressing local market needs, and delivering advanced new energy vehicle products and premium services.

Every step of BYD’s journey contributes to the future of global green travel.

In Oman BYD range of electrifying vehicles will soon be distributed by Saud Bahwan Group.

DREAM VILLA GROUP
UNVEILS AL AHLAM DISTRICT
IN SULTAN HAITHAM CITY

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

Dream Villa Group, in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, proudly announced the opening of the Al Ahlam District sales centre in Sultan Haitham City on Thursday. The event was graced by of Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

Al Ahlam District is a premier residential development within the first phase of Sultan Haitham City, featuring 47 exclusive villas spread across 33,579 square metres. Each villa marries architectural elegance with sustainable design, setting a new benchmark for luxurious and eco-friendly living.

Qais al Bahri, CEO of Dream Villa Group, expressed his delight at the project's launch: "We are honoured by the government's trust and thrilled to introduce Al Ahlam District in alignment with Oman Vision 2040. Our mission is to offer high-quality, sustainable villas that cater to the needs of diverse and evolving families.

"Representing the Dream Villa team, we aim to be the trusted innovators in lifestyle solutions in Oman, spanning residential development and hospitality. We are dedicated to designing and constructing sustainable, high-quality living spaces that blend authentic Omani heritage with modern innovations."

The project exemplifies a modern residential complex, with villas starting at 400 square metres, featuring state-of-the-art smart technologies for lighting, security and climate control, ensuring a contemporary living experience aligned with sustainability standards.

Strategically located for easy

access, Al Ahlam District offers a secluded environment that ensures privacy while being conveniently close to public schools, private clinics, mosques, a main city mosque, a mall and universities – all within a five-minute walk.

"Our goal is to enhance the quality of life by creating an integrated community with comprehensive facilities and amenities, embedding sustainability into every aspect of the project. We aim to foster social interaction and build a cohesive community," added Al Bahri.

The district features pedestrian-friendly streets up to 16 metres wide, ample parking, well-lit paths, and a 5-metre-wide green corridor with seating areas and gardens. The community park includes a large shaded children's play area and smaller gardens with seating and picnic spaces.

Additionally, the neighbourhood boasts scenic, illuminated walking and jogging paths, and a dedicated bicycle track. Each villa includes covered garages, barbecue areas, master bedroom balconies and rooftop gardens, offering a distinctive lifestyle in the heart of Sultan Haitham City.

Notably, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has recently signed agreements with several local and international real estate developers to develop six residential neighbourhoods in Sultan Haitham City, with an investment exceeding RO 1.1 billion for the first phase (2024-2030).

Among these projects is the "Dream Villa" initiative to develop Neighbourhood (6B) over more than 33,000 square metres, including 47 residential units, reinforcing Sultan Haitham City's status as a leading residential destination in the Sultanate of Oman.



Al Ahlam District features 47 exclusive villas spread across 33,579 sqm.

IGC launches Oman's first short-term natural gas supply auction

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

Integrated Gas Company (IGC), the sole aggregator and supplier of natural gas in the Sultanate of Oman, has invited existing end-users to bid for short-term gas supplies in the first such auction of its kind by the wholly state-owned energy firm.

On the market are around 9,000 million British Thermal Units (BTU) per day (approx 9 million standard cubic feet/day – mmsfd) of gas that will be available to one or more successful bidders for a period ranging from one to two years, according to IGC CEO Eng Abdulrahman bin Humaid al Yahyaee.

"As with our highly successful maiden spot natural gas sales contract that was signed with a leading Omani industrial customer barely a week ago, this time around IGC has unveiled yet another gas supply initiative that aims to maximise revenue generation for our principal stakeholder – the Omani government," he said.

"Furthermore, these innovative actions seek to provide our industrial users, among other customers, with greater flexibility and efficiency in their purchase of natural gas."

Speaking to the *Observer*, Eng Al Yahyaee said interested bidders are required to submit their price bids in sealed envelopes at IGC's head office latest by August 30, 2024.

"IGC has already set a minimum price for the gas volume to be auctioned, so any price offers should improve on this reserve price," the CEO said.



IGC is the sole aggregator and supplier of natural gas in Oman.



Eng Abdulrahman al Yahyaee
CEO - IGC

"To allow for this transaction to benefit multiple players, IGC is open to having one, two or even three customers sharing the volumes among themselves in a certain proportion.

"Besides, the supply timeframe is for one year, which can be extended by negotiation for a second year."

Just a week ago, IGC signed a landmark spot natural gas sales contract with Octal, the Salalah-based world leading polyethylene manufacturer.

Under the deal, IGC has committed to supplying 15,000 m3 per day of natural gas for four

months. The transaction marked IGC's groundbreaking foray into gas marketing activities in line with its enlarged mandate as the sole shipper of Omani natural gas.

Set up as a state-owned enterprise under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance, IGC represents the government's interests in the management of all allocations, assets, rights and obligations of natural gas purchase, sales, transport, imports and exports, as well as all relevant products.

IGC is also tasked with contributing to Oman's fiscal performance by shouldering all expenses related to gas purchase and transport from the State Budget. Part of its remit is to transfer net gas revenue to the treasury as well.

This week's short-term gas supply auction has several underlying aims, said Eng Al Yahyaee. "One objective is to help existing end-users strengthen their positioning in their respective field of operation by

meeting their requirements of additional gas.

"This is particularly the case where a customer may have just completed a debottlenecking exercise, which necessitates access to additional energy supplies.

"Thus, instead of turning to diesel, which is not only more expensive, but also significantly polluting, auctions of this kind will give them the opportunity to access relatively cheaper and environmentally friendlier natural gas."

On the other hand, plant shutdowns — scheduled or sudden — can leave producers grappling with supply disruptions and unutilised gas volumes on their hands.

By allocating these volumes to other potential customers through spot sales or short-term auctions, IGC can not only minimise impacts from disruptions, but crucially, but also ensure uninterrupted revenues accruing to the Omani government, he stated.

Oman and Indonesia collaborate
on energy and mineral ventures

JAKARTA: Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, convened yesterday with Arifin Tasrif, Indonesian Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, in Jakarta to explore avenues for enhanced bilateral cooperation in the energy and minerals sectors.

The discussions aimed at fortifying the partnership between Oman and Indonesia, focusing on sharing expertise and fostering collaboration in these crucial fields.

As part of the visit, Al Aufi and his delegation toured several leading Indonesian energy companies.

These visits provided insights into cutting-edge

innovations and pioneering projects, showcasing the latest technologies and advancements within the Indonesian energy sector. In addition to these company visits, the Omani delegation engaged in multiple meetings with Indonesian officials.

They presented a series of visual presentations highlighting potential areas for cooperation and expertise exchange, aiming to unlock new opportunities in the energy and minerals domains.

The meeting was also attended by Shaikh Mohammed bin Ahmed al Shanfari, Ambassador of Oman to Indonesia, along with several other prominent Omani officials.

Dhofar to host 2nd Green Transport Forum next month

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 10

The 2nd Green Transport Forum will be held in Salalah (Dhofar Governorate) on September 19, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has announced.

This event aims to enhance cooperation in the field of green transport among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, building on regional efforts to adopt sustainable practices in the transport sector.



Green mobility solutions will be a key topic of the forum.

The forum, organised by the ministry, will focus on three main objectives. The first is to strengthen cooperation between Gulf countries in sustainable transport. The second is to

exchange expertise and best practices in this crucial area.

The third objective is to develop joint projects that support green transport, contributing to reducing the carbon footprint and promoting environmental sustainability in the region.

The forum is expected to see wide participation from government officials, transport and environment sector experts, as well as representatives from private companies specialising in the development of environmentally friendly transport technologies.

Khareef Dhofar season witnesses 20% rise in municipal waste

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 10

The khareef season in Dhofar Governorate is a time of natural beauty, attracting both locals and tourists to the governorate. However, with this seasonal influx comes the challenge of managing the significant increase in municipal solid waste (MSW).

The latest data for July 2024 reveals the substantial quantities of waste generated across the various wilayats within the governorate, highlighting the ongoing efforts and operations required to manage this critical

aspect of urban maintenance.

Salalah, the main administrative city of Dhofar and the primary hub during the khareef season, unsurprisingly tops the list, generating a significant 25,708 tonnes of waste in July alone.

This figure reflects the city's dense population and the influx of tourists. Following Salalah, Mirbat and Taqah generated 3,780 tonnes and 2,039 tonnes respectively, indicating their roles as significant urban centres within the governorate.

Other wilayats, such as Thamrait (817 tonnes) and



The expanding tourism sector, coupled with ongoing urbanisation, has inevitably contributed to the growth in municipal waste.

Shaleem (742 tonnes), also contributed to the overall waste

management burden, though to a lesser extent.

Smaller wilayats like Sadah (565 tonnes), Al Mazyouna (317 tonnes), Rakhout (211 tonnes), Dhalkout (99 tonnes) and Maqshin (33 tonnes) reported lower figures, corresponding to their smaller populations and limited tourist activities.

To cope with the demands of waste management during the khareef season, extensive resources were mobilised. The operations in July 2024 involved 526 personnel and 142 pieces of equipment, covering an impressive total of 527,673 kilometres without any accidents — a testament to the efficiency

and safety of the operations conducted by be'ah, the company responsible for waste management in Oman.

The total amount of MSW received during this period reached 34,313 tonnes, with a daily average of 1,107 tonnes.

This figure represents a significant increase of 20 per cent compared to July 2023, which saw a daily average of 923 tonnes.

This surge in waste generation likely reflects the growing number of visitors to Dhofar during the khareef season, coupled with the ongoing urbanisation of the governorate.

Global stock markets seesaw to economic indicators



DR MYTHLI KOLLURU

The author is a National-Level Award-Winning Outstanding Women Educator and Scholar in Strategic Management. She is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat and a member of Knowledge Oman.

On August 5, 2024, the global stock markets experienced a significant downturn, with the Dow Jones industrial average dropping by 2.6% and the Nasdaq Composite decreasing by 3.43%. Japan's Nikkei 225 saw a dramatic 12.4% drop, partially reversed with a 10.2% rebound. This marked the worst day since the Black Monday crash in 1987. A similar trend was seen in the European markets, with the UK's FTSE 100 and other major indices experiencing significant drops. Indian stock markets mirrored a similar sentiment, with BSE Sensex plummeting by 2.74% and the Nifty 50 falling by 2.68%, with

a recovery of Sensex 1046 points, and Nifty with a recovery of 315 points on subsequent days. The interconnected nature of the international financial markets was evident with the decline across worldwide stock markets. Many stocks are trading at a discount, investors are nervous, and traders are unsure of their decision. The stock performance of top companies was significantly affected. Apple, the world's largest public company, and the stock of companies with investments in artificial intelligence, like Nvidia, were impacted. The Magnificent Seven bands of tech giants – including Alphabet, owner of Google and YouTube; Amazon; Microsoft; Meta

Platforms, owner of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp; and Tesla were all impacted. The American central bank is reassuring markets that the USA is not in recession. Investors expressed their shift to safety with investments moving from stocks to bonds. Still, the investors feel America is in recession, and sentiments triggered stock market seesaw movements. Weak economic data, investor sentiments, policy tensions, sector-specific reforms, slow hiring, rising unemployment, and exacerbated fears of recession led to volatility and widespread market decline. Since March of 2022, the Federal Bank of America has raised interest rates multiple

times, reaching a range of 5.25% to 5.50%, a 23-year high. The United States has been experiencing high inflation, reaching a record high of 9%, the highest in 40 years. In response, the Federal Reserve increased interest rates to combat inflation. Higher interest rates make borrowing more expensive, which reduces consumer and business spending. This decrease in demand helps to bring inflation under control by slowing down the rate at which prices rise. The Federal Reserve plans to loosen monetary policy and cut interest rates as inflation rates have decreased. They aim to make this decision in September, although market experts and investors advocate for

an immediate interest rate cut. Many Americans feel that the economy is in a recession and anticipate it will take 2 to 3 years to recover. Recent market volatility is driven more by speculative sentiments than an economic disaster. The market seesaw movement is temporary, though it could cause short-term volatility; investors must not panic, display a herd mentality, or make impulsive decisions. They must have a long-term perspective, which is crucial for navigating such market conditions. The situation warrants an asset portfolio review, reiterating the importance of diversification across asset classes and sectors to mitigate risks.



US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell speaks to reporters during a news conference in Washington. – Reuters

Jay Powell excels at his top job: punching bag

Anxious politicians don't get to decide US interest rate moves, for a reason. The Federal Reserve's monetary policy squad, led by Chair Jerome Powell, stands insulated from the electoral process. Politicians, current and aspiring, can therefore play to their base by slamming their decisions without leading to wild volatility. Everyone benefits because when politicians rule at the Fed, disaster ensues. Powell, whose term ends in 2026, may be an atypical bulwark. Reeling stock markets tend to revive Washington's Fed bashing. For nearly five decades, the central bank has had two sometimes-divergent jobs: promoting stable prices and employment. It decides how to use its primary tool, shifting the path of interest rates, largely at regularly scheduled meetings of its Federal Open Market Committee, leaving onlookers to think over whether it is moving too quickly, too slowly, or in the wrong direction. Consternation began with the Fed's July decision to leave rates where they are. Gloomy jobs report and a giant sell-off in global stock markets followed, attracting unsolicited advice from the likes of Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren, who called on the chair to "cancel his summer vacation" and cut the price of money. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has

urged against a cut, on the other hand, saying it would boost Democrats' chances in November's election – even though he has promised to pursue lower rates if he wins. Both sides ought to be rational enough to see that it's better if the Fed ignores their entreaties. The central bank's mandate was born after the tumultuous 1970s, when President Richard Nixon pushed for loose monetary policy while imposing price controls, as a way of taming the era's brutal stagflation – a toxic combination of inflation and sluggish growth. It didn't work. A National Bureau of Economic Research paper claims that if a US administration managed to increase pressure on the Fed for six months just half as much as Nixon did on then-Fed Chair Arthur Burns, prices could spike 8%. Powell isn't Burns. For one, he has a clearer mandate. Unlike other recent appointees, he also has bipartisan support: selected by Trump, extended by President Joe Biden, and confirmed overwhelmingly in the Senate both times. He can be relaxed about brickbats from jockeying politicians. That shouldn't be taken for granted: Powell's replacement may have less bipartisan backing, a different temperament, or helm a Fed handed different rules by Congress. For now, though, the US economy's punching bag is working just fine. — Reuters

The global 'patchwork' of crypto travel rule



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As crypto becomes more mainstream, regulatory bodies worldwide worked hard at implementing measures to ensure its transparency and mitigate associated risks, particularly around anti-money laundering (AML) and combating the financing of terrorism (CFT). One such measure is the Travel Rule, which mandates the transmission of originator and beneficiary information for certain crypto transactions. However, the implementation and enforcement of the Travel Rule vary significantly across jurisdictions, creating challenges for Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASPs) operating globally. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), cryptocurrency is legal to hold, sell, and trade. The regulatory landscape is overseen primarily by two entities: the Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority (VARA) in Dubai and the Financial Services Regulatory Authority (FSRA) in Abu Dhabi.

Travel rule in Dubai: VARA's approach
VARA's Compliance and Risk Management Rulebook, effective from February 7, 2023, explicitly mandates Crypto Travel Rule compliance for Dubai VASPs. The minimum threshold for compliance is AED 3,500, as noted by the Notabene.id team. VASPs must collect and transmit specific originator and beneficiary information, including names, account numbers, addresses, and unique transaction identifiers, for transactions exceeding this threshold.

While VARA urges VASPs to manage risks associated with transactions involving self-hosted wallets, it has not provided specific guidelines on handling them. Additionally, VASPs are required to conduct risk-based due diligence on counterparty VASPs before entering into any transaction. VARA also addresses the "sunrise issue," requiring VASPs to outline their plans for complying with the Travel Rule in jurisdictions where it is not yet mandatory.

Travel rule in Abu Dhabi: ADGM FSRA's approach
In Abu Dhabi, the FSRA's regulatory framework for virtual assets also incorporates the Travel Rule. The threshold for compliance is 0, meaning that all transactions, regardless of the amount, are subject to the Travel Rule. VASPs must collect and transmit the required originator and beneficiary information, including names, addresses, and account numbers. The FSRA's approach aligns with the European Union's Transfer of Funds Regulation, which also mandates wallet ownership verification for transactions exceeding 1,000 euros. This verification ensures that the originator or beneficiary customer genuinely controls the associated wallet. Beyond the specific regulations in the UAE, the implementation of the Travel Rule presents a complex and fragmented landscape worldwide, as noted by the

Notabene.id team. Jurisdictions have adopted varied approaches to thresholds, enforcement timelines, and obligations related to self-hosted wallets, making compliance a challenging endeavour for VASPs operating across borders. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) initially recommended a de minimis threshold of \$1,000 USD/EUR, exempting transactions below that amount from Travel Rule requirements. However, the 2021 update introduced a more nuanced approach, mandating the collection of originator and beneficiary information for all transactions, regardless of the amount, with verification required only under suspicious circumstances.

This has led to diverse implementations across the globe: (Source: Notabene.id)
No Threshold: Jurisdictions like the European Union, Estonia, Bahrain, Bermuda, India, Malaysia, and the Netherlands have adopted a zero-threshold approach, requiring Travel Rule compliance for all transactions regardless of the amount. *Specific Thresholds:* Many jurisdictions have set specific thresholds, triggering Travel Rule obligations only for transactions exceeding a certain value. Examples include Canada (CAD 1,000), Dubai (AED 3,500), Gibraltar (EUR 1,000), Hong Kong (HKD 8,000), Japan (YEN 100,000), Jersey (1,000 Euros), Liechtenstein (CHF 1), the Philippines (PHP

50,000), Singapore (SDG 1,500), South Korea (KRW 1,000,000), Switzerland (CHF 1,000), the United Kingdom (EUR 1,000), and the United States (\$3,000). *Limited Information Below Threshold:* Some jurisdictions, like the Bahamas (1,000 BSD) and Indonesia (\$1,000), require a limited scope of information to be collected and transmitted for transactions below the threshold, with full Travel Rule compliance triggered above it. *Threshold to be Announced (TBA):* Certain jurisdictions, like Australia and South Africa, have announced plans to implement the Travel Rule but have yet to specify the threshold. The enforcement dates for Travel Rule compliance also vary considerably, with Singapore leading the way in January 2020 and the European Union's full implementation scheduled for December 2024. Additionally, regulations regarding self-hosted wallets remain inconsistent, ranging from enhanced due diligence requirements to mandatory collection and verification of wallet owner information. The fragmented nature of Travel Rule implementation presents challenges for VASPs operating internationally. Understanding and complying with the diverse requirements across jurisdictions demand meticulous attention to detail and robust compliance frameworks. It is crucial for VASPs to stay updated with regulatory developments and proactively adapt their operations to ensure adherence to the evolving global landscape.

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TRAVEL

People sit in a restaurant with a view of the Eiffel Tower in Paris during the Paris 2024 Olympics games. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

File photo of K-pop boy band BTS member Suga poses for photographs during a photo opportunity promoting their new single 'Butter' in Seoul, South Korea. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A fan dressed for cosplay attends a fan event for the film "Borderlands" at TCL Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles, California, US. — AFP



FILM

German actor and pro-boxer Florian Munteanu attends the "Borderlands" special Los Angeles fan event at TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP



CULTURE

A farmer dries harvested corn at a village in southwestern China's Chongqing municipality. — AFP

art & life

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WASHINGTON STATE: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE LENS OF A FORMER OMANI STUDENT

Spending four years in Washington State was a transformative experience, allowing this former student to explore diverse landscapes, vibrant culture, and educational opportunities. Through his experiences, he embraced the state's welcoming community, which left a lasting impression on him.... **P20**

DISCOVERY

Fossil Hints That Jurassic Mammals Lived Slow and Died Old

SMALL MAMMALS often live fast and die young. Rodents and shrews mature quickly, mate within months and usually go belly up in a year or two. Some giant rats kick the bucket in just six months. But miniature mammals have not always burned out so quickly. Researchers recently analysed a

pair of fossilised skeletons belonging to a mouse-size mammal relative that lived among dinosaurs during the Jurassic period. Their findings, published in the journal Nature, reveal that these critters lived much longer and grew more slowly than their similarly sized descendants. The two specimens were discovered decades apart on Scotland's Isle of Skye. This island was home to swampy lagoons fringed by dense forests 166 million years ago. Sauropod dinosaurs stomped across the mud as pterosaurs flew overhead. Scurrying underfoot was a menagerie of Mesozoic mammal relatives. Krusatodon kirtlingtonensis was among these ancestral mammals. The two newly described specimens provide a picture of Krusatodon, which resembled a pint-size possum and weighed less than a hockey puck. The larger of the Krusatodon specimens was found in the 1970s. The smaller Krusatodon was discovered in 2016 by Elsa Panciroli, a pale-



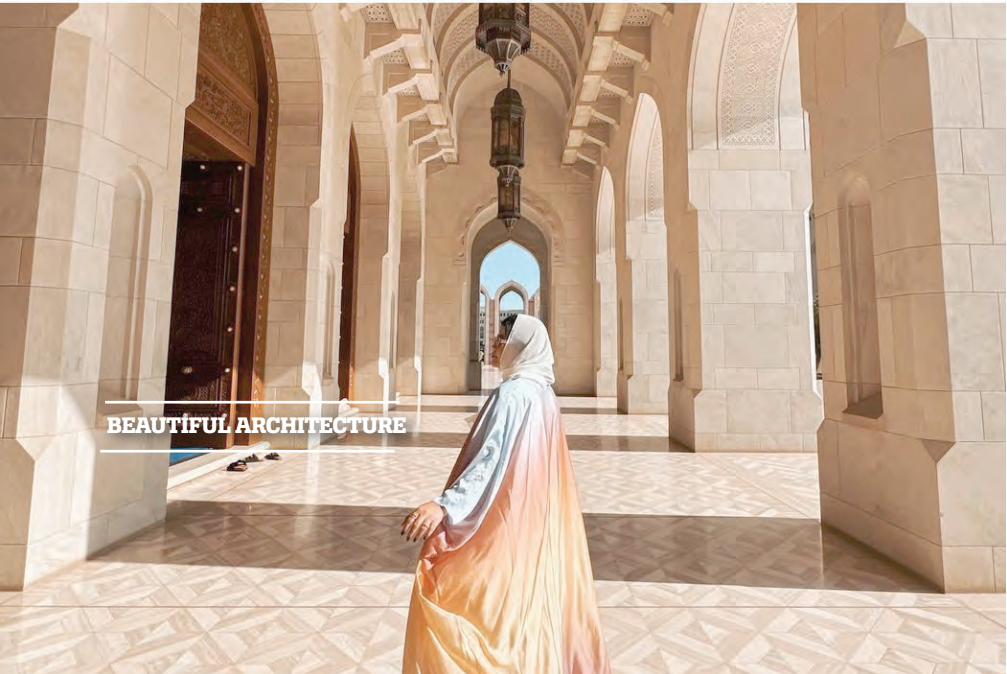
ontologist at National Museums Scotland and the lead author of the new study, and her team. Panciroli said she was delighted "to realise that the two of them were an adult and a juvenile of the same species." The team took high-resolution CT scans to compare the two fossil skeletons. To gauge how old each Krusatodon was when it died, the researchers analysed rings of mineralised dental tissue called cementum. The cementum bands revealed that the adult Krusatodon was about 7 years old when it died — a ripe old age compared with living mammals of similar size. The juvenile, which was roughly half as large as the adult, was somewhere between 7 months and 2 years old. Surprisingly, this Krusatodon was still in the process of replacing its baby teeth when it died. "We didn't expect it to be such an old juvenile," Panciroli said. Based on its size, "you would expect it to replace its teeth within weeks or months, not two years." — JACK TAMISIEA/NYT

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ENTERTAINMENT



Festival Winners
Crowd New York
Film Festival
Main Slate Lineup

THIS FALL'S New York Film Festival will feature celebrated prizewinners from Cannes and the Berlinale, organisers announced on Tuesday, unveiling a main slate that will join new works from film-makers Pedro Almodóvar, Steve McQueen and RaMell Ross.

The festival, which runs from September 27 to October 14, will screen films from 24 countries and include two world premieres, five North American premieres and 17 American premieres.

Ross' film, "The Nickel Boys," is an adaptation of Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize-winning 2019 novel about two Black teenagers in a Jim Crow-era Florida reform school. It's the opening-night selection. Almodóvar's "The Room Next Door," about a rekindled friendship between women played by Julianne Moore and Tilda Swinton, will be the centerpiece. And the festival will close with McQueen's "Blitz," starring Saoirse Ronan as a working-class single mother in London who gets separated from her 9-year-old son during World War II.

Winners from Cannes and the Berlin Film Festival feature heavily in the festival's main slate lineup.

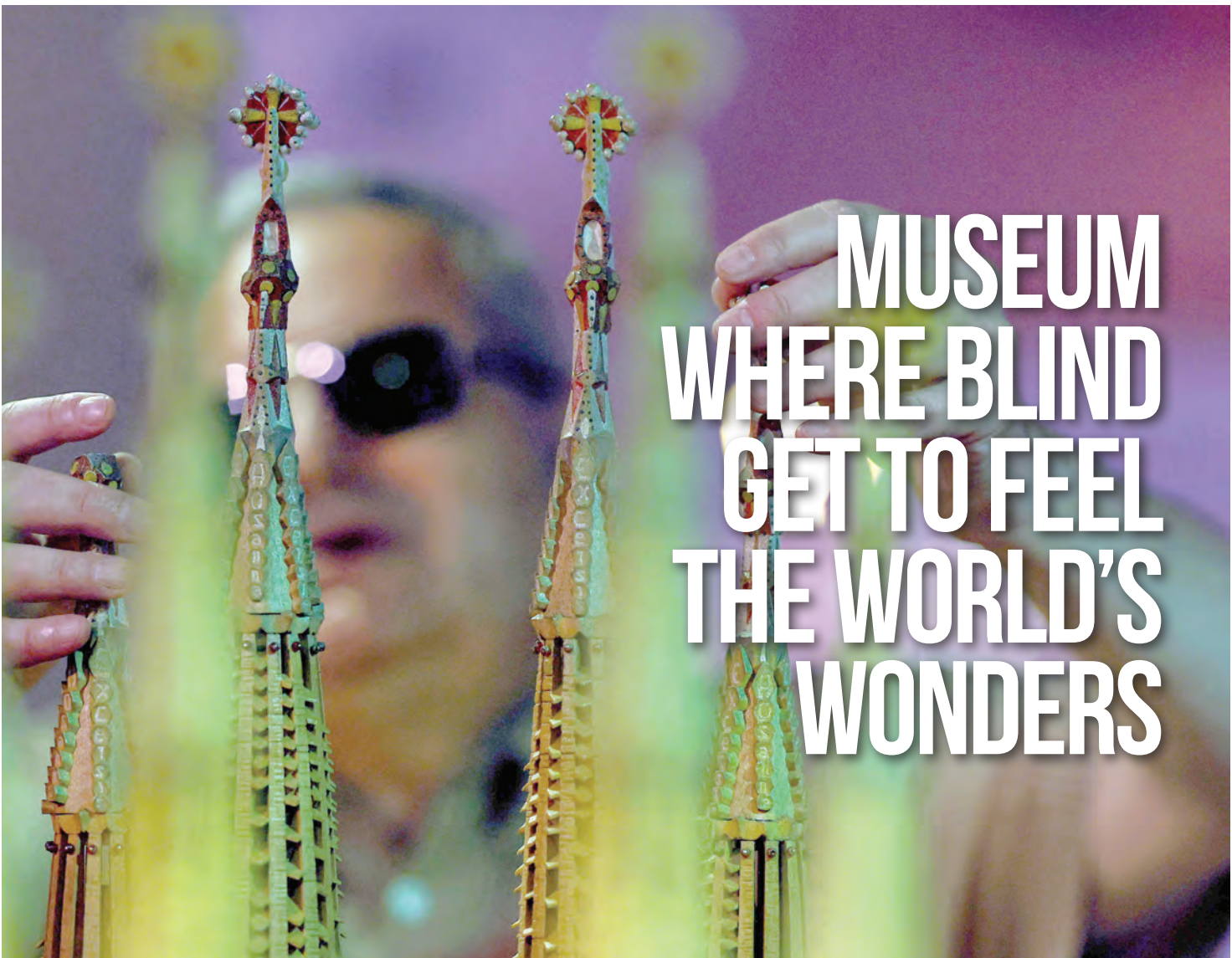
Cannes imports include the Palme d'Or winner "Anora," from Sean Baker; the Grand Prix winner "All We Imagine as Light" from Payal Kapadia; best director winner Miguel Gomes' "Grand Tour"; the two best-director winners from the Un Certain Regard section, Roberto Minervini with "The Damned" and Rungano Nyoni with "On Becoming a Guinea Fowl"; and special prize winner "The Seed of the Sacred Fig" from Mohammad Rasoulof.

Berlinale veterans playing in New York include the Golden Bear prizewinner "Dahomey," a documentary from Mati Diop about the complicated postcolonial legacy of artefacts from the former African kingdom; Philippe Lesage's Quebecois coming-of-age drama, "Who by Fire"; and the documentary "No Other Land," about the destruction of West Bank villages by the Israeli military, made over five years by a Palestinian-Israeli collective. Two festival mainstays, filmmakers Hong Sang-soo and Wang Bing, will each have two films playing this fall.

Hong is bringing "By the Stream," about a former film director, and "A Traveller's Needs," which won the Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize at the Berlinale and stars Isabelle Huppert as an inexperienced French teacher in a suburb in Seoul, South Korea. (Hong also showed two films last year.)

The second and third parts of Wang's observational nonfiction "Youth" trilogy, titled "Youth (Hard Times)" and "Youth (Homecoming)" and focused on migrant textile workers in the Chinese district of Zhili, will also screen at the festival. The first part of the trilogy, "Youth (Spring)," was included in last year's lineup.

"The most notable thing about the films in the main slate — and in the other sections that we will announce in the coming weeks — is the degree to which they emphasize cinema's relationship to reality," the festival's artistic director Dennis Lim said in a news release. "They are reminders that, in the hands of its most vital practitioners, film has the capacity to reckon with, intervene in and reimagine the world." — AFP



MUSEUM
WHERE BLIND
GET TO FEEL
THE WORLD'S
WONDERS

WITH THEIR FINGERTIPS, Marina and Jose Pedro pored over a small-scale model of Barcelona's Sagrada Familia church in an exhibition which allows the blind to discover some of the world's best-known monuments.

"There are just so many tiny details! And what a strange roof," enthused Jose Pedro Gonzalez as he explored the wooden replica of Gaudi's spectacular basilica.

Marina Rojas said that she "never imagined the Sagrada Familia like that".

"It's very surprising, because you get a general idea of what the monument is like, what the space inside is like," she added.

The Madrid Typhological Museum — from the Greek "tuphlos" meaning blind — houses 37 reproductions of global monuments that are listed as world heritage sites.

It was set up in 1992 by ONCE, Spain's powerful national organisation for the blind which has 71,000 members.

Made of wood, stone, metal or resin, the models are accessible to all visitors — whether blind, sighted or partially sighted — giving them a hands-on, sensory experience of the architecture.

"There's no other place in the world with a museum like this," said guide Mireia Rodriguez, who is herself visually impaired.

"There are many other museums designed for visually impaired visitors, but they don't have this kind of collection."

ONCE runs a lottery and some very popular scratchcard games which bring in 2.5 billion euros (\$2.7 billion) a year and pays the salaries of its 72,000 employees, six out of 10 of whom have some sort of disability.

The funds are also used for other investments, such as the museum, which in 2023 welcomed 16,000 visitors.

Besides the models, the museum also features artworks by people who are visually impaired



and a display of tools and equipment used from the early 19th century until the 1980s to help blind people access culture, including books in Braille.

GETTING CLOSER TO CULTURE

After wandering through a room housing models of Spain's best-known sights such as the Alhambra palace in Granada, Madrid's Royal Palace and the Santiago de Compostela cathedral, Rojas branded the exhibition "really marvellous".

Another room is filled with global landmarks such as the Taj Mahal, London Bridge, the Statue of Liberty, Rome's Colosseum, the Parthenon in Athens, the

he is firmly out of bounds. "Don't stroke me, I'm working," warns a message on his harness.



DETAILS LIKE JEWELLERY

It was while feeling the dome of the Taj Mahal that Gonzalez's hands lingered longest, his fingers taking in the model's smooth curves made of the very same Makrana marble as the dazzling white mausoleum in northern India.

"I knew the Taj Mahal was made of marble, but the first thing that surprised me was touching it and how cold it felt, that the model itself was also made of marble," the 60-year-old who has been blind since birth said.

"I love these oriental domes and all the work that goes into carving the marble and the little details," said Gonzalez, his hands gliding over the monument's rooftops and facades.

"It is, of course, a building and not a piece of gold jewellery, but in many respects, it seems like one," he smiled. — AFP

WASHINGTON STATE:
A JOURNEY
THROUGH THE
LENS OF A
FORMER OMANI
STUDENT



BY NASRULAH AL AJMI

The state of Washington in the United States will forever hold a special place in my heart. Spending four years in this American gem, in a small city called Pullman, pursuing higher education, was eye-opening. While its landscape, people, culture, and practices were very different from Oman, I learned to appreciate them as they were making it a second home – a place I will go back to having fallen in love with some of its unique characters.

Washington State stands out from other US states due to its unique geographical and cultural features. Geographically, it boasts diverse landscapes, including the Pacific coastline, the Cascade Range with volcanic peaks like Mount Rainier, and the Olympic National Park's temperate

rainforests. Additionally, the Museum of Pop Culture attracts over 500,000 visitors annually, highlighting the influence of pop culture on Seattle's artistic identity (MoPOP Annual Report, 2023).

NATURE: OUTDOOR PLAYGROUND IN WASHINGTON
Nature enthusiasts and travel experts emphasise Washington State's diverse natural landscapes, which offer abundant opportunities for outdoor activities.

From the rugged peaks of the Cascades to the serene coastline of Puget Sound, the state's parks and wilderness areas provide unparalleled experiences for hiking, camping, and wildlife observation.

Olympic National Park alone, with its temperate rainforests and rugged coastline, draws millions of visitors each year (National Park Service Annual Visitor Use Report, 2023). Washington is home to over 140 state

shaping Washington's cultural and educational landscape.

Their contributions to civil rights and academia continue to resonate, influencing social progress and educational policies in the state.

Institutions like the Washington State Historical Society preserve and promote these legacies, ensuring that future generations understand the state's rich cultural heritage.

Washington's commitment to preserving its historical sites and promoting heritage tourism has contributed to the state's economy and cultural identity.

Historic sites such as Fort Vancouver and the Whitman Mission National Historic Site attract thousands of visitors annually, generating economic benefits for local communities (Washington State Historical Society Annual Report, 2023).

EDUCATION: UNIQUE SYSTEM
Education remains a cornerstone of



rainforests. Eastern Washington contrasts with arid regions and fertile agricultural lands. The state's climate varies significantly, with a wet maritime climate in the west and a drier continental climate in the east.

Culturally, Washington is a hub for technology and innovation, home to companies like Microsoft, Amazon, and Boeing. It is known for its progressive values, and being a leader in environmental policies and social issues. The state is culturally diverse, influenced by Native American heritage and immigrant communities, particularly from Asia and Latin America. Seattle is famous for its coffee culture and vibrant music scene, notably the grunge movement of the 1990s. Residents embrace an outdoor lifestyle, with abundant opportunities for hiking, skiing, and water sports.

Economically, Washington benefits from its tech industry, agriculture, and trade. It is one of the few states with no personal income tax, shaping its economic environment. These features collectively make Washington a unique and dynamic state.

While at Washington State University (WSU), I had the honour of participating in multiple sports tournaments and activities that challenged me to become a multi-faceted college student. Everyone was incredibly friendly, making me feel not only safe but also at home. In every activity or tournament I joined, I found the people of the city to be exceptionally welcoming.

The education system was exceptionally supportive and tailored to facilitate students' success in their careers. Every professor I encountered demonstrated significant support for my journey in journalism and digital media. It is difficult to find any shortcomings at WSU, as it offers extensive resources for career development, beautiful surroundings, safety, and a robust educational framework for students.

CULTURE: ARTISTIC HUB IN SEATTLE

Cities like Seattle are renowned for their cultural scene, which blends influences from indie music, grunge, and avant-garde theatre. Cultural observers noted that Seattle's commitment to fostering creative expression is exemplified by institutions such as the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture and the Museum of Pop Culture (MoPOP). These institutions not only showcase local talent but also celebrate diversity, including contributions from Native American communities that enrich the cultural mosaic of the region.

Seattle's theatre scene boasts over 100 active theatre companies, ranging from small experimental groups to major Broadway productions, making it a cultural hub for theatre enthusiasts (Seattle Times,



parks and millions of acres of national forests, ensuring ample opportunities for outdoor recreation year-round. The state's dedication to preserving its natural beauty and promoting sustainable tourism has made it a favourite destination for eco-conscious travellers (Washington State Parks Annual Report, 2023).

FOOD: CELEBRATING LOCAL FLAVOURS

Washington's commitment to sustainable agriculture and local food sourcing is reflected in its robust culinary scene. The state's fertile lands and extensive coastline support a vibrant farm-to-table movement, with farmers' markets and restaurants showcasing fresh produce and seafood. Seattle's culinary diversity, influenced by its multicultural population, offers everything from Pacific Northwest cuisine to international flavours, enhancing the region's gastronomic appeal.

The farm-to-table movement is not just a trend but a way of life in Washington State, with over 700 farmers' markets across the state promoting locally-grown produce and artisanal products (Washington State Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 2023).

Seafood plays a prominent role in Washington's cuisine, ranking the state among the top producers of Pacific salmon and Dungeness crab in the United States.

HISTORY: SHAPING CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Historical figures such as George Washington Bush and Dr. Samuel E. Kelly have played pivotal roles in

Washington State's future, with institutions like WSU driving research and innovation across various disciplines. The University's partnerships with industry leaders and commitment to educational equity ensure that Washington continues to produce leaders in technology, healthcare, and other fields.

Washington State's higher education system is recognised for its quality and accessibility, with universities and colleges across the state offering diverse academic programmes and opportunities for students. The state's investment in education, including initiatives to promote STEM education and vocational training, positions Washington as a leader in preparing future generations for success in a global economy.

IDEAL SPACE FOR STUDENT GROWTH

My four years in Pullman flew by so quickly. For a time, I considered moving there to explore unique opportunities I felt I might not find in Oman.

The seasons greatly vary from each other. It's one of the many things that makes Pullman and the greater Washington State an interesting place to live.

My university in Pullman offered a supportive environment for Muslim and Middle Eastern students through a variety of resources and cultural accommodations. The campus's diverse community, which includes a significant number of international students, fosters an inclusive atmosphere where students can share their cultures and traditions.

The university also offers a range of academic programmes and research opportunities, particularly in fields such as engineering, agriculture, business, and sciences, which may interest Middle Eastern students.

These factors contribute to making Washington State an ideal place for students seeking a supportive and welcoming environment for their academic pursuits.

In that short time, I managed to make friends not just with people with whom I shared the same educational interests but also in other areas of life, like sports and community activities. Washington State seamlessly combines cultural richness, natural beauty, culinary excellence, and educational strength, making it a place where creativity thrives and innovation flourishes.

The state's captivating landscapes and diverse communities create an inviting environment for both residents and visitors. Whether exploring its scenic landscapes, savouring its culinary delights, or engaging with its rich history and vibrant arts scene, Washington State offers something unique and enriching for everyone.



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