

P12

PIANIST DEDICATES MUSIC TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WHO INSPIRED HIM



P9

FRANCE EASE PAST MOROCCO TO SET UP AUSTRALIA CLASH



P13

OMANI DESALINATION PLANTS SAY NO FINANCIAL IMPACT FROM ALGAL BLOOM



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO SINGAPORE PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Halimah Yacob of the Republic of Singapore, on her country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Halimah Yacob. His Majesty also wished the people of Singapore further progress and prosperity. — ONA

CRUDE PRICE AT \$86.15 A BARREL

Oman oil price for October delivery on Tuesday reached \$86.15, comprising a drop by \$1.60 from the price of Monday which stood at \$87.75. The average price of Oman oil for August delivery has stabilised at \$74.78 per barrel, thus 16 cents per barrel lower than July delivery. Meanwhile, US crude oil fell 2.16 per cent to \$80.19 a barrel on Tuesday. Brent crude was 2.05 per cent lower at \$83.60 per barrel. Global investors were also waiting for Thursday's US inflation figures.

PARIS

JULY HOTTEST MONTH ON RECORD: EU

July was the hottest month ever recorded on Earth, the European Union's climate observatory confirmed on Tuesday, warning of dire consequences. Marked by heatwaves and fires all around the world, the previous month was 0.33 degrees Celsius higher than the record set in July 2019 when the average temperature was 16.63C, it said. "It has not been this warm, combining observational records and paleoclimate records, for the last 120,000 years," said Samantha Burgess, Deputy Director of the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service. **DETAILS ON P5**

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CHOCOLATE FESTIVAL IN SALALAH

The chocolate festival was opened in Salalah under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, on Tuesday.

Investments in Mahas Industrial City touch RO 40 million

KHASAB: Mahas Industrial City, an affiliate of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has recorded a notable growth in the first half of this year, with its investments touching RO 40 million by the end of the first half, marking a growth rate of 5.3 per cent compared to the corresponding period in 2022.

Mahas Industrial City has successfully attracted and expanded five investment projects this year, covering a total area of 50,000 sqm, which has resulted in the overall leased area reaching approximately 191,500 sqm. Moreover, the workforce in Mahas Industrial City has touched 236, with an Omanisation rate of 40 per cent.

Mubarak bin Salim al Ghailani, Acting Director-

General of Mahas Industrial City, said that the road and infrastructure project in the industrial city is on track and has achieved a completion rate of 50 per cent as of now.

Al Ghailani highlighted the successful completion of all concrete works for the main entrance bridge, which connects the industrial city to the main road. Moreover, the excavation, expansion and preparation of the main channel to protect against rainwater and floods, along with the construction of protection walls, have been completed. A significant part of the main roads' preparation and foundation works for the main water tank, and water, emergency and sewage pipelines have also been completed. The entire project is expected to be fully completed



Mahas Industrial City was established in compliance with the Royal directives to expedite economic and industrial growth while attracting both local and foreign investments to Musandam Governorate

MUBARAK BIN SALIM AL GHAILANI

Acting Director-General

and delivered by the middle of 2024. Al Ghailani pointed out that this project, which is being developed on an area of one million sqm at a total cost of approximately RO 5 million, incorporates the construction of a 75-metre bridge linking the entrance of the industrial city to the main road; and an internal road network of 7 km.

Al Ghailani said that Mahas Industrial City was established in compliance with the profound interest and directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to expedite economic and industrial growth while attracting both local and foreign investments to Musandam Governorate. The city covers a total area of 1,548,821 sqm and is designated for light and medium industries. — ONA

Ibri benefits from GCC visitors to Dhofar

HOTEL OCCUPANCY REACHES 60-85 PC

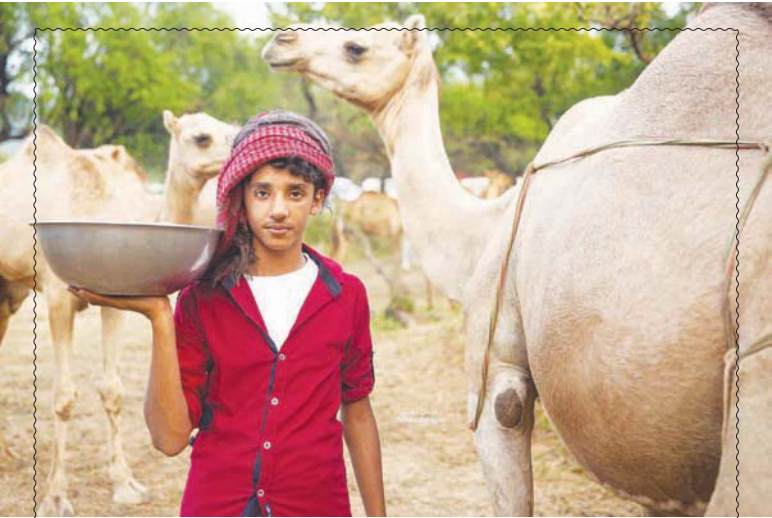
HILAL AL GHAFRI
IBRI, AUG 9

Ibri has become a bustling hub for tourists and commerce since the beginning of the 2023 Dhofar Khareef season. A prominent Wilayat in Al Dhahirah Governorate is witnessing a surge in activities primarily by visitors from GCC countries.

They are drawn to Ibri for its strategic location overlooking the Empty Quarter border that links the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia. The town's significance is further underscored by its proximity to the Hafeet border port in Al Buraimi Governorate, which serves as a pivotal resting point for land travellers embarking on a summer sojourn to Dhofar Governorate.

The burgeoning commercial movement in Ibri is particularly pronounced during this period, with Gulf visitors making a beeline for its hospitality establishments. Many of these visitors utilise Ibri as a reprieve before continuing their journey to the Dhofar Governorate, 900 kilometres from Al Dhahirah Governorate.

Ali bin Khamis al Sudairi, Assistant Director of the Department of Heritage and Tourism in Al Dhahirah Governorate, highlights the growing hotel sector in the region. He elucidates that the Wilayat of Ibri's hotels have experienced an impressive surge in occupancy.



LOOKING FORWARD TO DHOFAR SPRING

Right after khareef, people in Dhofar Governorate look forward to the spring season or locally referred to as serb. During this time, the pastures become shades of different colours, not only green but as nature takes its regular annual journey, start to turn brown. **DETAILS ON P11**

Extreme heat taxes the body, says research

CALIFORNIA: Tens of thousands die from heat waves and even more suffer from heat illness or injury. Moreover, research shows that the human body can adapt to heat, but only to a certain point.

"The body works quite hard to keep the core body temperature within a pretty narrow range," says Kristie Ebi, who researches climate change and health at the University of Washington in Seattle.

"If you can't cool down that core body temperature, then your cells and your organs start being affected." The research found that



sustained heat waves place human bodies under strain, which can set off a cascade of effects that can lead to permanent injury or

death.

Heat waves are also getting more humid, limiting people's ability to cool down, and nights

are growing hotter, cutting into the time people might rest and recover.

Those trends contribute to undercutting our ability to adapt to rising heat. Heat risks are expected to increase with rising temperatures, researchers say.

Climate change is spurring heat waves that are not only hotter and longer but, crucially, more humid. "It's becoming more dangerous because the humidity is acting as a barrier to how we cool ourselves," says Rachel Cottle, who researches thermo regulation at Penn State.

— Agencies



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Banned Cold Out syrup not in circulation in Oman

KABEER YOUSUF
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The Cold Out syrup, on which the World Health Organisation (WHO) clamped a ban, is already banned in the Sultanate of Oman. As per the WHO’s Medical Product Alert issued on Sunday, the Cold Out syrup (Paracetamol and Chlorpheniramine Maleate) comes under ‘Substandard (contaminated) syrup medicines’.

It was banned earlier in the Sultanate of Oman, and no pharmacies have sold it since then. “We don’t deal in Cold

Out in our pharmacies, nor do the private pharmacies in the country,” a pharmacist from the Ministry of Health (MoH) told the Observer.

A random survey through most of the pharmacies, Badr Al Samaa, Muscat Pharmacy, Scientific Pharmacy, Hala Pharmacy, Salama Pharmacy, Al Hashar Pharmacy, revealed that the said syrup is not being sold in Oman.

The India-made cough syrup, considered substandard (contaminated), was identified in the Republic of Iraq and reported to the World Health Organization



(WHO) last month by a third party in the WHO Region of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol found in Cold Out are toxic to humans when consumed and

can prove fatal. The substandard batch of the product referenced in WHO Alert is unsafe, and its use, especially in children, may result in serious injury or death. Toxic effects can include abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea, inability to pass urine, headache, altered mental state and acute kidney injury that may lead to death.

“This WHO Medical Product Alert refers to one batch of substandard (contaminated) Cold Out syrup (Paracetamol and Chlorpheniramine Maleate). Paracetamol and chlorpheniramine combination

syrups are used to treat and relieve symptoms of the common cold and allergy symptoms,” said a WHO representative.

A sample of the Cold Out Syrup was obtained from one location in Iraq after getting the tip-off and was submitted for laboratory analysis. The sample was found to contain unacceptable amounts of diethylene glycol (0.25 per cent) and ethylene glycol (2.1per cent) as contaminants. The acceptable safety limit for both ethylene glycol and diethylene glycol is no more than 0.10 per cent, the WHO spokesperson added.

Forum empowers youth to voice their aspirations



QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 8

Dhofar Governorate hosted a youth forum recently under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. The forum was organised by the Youth Centre in collaboration with various governmental and private entities.

The forum aimed to enable the participants to forge genuine partnerships and open up avenues for further empowerment. On the occasion, a number of developmental projects and initiatives were unveiled, with the presenters appealing the youth to participate in these schemes.

A tapestry of vibrant young individuals from every corner of Dhofar converged at the forum, ardently participating in an array of workshops and fervent discussions. Themes of partnership, empowerment, development, and youthful participation illuminated the conversations, resonating with the aspirations of the attendees.

In opening remarks, HH Sayyid Marwan said: “Today, I am delighted to convene with all of you to deliberate upon the imminent youth dialogue. My gratitude extends to the Youth Centre for orchestrating this rendezvous and consistently championing youth engagement.”

He continued, “It is widely recognised that the participation of young minds is the bedrock upon which a brighter future is erected. By infusing novel ideas and perspectives into decision-making, our youth can foster policies and programmes that seamlessly cater to their communities’ needs.”

The Governor described the forum as an invaluable platform for Oman’s youth to voice their aspirations and be resoundingly heard. “It’s not just about dialogues; it’s about fostering collaborations, deepening our mutual learning, and collectively enriching our shared journey. I firmly believe that this dialogue will serve as an enriching chapter for all participants involved,” he remarked.

TRA seeks feedback for green initiatives in postal sector

MUSCAT: The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has launched a public consultation on its draft environmental sustainability initiatives for the postal and e-commerce delivery services sector.

TRA seeks to implement the environmental objectives of Oman Vision 2040 through initiatives aimed at reducing emissions, optimising energy, and reducing environmentally polluting materials used for postal activity and delivery services.

The project of environmental sustainability initiatives for the

postal services sector includes carbon emission reduction initiatives, packaging and recycling initiatives, energy conservation, and awareness. TRA invited everyone to provide views on the public consultation document available on its website.

The TRA initiative holds significance as there is an increased demand for postal and delivery services triggered by e-commerce has led the sector to further utilise vehicle fleets (commercial and private) on a national level for its postal activities which impacts the environment.

SMEs exhorted to benefit from Mazaya initiative

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) urges small and medium enterprises owners to take advantage of the exclusive offers offered by the Mazaya initiative, which aims to enhance the activity and sustainability of the small and medium enterprises sector.

The initiative provides offers, discounts, and benefits (product or service) to SME owners with active entrepreneurship cards. The number of such cardholders reached more than 29,000 by the end of June in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The initiative allows all public and private sector institutions to present their exclusive offers, as these offers and features will play a prominent role in sustaining the growth of SMEs and stimulating



them to expand and strengthen partnerships for advancing this vital sector in the Sultanate of

Oman.

The initiative targets important promising sectors and fields

such as services and sectors, for example, real estate, finance, insurance, entertainment, travel and tourism, health care, hotels, communications, technical solutions, employment, human resource services, decoration, furniture, interior design, education, training, administrative, financial and legal consulting, logistical transportation and delivery, marketing and artificial intelligence.

Owners of small and medium-sized enterprises who hold the Entrepreneurship Card can take advantage of these benefits and offers by showing the Entrepreneurship Card to the enterprise participating in the initiative. The Authority has published a document through its social media accounts and website that includes a list of benefits, offers, and contact information with the institutions that provide it.

‘Nama Week’ campaign to enhance community engagement, sustainability

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 8

Dedicated to driving economic, environmental and social sustainability, Nama Dhofar Services launched its recent campaign ‘Nama Week’ in Dhofar. The campaign began in cooperation with the Environment Authority and Dhofar Municipality.

An event marking the launch of the campaign held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, in the presence of Ali Issa Shamas, CEO of Nama Dhofar Services and general directors. The campaign aims to enhance the community engagement and the sustainability landscape in the Sultanate of Oman.

Commenting on the event, Ali Issa Shamas said: “Nama Group remains committed to achieve the objectives of the three fundamental pillars — environmental, social and Economic Sustainability — of



sustainability.

The company had organised a similar event earlier in Musandam Governorate which was well-received by the community. As part of the sustainability plan of Nama Group, the launch of the ‘Nama Week’ campaign in Dhofar seeks to provide services and initiatives for the community welfare, as well as promoting programs that support economic, social and environmental sustainability. Aligning itself to the nation’s sustainability agenda, Nama

Group places a strong emphasis on sustainability and integrates the philosophy of sustainable development in all its core operations and activities.

In collaboration with the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, Nama Week campaign commenced with the “Baiti Aamin” exhibition in Salalah’s Gardens Mall, aiming to enhance home safety among the community, rationalise electricity and water consumption, and promote the efficient use of energy.

‘Nama Week’ campaign in

Dhofar covers a wide array of environmental initiatives, including planting local trees in different locations in the governorate and distributing 500 local seedlings to the company’s employees, contributing to preserve the beauty of nature and maintain the environmental balance. In addition, Al Dahareez beach cleanup activity will be carried out in cooperation with Dhofar Municipality to raise public awareness to support marine life and sustain Oman’s ecological system.

During the campaign period, a number of social initiatives will be conducted like visiting some houses and replacing the old electricity meters to new smart meters, running awareness sessions on home safety, rationalisation of electricity and water consumption, and efficient use of energy. In addition to that, the one-week campaign will include a variety of entertainment activities and competitions for different segments of society.



Saudi firm to develop Oman’s first hydrogen refuelling station

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 9

Hydrogen Systems has secured a contract from Shell Development Oman to spearhead the design, development, and installation of Oman’s inaugural hydrogen refuelling station to be located in Muscat, according to a report.

Hailing from Saudi Arabia, Hydrogen Systems provide full engineering support, project management, hydrogen safety consulting, manufacturing, and technical services and are committed to delivering comprehensive, cost-effective hydrogen gas solutions across the greater GCC region.

Hydrogen Systems is a Saudi Arabia-based company that provides the most comprehensive and cost-effective hydrogen gas solutions to its customers in the GCC region.

With the establishment of the Hydrogen Energy Center of Excellence, Hydrogen Systems is committed to the localisation and development of hydrogen energy and decarbonisation solutions to meet the growing demand in the region.

Hydrogen Systems is tasked with executing detailed engineering, procurement, and quality assurance and control of electrolyzers, compression,



storage, and dispensing along with all associated subsystems. This development reinforces Oman’s position as a leader in the renewable energy sector, specifically hydrogen technology.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) has predicted that Oman could become one of the largest global exporters of hydrogen by 2030, offering renewable hydrogen as economically as \$1.6 per kg. Sattam Alsuwailam, CEO of Hydrogen Systems,

highlighted the significance of the collaboration with Shell, saying, “This further solidifies Hydrogen Systems’ position as a leader in the hydrogen technology sector, leveraging its expertise and innovative solutions to advance the adoption of hydrogen as a clean and sustainable energy source.”

Walid Nadi, Oman Shell’s Vice-President and Country Chairman, expressed excitement about the project. He noted, “This station

will become the first Shell station worldwide to have the hydrogen production plant on site. This will allow for maximum energy efficiency and for us in Oman Shell to be a pace-setter in the hydrogen industry in Oman.”

Earlier this year, Shell signed two agreements to expand its hydrogen commitments in Oman, including the production of liquefied synthetic gas (LSG) from hydrogen and carbon dioxide.

4,186 fire incidents reported in 2022

MUSCAT: A recent statistics published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) revealed that the number of fire incidents increased, registering 4,186 in 2022 compared to 4,057 incidents in 2021 and 3,409 incidents in 2020.

The statistics showed that 32.1 per cent of the fire incidents (1,345 incident) took place in residential facilities. Home-based fires are common due to the presence of electrical appliances, cooking gas, etc. This was followed by vehicle fires with 930 incidents making up 22.2 per cent of the total number of fire incidents reported last year. Vehicle fires increased significantly especially in summer often resulting in human and material losses. Vehicle fires are avoidable by paying attention to routine vehicle maintenance and replacement of damaged parts with new ones, especially engine parts, the Public Authority for



Civil Defence and Ambulance advised.

According to the statistics, 839 (20 per cent) fire incidents occurred at waste collection sites while fires erupting at farms were 408 (9.8 per cent). Fires

at farm fires, agricultural waste are mainly caused by the rising temperature in summer and farmer’s non-abidance by safety and precautionary measures.

Fires at companies and commercial institutions were 302

(7.2 per cent) and no fire incidents were reported at oil installations and 8 fire incidents occurred at places of worship.

The number of fire incidents involving electrical equipment, overhead power lines and utility poles amounted to 234 (5.6 per cent) whereas 50 fires occurred in government facilities last year.

Forty-one accidents occurred in industrial facilities as the Sultanate of Oman has recently witnessed rapid industrial growth. This is because some industrial facilities are not complying with the requirements of civil protection and safety measures.

Governorate-wise Muscat Governorate recorded the highest number of fire accidents compared to other governorates with 1,307 incidents, followed by the Al Batinah North Governorate (949 fire incidents) and Al Dakhiliyah Governorate with 435 incidents.



MoHERI inks agreement with Bahwan Cybertech

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) on Tuesday signed a cooperation agreement in the fields of higher education, research, innovation and vocational training with Bahwan Cybertech.

The agreement was signed by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Durgaprasad (DP), Co-founder, Director and Group CEO of Bahwan CyberTek (BCT) Group.

The agreement states that Bahwan Cybertech will support the higher education sector through annual funding of undergraduate scholarships in various disciplines in Oman. The company will also train students of private higher education institutions, develop partnerships and cooperation programmes with private universities and colleges (in the fields of research and innovation), invest in readily available opportunities and support the ministry’s cultural programme titled ‘We are Oman’ over the next three years.

The agreement also secures the company’s support for

the research and innovation sector by financing three startups envisaged as part of a programme known as ‘Upgrade’, which seeks to transform student graduation projects into startups. Such innovation-based entrepreneurship will be set up in accordance with standard regulations and established business norms.

The company will also lend backing to applied research and the university’s annual research forum, besides funding the participation of a Nobel Prize-winning speaker or a world-renowned scientist in the forum. This is in addition to funding the establishment of an online electronic platform (named ‘Oman Innovates’), which is designed to boost research and innovation.

Under the agreement, Bahwan CyberTek will support and finance a number of development projects undertaken by vocational colleges affiliated to the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The company will also provide training programmes to the staff of the Ministry and vocational colleges. — ONA

Number of mobile broadband internet subscribers up by 10pc



MUSCAT: Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) show that the total number of subscriptions of fixed line phones fixed with Internet Protocol Technology (IPT) grew by 7.4 per cent, while the number of mobile broadband internet subscribers rose by 10 per cent as at the end of June 2023, compared to the corresponding period in 2022.

The number of IPT fixed line phone subscriptions stood at 275,117, while the number of prepaid and post-paid fixed-line subscriptions went down by 11.8 per cent to 230,338.

The statistics also show that the number of mobile phone subscriptions by the end of June 2023 rose by 12.4 per cent and stood at 7 million (7,021,389). The number of prepaid mobile phone subscriptions constituted the largest segment of subscribers (5,289,594 lines), with an increase of 10 per cent until the end of June 2023.

The number of active mobile broadband Internet subscriptions stood at 5,937,159. — ONA

Darbat Waterfalls: Popular destination for photographers



QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 8

Darbat Valley in Dhofar is a popular tourist destination for its many attractions that include lakes, waterfalls, caves, mountains, and wildlife.

The valley is home to Darbat and Teeq lakes which are fed by the khareef rains. These clear and unpolluted water make these lakes popular for swimming, boating, and fishing.

Darbat Valley is also home to several waterfalls, including the Darbat Waterfall. The waterfalls are most impressive during the

rainy season when they can reach heights of up to 30 metres.

The waterfalls are a popular destination for photographers and offer stunning views of the valley.

Darbat Valley is also home to several caves. The caves are a popular destination for spelunkers and offer a unique opportunity to explore the natural beauty of the region.

The most famous cave in Darbat Valley is the Teeq Cave, which is filled with rocks.

The mountains surrounding Darbat Valley are a popular destination for hiking and

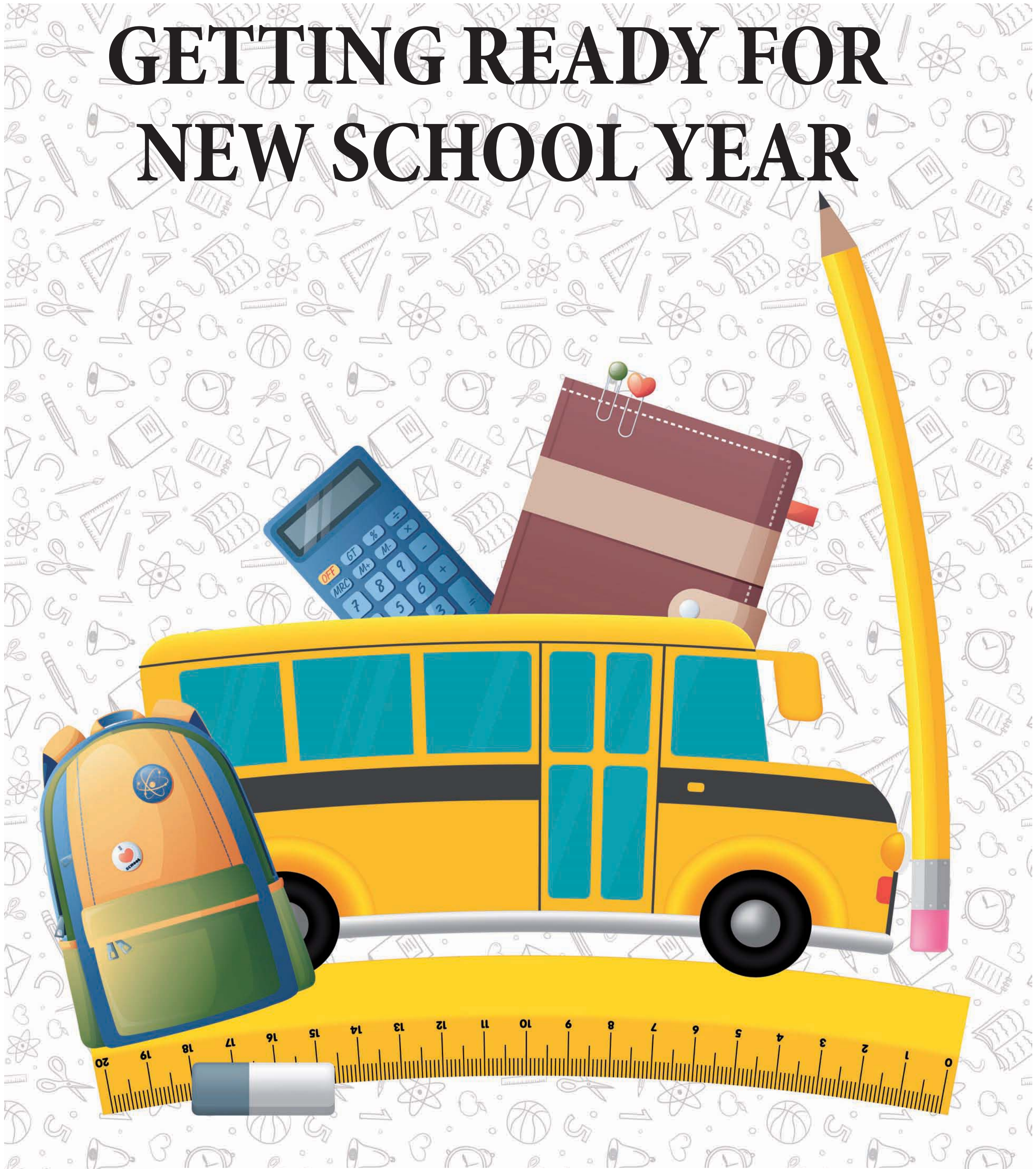
mountain biking. Visitors can enjoy stunning views of the valley and the surrounding countryside from the top of the mountains. Darbat Valley is home to a variety of wildlife, including birds, reptiles, and mammals.

Visitors can enjoy birdwatching or seeing other animals in their natural habitat while hiking or camping in the valley. Darbat Valley is a year-round destination, but it is especially beautiful during the monsoon season (July to September).

During this time, the valley is lush and green, and the waterfalls are in full force.



GETTING READY FOR NEW SCHOOL YEAR



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 8

In a few weeks, schools will open their doors, signalling the commencement of a fresh academic year. Pupils will reconvene in their classrooms, embarking on the next leg of their educational expedition. As each new semester begins, students confront a range of hurdles concerning adapting their daily schedules and managing their time to better align with their academic commitments.

Although a significant number of students might initially grapple with a disorder in the initial days or weeks of the upcoming school term, it is important to note that this short period can positively or negatively impact the remaining part of the school year. It is essential to equip students with

effective strategies to navigate the challenges of transitioning back to the academic routine.

Ahmed al Risi, an educational expert, emphasises the importance of proactive preparation to ensure a smooth start to the school year.

“The beginning of each academic term brings both excitement and trepidation for students. Parents and guardians must play a pivotal role in guiding their children through this transition,” says Al Risi.

Al Risi’s recommendations include fostering a positive mindset towards school by highlighting its benefits. Parents are encouraged to engage in conversations that emphasise the enjoyable aspects of learning, reconnecting with friends, and acquiring vital life skills.

Parents can gradually help their children allocate time for recreational

activities and ensure sufficient sleep. Moreover, Al Risi advocates a gradual shift towards effective time management and discipline. Parents can facilitate a sense of organisation that supports academic success by involving children in creating routines that incorporate both study and leisure activities.

“One of the best ways that parents can do is to take their children shopping for school supplies and backpacks, making them feel prepared and excited for the new academic year,” Al Risi added.

To address the concerns that often arise as children approach school age, Al Risi advises involving older siblings in conversations about the positive aspects of school. This can help alleviate anxieties and foster a sense of excitement about the new

experiences awaiting them.

In the context of the challenges parents face when their child begins school, Al Risi underscores the importance of understanding the child’s perspective. Parents can create an atmosphere of safety and support by actively addressing fears related to school assignments and the new environment.

Parents should ease their child’s concerns regarding school tasks and go to school by comprehending their apprehensions and providing comfort that both educators and parents are available to assist them.

By altering unfavourable viewpoints and highlighting the pleasurable and beneficial facets of the school, parents can aid youngsters in approaching school with enthusiasm and a receptive outlook.



In brief

■ JAKARTA



‘MYANMAR SOLUTION NEEDS POLITICAL WILL FROM ALL SIDES’

Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Tuesday said a resolution to the Myanmar crisis that has dragged into its third year needed “political will” from all sides of the conflict, as divided Southeast Asian nations step up diplomatic efforts.

The country has been ravaged by violence in the two years since civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi was deposed in a coup and hit with 19 criminal cases ranging from corruption to breaching Covid-19 rules. “We are aware the situation in Myanmar is still full of challenges. We must also realise this situation can only be resolved if there is political will from all parties.”

■ KATHMANDU



LANDSLIDES, FLOODS KILL 38 IN NEPAL AFTER HEAVY RAINS

Landslides caused by heavy rain have killed at least one person, and blocked a major highway in Nepal this week, officials said on Tuesday, as the death toll from the annual monsoon rains nears 40.

The rains, which lash the Himalayan nation from June to September, kill scores of people every year, and many more go missing as the monsoon triggers landslides and floods.

This year, 38 people have died and at least 33 people are missing, Mana Acharya, an official said. Rescue workers are also searching for another 6 people who have gone missing after a landslide.

■ WARSAW



POLAND TO HOLD PARLIAMENT ELECTION ON OCTOBER 15

Poland will hold a parliamentary election on October 15, the president said on Tuesday, a vote that will determine Warsaw’s relations with the EU at a time when it faces rising tensions on its eastern border.

The result of the vote in the bloc’s largest eastern member is likely to influence whether there will be a thaw in relations with Brussels, which have been soured by rows over issues such as the rule of law and migration.

It will also decide who will lead the Nato-member and key Ukrainian ally through a period of rising instability on its eastern border, amid concerns about the presence of Wagner Group mercenaries in Belarus and an increase in attempts by migrants to cross the frontier illegally.

Climate-friendly cattle to reduce one of the biggest sources of the potent greenhouse gas

These cows to belch less methane

WINNIPEG: When Canadian dairy farmer Ben Loewith’s calves are born next spring, they will be among the first in the world to be bred with a specific environmental goal: burping less methane.

Loewith, a third-generation farmer in Lynden, Ontario, in June started artificially inseminating 107 cows and heifers with the first-to-market bull semen with a low-methane genetic trait.

The arrival of commercially available genetics to produce dairy cattle that emit less methane could help reduce one of the biggest sources of the potent greenhouse gas, scientists and cattle industry experts say.

Burps are the top source of methane emissions from cattle. Semex, the genetics company that sold Loewith the semen, said adoption of the low-methane trait could reduce methane emissions from Canada’s dairy herd by 1.5 per cent annually, and up to 20 per



Some countries and food companies have begun to encourage farmers to move to lower-emitting cattle.

cent-30 per cent by 2050.

The company this spring began marketing semen with the methane trait in 80 countries. Early sales include a farm in Britain and dairies in the US and Slovakia, said vice-president Drew Sloan.

If adopted widely, low-

methane breeding could have a “profound impact” on cattle emissions globally, said Frank Mitloehner, professor of animal science at University of California Davis, who was not involved in developing the trait.

Some dairy industry officials remain unconvinced about low-

methane breeding, saying it could lead to digestion problems.

Canada’s agriculture department said in an email that it has not yet assessed the methane evaluation system underlying the product but that reducing emissions from livestock was “extremely important.”

Livestock account for 14.5 per cent of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions. Methane is the second-biggest greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide.

While farmers can feed additives to cattle to reduce methane production, their effects wear off once cattle stop eating them and they are not approved for use in the United States, Mitloehner said.

Semex is not initially charging extra for the methane trait, said Michael Lohuis, Semex’s vice-president of research and innovation. He declined to provide sales projections but

expects sales to remain slow until financial incentives emerge.

The Canadian government currently offers no incentives for low-methane cattle breeding, but the agriculture department said in an email that Ottawa is working to introduce offset credits for reducing methane through better manure management.

Some countries and food companies have begun to encourage farmers to move to lower-emitting cattle.

New Zealand will begin taxing farmers for methane from cattle in 2025.

Nestle and Burger King parent Restaurant Brands International are tackling the methane problem in their supply chains by changing what cattle eat.

Juha Nousiainen, senior vice-president at Valio, a Finnish dairy, warned that breeding cattle to burp less methane could create digestive problems. — **Reuters**

Israel stops funds to Arab towns, East Jerusalem

JERUSALEM: Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has frozen funds for Arab towns and Palestinian education programmes in East Jerusalem, citing crime and safety fears and prompting accusations of racism.

Smotrich, a key member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s nationalist-religious government, said on Monday some of the budget funds meant for Arab local councils were a political pay-off by the previous cabinet that could end up in the hands of “criminals and terrorists”.

“The priorities of our national government... are different from those of the previous leftist government and we should not apologise for that,” said Smotrich, head of the pro-settler Religious Zionism party whose past comments about the Palestinians have drawn international condemnation.

Israel’s public broadcaster Kan first reported the freeze on Sunday when it published a letter from Interior Minister Moshe Arbel to Smotrich, urging him to release 200 million shekels (\$54 million) of the funds at stake that are intended for administration and another 100 million for economic development.

Lawmaker Mansour Abbas



Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich

who heads the United Arab List accused Smotrich of racism.

“Arab citizens are entitled to those funds, which were meant to close the gaps between Arab and Jewish communities,” he told Reuters.

Arab citizens, most of whom are descendants of Palestinians who stayed in the new Israeli state after the 1948 war surrounding its creation, make up about a fifth of Israel’s population.

Netanyahu’s office did not respond to a request for comment, while opposition leader and former prime minister Yair Lapid also accused Smotrich of racism, “abusing Arab citizens simply

because they are Arab”.

Israel’s Arab minority has for decades faced social and economic disparities compared with Jewish citizens, including high poverty rates, overcrowded towns lacking in infrastructure and poorly-funded schools.

The extra funds, designated in 2022 for 67 Arab councils, were the state’s acknowledgement of years of insufficient resource allocation to Arab localities, said Ameer Bisharat, head of the National Committee of Arab Local Councils in Israel.

The freeze could mean that councils are unable to provide basic services such as garbage

collection or reopening schools after the summer holiday, he said.

Smotrich said a separate 200 million shekels for encouraging academic studies among Palestinians from East Jerusalem would also be frozen until what he described as “extremist activity” on campus was eradicated.

In May, the government extended a 2018 2.1 billion shekel five-year plan meant to improve education, employment, health and infrastructure in East Jerusalem, which Israel captured in a 1967 war and annexed in a move unrecognised internationally.

It includes programmes to help Palestinians — who make up almost 40 per cent of Jerusalem’s population, with almost two thirds below the poverty line — integrate into Israeli academic institutions.

Smotrich said the new East Jerusalem plan would have a total increased budget but that although encouraging academic studies among the city’s Palestinians was a worthy cause, this also had unwelcome consequences.

“In recent years, radical Islamic cells have developed in Israeli universities and colleges, over and over again they express solidarity with Israel’s enemies,” he said on Facebook, responding to Kan’s report. — **Reuters**

Imran Khan appeals against graft conviction

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan’s former Prime Minister Imran Khan appealed against his conviction and three-year sentence on corruption charges on Tuesday, four days after he was jailed and barred from politics in a case threatening to worsen political uncertainty.

His lawyer, Naeem Panjutha, said the petition, challenging Khan’s conviction on charges of selling state gifts unlawfully during his 2018-2022 term as prime minister, had been filed in Islamabad High Court, which will hear the case on Wednesday.

The petition described the conviction as “without lawful authority, tainted with bias”, and said Khan, 70, had not received an adequate hearing.

Noting that the court rejected a list of witnesses for the defence a day before reaching its verdict, it said a conviction without hearing the defence case was a “gross travesty of justice, and a slap in the face of due process and fair trial”. — **AFP**

In Niger, sanctions, flight disruptions squeeze UN aid stocks

DAKAR: Niger’s military coup is hampering United Nations’ humanitarian efforts in one of the world’s poorest countries as border and airspace closures have cut off supplies of medicine and food, a UN official said on Tuesday.

UN aid agencies are scrambling to eke out depleting stocks just as regional sanctions potentially increase the number of people in need, the UN humanitarian chief in Niger, Louise Aubin, warned.

Any humanitarian cutbacks could have devastating impacts in Niger, which has one of the highest rates of child mortality in the world and whose rural communities have been hit by a deadly extremist insurgency.

Over 4 million people



Bags of rice are offloaded from a truck at Niamey’s market on Tuesday. — **AFP**

were already targeted for UN emergency assistance before the July 26 power grab.

“The risk is that we start

running out of assistance materials to be able to help out people - I’m talking about simple things that are so life-saving,” Aubin told

Reuters, listing food, vaccines and cash as areas of concern.

“Some people will soon be feeling the pinch of this ... More than the 4.3 million people we had planned on supporting through emergency humanitarian assistance, we might see that number growing and growing fast,” Aubin said flights operated within Niger by the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) had been disrupted but not suspended by the junta’s decision to close its airspace in response to the West African regional bloc’s threat of possible military intervention.

But that and the closure of land borders under sanctions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

means the outlook for replenishing stocks in Niger is uncertain, she said. “There are no flights coming in at the moment. So that is becoming an issue,” she said. “Being able to mobilise food means obviously being able to bring in food from the outside.”

It was not immediately possible to determine how long stocks of food products or vaccines would last, but “these are quickly depleted because these are regular operations to be able to reach people in need.”

The World Food Programme, UNICEF, and the UNFPA population fund are contingency planning to keep operations on track despite the looming shortages. — **Reuters**



Fans bid seaside farewell to rock star O'Connor

BRAY: Thousands gathered outside Sinead O'Connor's former seaside home on Tuesday to bid farewell to the outspoken Irish rock star, some singing along to hits blasted from a vintage Volkswagen camper van, others showering her hearse with flowers.

O'Connor, best known for the 1990 chart-topping hit "Nothing Compares 2 U" and her controversial but often prescient views on religion, sex and feminism, died on July 26 aged 56 after police found her unresponsive at an address in London.

Crowds gathered along the seafront at Bray, just south of Dublin, clapped and cheered as O'Connor's coffin passed in a hearse. Driving ahead, the VW van was decked out with a rainbow flag and blared Bob Marley's "Natural Mystic" from speakers secured to the roof.

"I think she had the courage to

say a lot of things that we all felt," said Gemma Byrne, 47, who took a 90-minute train from the town of Drogheda to pay her respects.

"She represented our transition from a very dark past into a hopeful future and I'm just here to say thanks for being with me along that journey, and for maybe putting words and expression on what I felt but didn't quite know how to say."

Two of Byrne's friends held a large red flag reading "Thank You Sinead." Others stood with buggies and dogs, some climbed up on walls to get a better view, and locals watched from balconies overlooking the strand.

One fan held a black-and-white photo of O'Connor with the words "Fight The Real Enemy," the declaration the singer famously made after ripping up of a photo of Pope John Paul II during a 1992 television appearance on "Saturday Night Live."

— AFP



A hearse carrying the coffin of late Irish singer Sinead O'Connor passes near her former home during her funeral procession as fans line the street to say their last goodbye to her, in Bray, Ireland, on Tuesday. — Reuters

July was world's hottest on record

BRUSSELS: Last month was the hottest July on record, with abnormally high temperatures recorded on both land and sea, the European Union's Copernicus climate change panel said on Tuesday.

Scientists warned late last month that it was on track to become the world's hottest month on record. This year has been the third-warmest year to date, Copernicus deputy head Samantha Burgess said. "We just witnessed global air temperatures and global ocean surface temperatures set new all-time records in July," she said.

"It shows the urgency for ambitious efforts to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, which are the main driver behind these records," June had also smashed through the previous temperature record for that month, according to Copernicus, which bases its calculations on a dataset going back to 1950.

Sweltering temperatures have affected considerable swathes of the planet, with heat records registered from Death Valley in the US state of California to a northwest China township as Canada and southern Europe battle wildfires.

The world's hottest day to date was July 6, 2023, with a global average temperature of 17.08 degrees, according to the data.

The effects of the unusually hot



Pigeons stand on a water fountain outside Souq Waqif in Doha on Monday. — AFP

weather have been visible in the last month as wildfires ravaged Europe, flash foods hit Pakistan and a typhoon landed in China, the Philippines and Taiwan.

The Copernicus records only go back to 1940, but researchers can build an index of historical climate change using tree rings and air bubbles in glaciers.

This research suggests that July's temperatures are unprecedented going back thousands of years, said Carlos Buontempo, who serves as director of the Copernicus Climate Change Service at the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, in late July. According to Copernicus, the temperature over land in July was 0.72 degrees above the

average for the years 1991 to 2020 globally, and 0.51degrees higher for the ocean temperature about 10 metres below the surface.

The Copernicus data is based on computer-generated analyses that include measurements from satellites, ships, aircraft and weather stations around the world. The agency had released preliminary data for the month on July 27. The US climate agency NOAA is set to publish its own data for July in mid-August.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in Geneva has meanwhile not ruled out that 2023 will be hotter than the last record year 2016, when the average temperature was 1.3 degrees above pre-industrial levels.

— dpa

Saudi sets up new council to supervise holy mosques

RIYADH: The Saudi government has set up a new council, under the direct control of the king, to supervise the affairs of the two holiest mosques of Islam, Saudi state media said on Thursday.

The new body will "preside over the religious affairs of the two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina," according to a government statement on state news agency SPA posted on social media platform X.

The council, which replaces a previous one that was under the government's control rather than the king's, will likely have more financial and administrative independence.

Mecca's Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina are Islam's two holiest sites.

The Presidency of Religious Affairs at the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque will be responsible for supervising the affairs of imams and muezzins of the two holy mosques and all matters related to their religious affairs including seminars and Islamic lessons. The General Presidency for the Affairs of the Two Holy Mosques will be transformed into a public body called the "General Authority for the Affairs of the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque."

— Agencies

World scouts abandon South Korea jamboree camp

BUAN/SEOUL: South Korea on Tuesday evacuated the majority of teenage scouts from their campsite ahead of an approaching typhoon, the latest disruption to the World Scout Jamboree which has been marred by illness and criticism of its organisation and facilities.

More than 1,000 buses were being deployed to move the scouts out of the south west, a region that Typhoon Khanun is expected to hit on Thursday.

There were about 36,000 participants at the campsite, near Buan city, and more than two-thirds have already left, Interior Minister Lee Sang-min said.

Seoul and its surrounding province of Gyeonggi would host almost half the scouts, with the rest fanning out to six other areas, Lee said. Police cars and

helicopters will escort the convoys to safety, he added.

South Korean organisers are keen to minimise any further problems at the jamboree, the first global gathering of scouts since the pandemic. Since the event began last week, hundreds of participants have fallen ill due to a heatwave, triggering criticism from the public and parents about a lack of preparation.

The British scout contingent, the event's biggest, also left early, citing poor sanitation and food quality, among other concerns. The US scout group followed.

"This is the first time in more than 100 years of World Scout Jamborees that we have had to face such compounded challenges," Ahmad al Hendawi, Secretary-General of the World Organization



Scouts prepare to leave the campsite of the World Scout Jamboree in Buan on Tuesday. — AFP

of the Scout Movement, said.

At the sprawling campsite, scouts dismantled tents and folded up ground sheets, before carrying their backpacks to board nearby buses. Typhoon Khanun, which has already wreaked havoc in southern Japan, is moving towards South Korea bringing heavy rain and winds of up to 125 kph (78 mph) as of Tuesday morning, according to the weather agency.

Khanun is expected to hit southern regions of South Korea on Thursday before tracking up the peninsula, and the government raised its typhoon alert to the highest level, closing some roads, mountain trails and beaches.

President Yoon Suk Yeol will hold a meeting on Tuesday to review measures to minimise typhoon damage.

— Agencies

SHORT TAKES

TBILISI

Georgia mourns 2008 war dead

Dozens of Georgians on Tuesday marked the anniversary of a 2008 war with Russia in which some 400 of their compatriots died, as the prime minister branded Moscow an "aggressor".

Russia sent thousands of troops into Georgia on August 8, 2008 after Tbilisi launched a large-scale military operation against South Ossetian separatists who had been shelling Georgian villages.

"We have known for a long time that Russia was an aggressor, we know that and the whole world knows that," Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili said at a wreath-laying ceremony to remember the dead at a cemetery in the capital Tbilisi.

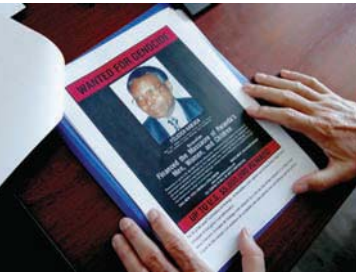


THE HAGUE

Rwanda genocide victims slam Kabuga release

A group representing survivors of the Rwandan genocide on Tuesday expressed anger and disappointment at a UN appeal court ruling that a suspect should be urgently considered for release after he was declared unfit for trial.

The Ibuka association representing survivors slammed the decision in the case of former business tycoon Felicien Kabuga, accused of setting up a hate broadcaster that fuelled the 1994 slaughter of around 800,000 people.



Two missiles hit a residential area, Ukrainian Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko wrote on Telegram on Monday evening.

KIEV

At least 5 killed, 31 injured in Ukraine

A child, 19 police officers and five rescue workers were among the injured. They had come under fire in the second attack while they were helping the victims of



the first strike. Earlier the head of the military administration in Donetsk province, Pavlo Kyrylenko, said on Telegram that the area included hotels, restaurants and shops.

Find strength beyond toxic influences



Hyesha Barrett
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The writer is a life coach and NLP practitioner

Throughout our lives, we come across an array of diverse individuals. Some of whom may inappropriately exhibit harmful behaviour, belittle our thoughts and question our actions — all of which leaves a negative impact on our well-being and emotional state. The constant walking on eggshells and not being able to express our thoughts and feelings from an authentic place can be exhausting.

Here are 10 characteristics of toxic traits to look out for in others around you:

1. Negativity leaving you feeling overwhelmed and discouraged
2. Pessimism always making you question your actions
3. Criticism undermining your confidence and self-esteem
4. Dishonesty and telling lies
5. Lack of empathy to understand and acknowledge your emotions and perspective
6. Being rude, dismissive and insensitive to your feelings, leaving you feeling invalidated and unheard
7. Cynical and argumentative for no reason
8. Aggressive, hostile and any other tactics giving

out orders

9. Manipulative using guilt, emotional blackmail or mind games
10. Self-centred and selfish with a lack of self-awareness

Often times, it's easier to concede to the demeaning ploys used, as there could be consequences if you don't. If you must face this person, always be empowered by your own choice and make decisions from a position of power, rather than from a place of feeling controlled.

Dealing with toxic behaviour is consuming, therefore be clear about your limits. These individuals can be charismatic and have a way of drawing you in by being alluring and attentive at first, before the drama starts. Notice the pattern — if it happens often, establish what you are willing to tolerate, set clear and concise boundaries, communicate what behaviours are unacceptable, then withdraw.

You can reject behaviour, requests and people by saying “no” in an assertive, non-aggressive manner. Strength and compassion can co-exist beautifully together at the edge of your boundaries. Meet people where they are and don't expect change. Come from a place of empowerment and focus on the solution

BY RECOGNISING THE SIGNS OF TOXIC BEHAVIOUR AND IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES, YOU CAN PROTECT YOURSELF FROM THE DETRIMENTAL EFFECTS OF THEIR NEGATIVITY

not the problem.

Be understanding, compassionate, kind and respectful, to others and mainly to yourself. Forgiveness and letting go are key components to moving on from the expectation of things ever being different. The past can't define who you are, nor where you are going.

Forgiveness doesn't mean condoning, but simply giving you the freedom of lessening the grip around your pain and sadness.

Do so with conviction and an abundance of self-love. Focus on the way people treat you; it is extremely indicative of how they would like to continue a relationship with you.

Dealing with toxic people requires a combination of self-awareness, assertiveness and emotional resilience. By recognising the signs of toxic behaviour and implementing effective strategies, you can protect yourself from the detrimental effects of their negativity.

Through setting boundaries, limiting contact, engaging in self-care, staying composed, practicing empathy with caution and strengthening your support network, you will absolutely protect your well-being and manage challenging interactions more effectively.

Split couples, ghost voters haunt Zimbabwe polls

On election day in Zimbabwe this month, Tendai and his wife will leave home and head in opposite directions.

The pair from the central town of Kadoma live under the same roof but have been assigned to different polling stations in one of a series of anomalies in the voters' roll that have raised fears of rigging.

The southern African country votes to elect the president and legislature on August 23 in what analysts expect to be a tense affair, amid a crackdown on dissent and a disaffected population battling hyperinflation, poverty and high unemployment.

Suspensions over possible election irregularities are rife in a nation that has been ruled by the same party since independence in 1980 and has a long history of disputed votes.

Activists at Team Pachedu, a civil society group, say an analysis of the roll suggests such fears are well grounded.

“We have discovered a lot of irregularities,” said Tafadzwa Sambiri, a spokesman for the group. “Chief among them is the recycling of IDs”.

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) did not reply to a request for comment.

Team Pachedu said it found thousands of ID numbers that were linked to a person in the 2013 elections but are tied to a different name in 2023.

The group said it found other oddities, like people who are dead or registered twice or seemingly crammed in a relatively small space.

Thousands of others, like Tendai, have noticed their place of voting has changed.

“I now have to board a taxi to Southerton which is about three kilometres from where I stay. It's costly and not convenient for me,” said a woman from Harare.

The issue first came to light in May, when election authorities made the roll available for inspections, and many found their names had been removed or misplaced.

Among them was David Coltart, a former education minister and a member of the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), the leading opposition party, who after a day of searching figured he had been moved to a polling station further away from the house he has inhabited for decades.

In some instances, voters from ruling party strongholds appear to have been moved in bulk to opposition leaning areas, according to Team Pachedu.

Activists fear the anomalies could prove decisive. — AFP

A light bulb went off



Pamela Paul
American columnist, journalist, editor, and author of 'Things We've Lost to the Internet'

When Thomas Edison was working on the incandescent lamp in 1879, he purportedly said, “We are striking it big in the electric light, better than my vivid imagination first conceived. Where this thing is going to stop, Lord only knows.” That heavenly glow stopped last week.

We knew the day was coming when the lights would go out, and by that, I mean the light of the incandescent light bulb. As of August 1, the Biden administration's regulations went into effect: All bulbs forthwith must comply with new efficiency standards. While not explicitly banning incandescent bulbs, these regulations will make it awfully hard — if not impossible — for the old Edison bulb to pass muster.

Intellectually, I'm on board.

The more environmental regulations this country can impose, the better. My own micro-contribution is an array of personal eco-diktats, some of which I try to force on other members of my family. I am forever turning out lights when people momentarily leave a room. I wash and reuse Ziploc bags until they no longer zip, and I enlist all stray bags into litter box duty. I am a manic recycler of paper.

There is simply no reasonable defence of incandescent light bulbs. LED bulbs last longer, are cheaper in the long run and, now that their once hefty price tag has dropped, in the short run as well. Their widespread use will significantly reduce carbon emissions. But against reason, let me argue briefly and futilely in favour of the aesthetic, ambient, even tactile (I'll explain) benefits of Edison's radiant invention.

First, consider the alternatives. A hundred times I have been told that LED bulbs, with their unnatural froideur and their sour green aura, can now simulate all manner of glow. They come with labels like soft white and bright white, cool white and daylight. It's all nonsense. The morose cast of the LED bulb looks one step up from the dread fluorescent, with its grim hue supplying the gray to barely finished basements, the line at the DMV and the waiting room in the ER. Stark.



STARK. DEVOID OF PASSION. INSTITUTIONAL. I'M HARDLY THE FIRST PERSON TO NOTICE THAT LED LIGHT SIMPLY LOOKS BAD

Devoid of passion. Institutional. I'm hardly the first person to notice that LED light simply looks bad.

Things illuminated by LED (human beings, for example) also look bad, sullen, even villainous.

There is little hygge to be found in an LED-lit home. Rooms exude the doleful pallor of a desaturated sequence in a Christopher Nolan movie.

I think of the poor painter in Oliver Sacks' “An Anthropologist on Mars,” suddenly struck with a loss of colour vision, who finds that what's left looks distasteful, “the whites glaring, yet discoloured and off-white, the blacks cavernous — everything wrong, unnatural stained and impure.” LED bulbs flicker; they fade.

Occasionally they buzz, though apparently all bulbs are guilty of this, and it's allegedly not their fault; it's your house's.

And LED is cold — not just in terms of colour but actually cold. As a person whose internal thermostat runs on the chilly side, who needs a hot bath every night just to fully inhabit my

extremities, the incandescent light bulb has served as a beacon.

The 17th-century house I grew up in never acquired insulation. Heating was kept to a minimum, the logic being, I assume, that there was little point letting heat in if it was only going to waft right out.

The old-fashioned standing radiators in the corner of each room (think “Eraserhead”) occasionally emitted a faint warmth; I would hug the one in the kitchen while waiting for my bagel to toast. A cat who became ill joined me there as he grew more sickly, sidling up to the radiator beside me until his time ran out.

The strongest heat in the house came in the form of my reading lamp, which I powered up with 100-watt bulbs and clutched as I read in bed, my fingers lightly roasting with pleasure.

I associate that jolly warmth with late-night phone calls, books read after bedtime, the privacy of my own well-lit room.

The incandescent bulb has had its drawbacks. I never succeeded in getting it to prove a fake fever the way Elliott did in “E.T.” I was repeatedly told not to hug my lamp, but I ignored those warnings. Only a few times did I singe anything, usually a pajama sleeve.

It wasn't until adulthood that I set anything entirely aflame. It was bound to happen, and I only wish it hadn't happened to Teddles, whom I placed on my child's bedside lamp to resuscitate the teddy-bear-headed blanket from a state of slight sogginess.

(We all make what, in hindsight, were clearly mistakes under parental stress.) Within moments, whatever toxic acrylic formulation constituted its beloved snuggly form had degraded into a tough fibrous shell.

Until last Tuesday, old-fashioned bulbs continued to be available online, in dollar stores and at specialty lighting shops.

A few may still be. Run! Or simply succumb to the waning incandescence. Wait it out until fireplace season. Cling to the good news that, per a separate slate of proposed efficiency standards, the odious compact fluorescent light may soon be banned, too. We'll always have candlelight.

— The New York Times

From the impossible to possible!

During the renovation process of a library in my native village in South India, as part of our efforts to inculcate reading, especially among students, we were flooded with comments like “Why a library when knowledge is available at one’s fingertips”.

This reminded me of the prediction of a technology revolution in education during the height of the dot-com bubble a few years ago, in which it was said that the printed word would be replaced by the computer screen.

Yes, the time has changed. Not only is it easier to find any information online, but the information now comes in different formats. It is no longer necessary to go to the library and spend hours there searching for the desired data!

Today, massive amounts of information in the form of books, audio, images and videos are available at one’s fingertips.

This has become possible thanks to the increased availability of smart devices and web-based curricula.

The education sector is one of the primary beneficiaries of this rapid evolution in the technology world. It is playing an increasing role at all levels of education, from elementary school to higher education.

Look at the harrowing period of Covid-19 and how online education became a vital part of teaching and learning. When countries went on lockdown, all schools had to close immediately to avoid spreading the virus.

During this crisis, we found an incredible amount of large-scale efforts to use technology in support of remote learning.

Undoubtedly, it was thanks to technology that what was once difficult became a reality for many as educational software tools allowed students and teachers to communicate and learn during the period of the pandemic.

In several countries in the world, classrooms provide students with access to devices like computers, laptops and tablets, helping them develop their technological literacy and get comfortable using a variety of instructional materials, tools and



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THANKS TO TECHNOLOGY THAT WHAT WAS ONCE DIFFICULT BECAME A REALITY AS EDUCATIONAL SOFTWARE TOOLS ALLOWED STUDENTS AND TEACHERS TO COMMUNICATE AND LEARN DURING THE PANDEMIC

programmes for their own learning that is useful in life beyond school.

Aligning with the pace and depth of technological developments, artificial intelligence (AI) is helping educators improve their effectiveness and learning outcomes.

They not only assist teachers, but also make individualised learning more exciting.

The AI works with each student individually, making sure they are learning at their optimal pace. It helps students become more efficient learners due to its comprehensive understanding abilities which allows them to access new knowledge quickly.

They can find answers through easily accessible directories like Wikipedia or Google Scholar without having any gaps between educational materials that occur when using traditional methods such as books or lectures.

However, like many other applications, AI too has its dodges. We must keep safety issues at the front of our gaze and develop the necessary checks.

The regulatory bodies that review and validate textbooks and other educational materials took significant time and investment to establish and sustain.

Students lose their ability to practice and learn social skills because they don’t come into contact with real people during class time.

This makes it hard for them when they get out of school and need these types of interactions on the job or even just socially as adults.

AI has the potential to become addictive. Students could lose interest in learning because they are more interested in AI devices.

We further know that children and youth are highly susceptible to manipulation, much more vulnerable than adults.

There are numerous examples of AI slipping out of the guard put in place by their creators and engaging in all sorts of activities that are inapt for children, and on the other hand, adversely affect them.

Finally, as one parent pointed out, there is the worry that as artificial intelligence is being used to grade students’ assessments, there will be less incentive for them to work hard!

A CROW ABOVE AN EAGLE!



A crow flies above an eagle, the emblem of the city of Frankfurt, atop a historical building in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, on Tuesday. – AFP

What we must learn from Covid-19

Hardship, crisis, misfortune and mistakes often provide the most valuable insights. The Covid-19 pandemic is a case in point. For all the suffering that the virus has caused, it has also highlighted the steps that countries must take, both collectively and individually, to prepare for future global public-health emergencies. Now, with the pandemic seemingly in the rearview mirror, the question is whether political leaders around the world will take its lessons to heart.

This is not a trivial question. Over the past few decades, disease outbreaks have triggered a recurring cycle of panic and neglect among policymakers. But in light of the human, economic and social devastation wrought by Covid-19, we can and must break this pattern.

If Covid-19 has taught us anything, it is that factors such as climate change, human encroachment on wildlife habitats, population growth, urbanisation, and low-cost travel make it increasingly likely that we will face more devastating pandemics in the not-too-distant future. A 2021 study found that the “yearly probability” of extreme epidemics could “increase up to threefold” in the coming decades. It would be extremely reckless not to take decisive action now to mitigate



José Manuel Barroso

The writer is a former president of the European Commission and prime minister of Portugal, is Chair of the Board of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

WITH THE PANDEMIC NOW SEEMINGLY IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR, POLICYMAKERS MUST START PREPARING FOR THE NEXT PUBLIC-HEALTH CRISIS

this looming threat.

Another crucial lesson from Covid-19 is that all countries must have robust health systems capable of responding quickly and effectively to an emergency while simultaneously addressing ongoing healthcare needs. Even well-resourced countries struggled to perform this complex balancing act during the pandemic, resulting in millions of deaths and severe economic damage.

Governments around the world owe it to their citizens to make significant and sustained investments in areas such as disease surveillance, outbreak-response capabilities, primary healthcare services, and healthcare worker training. Such investments are needed not only in wealthier countries, but also in lower-income countries that cannot afford them on their own.

All of this underscores the imperative for wealthy countries to step in and provide critical assistance. Throughout the pandemic, these countries’ governments, recognising that deadly pathogens are indifferent to national borders, repeated the mantra that “no one is safe until everyone is safe.” And yet, despite this lofty rhetoric, lower-income

countries found themselves last in line for diagnostics, vaccines, treatments, and other crucial supplies. Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance (whose board I chair) had to wait months before the COVAX facility it established in 2020 managed to overcome vaccine hoarding and export bans and start shipping significant quantities to the countries most in need.

The good news is that ensuring equitable access to vaccines and other crucial interventions is an achievable goal. There are several steps that governments can take to prepare for the next pandemic and ensure that all countries, regardless of their wealth, have

the resources they need to manage the crisis.

First, rather than raising money during an emergency, innovative financing tools could secure funding in advance and ensure that it is ready to be deployed immediately. Moreover, the Covid-19 crisis showed that concentrating a large share of the world’s vaccine manufacturing in the Global North can severely hinder equitable access. With that in mind, the African Union Commission and Gavi have recently announced a joint effort to establish vaccine-manufacturing facilities in several dozen locations across Africa. This manufacturing network



A crucial lesson from Covid-19 is that all countries must have robust health systems.

could minimise potential supply bottlenecks and enhance the availability of other vital vaccines, such as for cholera, for which current production fails to meet demand.

Initiatives like the pandemic accord, which is currently being debated among the World Health Organization’s member states, promise to promote greater equity and effectiveness in pandemic prevention and response. While negotiations over the details are still ongoing and will most likely continue until the agreement comes to a vote at the 2024 World Health Assembly, governments could benefit from participating in the process and should commit to abide by the accord once it is approved.

Although Covid-19 no longer dominates news headlines, it is crucial that we maintain the political will to establish equitable vaccine access and not revert to our pre-pandemic complacency. Today’s political leaders have a historic opportunity to foster a more inclusive global order, and they have a responsibility to act boldly before the next public-health emergency. Failing to do so will condemn us all to relive the traumas of the past three years.

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COLOMBIA EARN MAIDEN QUARTERS AT WOMEN’S WORLD CUP



France forward Eugenie Le Sommer scores her team's fourth goal during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup round of 16 match between France and Morocco at Hindmarsh Stadium in Adelaide. – AFP



France midfielder Kenza Dali (2R) celebrates with team-mates scoring her team's second goal during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup round of 16 match against Morocco. – AFP



Colombia's Catalina Usme scores a goal against Jamaica during the Fifa Women's World Cup Australia and New Zealand 2023 - Round of 16 match at Melbourne Rectangular Stadium, Melbourne, Australia. – Reuters

FRANCE EASE PAST MOROCCO TO SET UP AUSTRALIA CLASH



France forward Eugenie Le Sommer celebrates scoring her team's fourth goal during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup round of 16 match against Morocco. – AFP

ADELAIDE, Australia: France issued a Women's World Cup warning on Tuesday to set up a tasty quarterfinal clash against Australia, with Colombia joining them in the last eight and facing England.

A rampant France scored three times in eight minutes in a first-half blitz as they won 4-0 to bring Morocco's fairytale run to a brutal end.

Veteran striker Eugenie Le Sommer scored twice, once in each half, and Kadidiatou Diani and Kenza Dali were also on the scoresheet in Adelaide.

Herve Renard's side will now play co-hosts Australia in Brisbane on Saturday, with the winners of that going on to play either England or Colombia in the semifinals.

"We fulfilled our objective. You always want a little bit more, but it's fine," Renard told broadcaster M6.

France were knocked out in the quarterfinals as hosts in 2019, losing to eventual winners the United States.

A win against Australia will see them equal their best-ever

performance at the World Cup, when they got to the last four in 2011.

"We have matched our performance of four years ago, but our objective was to do better than we did in 2011, so we know what we have left to do," Renard said.

Asked if his side could beat the Matildas in front of a hostile crowd, he added: "We are capable of doing it but it won't be easy, albeit not easy for either team."

While France are desperate to win a first major women's international title, Morocco came into the game with the pressure off, their World Cup already a huge success.

They recovered from a 6-0 thrashing to Germany on their World Cup debut to exceed all expectations by defeating Colombia and South Korea to reach the knockout rounds.

COLOMBIA MAKE HISTORY

Colombia reached the quarterfinals for the first time and a meeting with England after a 1-0 win over Jamaica.

Skipper Catalina Usme scored the only goal of the game in

Melbourne in the 51st minute, bringing the ball down expertly and bending it into the bottom corner.

It was the first time at the tournament that Jamaica had conceded a goal.

It set a cagey game alight

and sent the pumping pro-Colombian crowd into deafening delirium.

Fired up, Jamaica almost had an immediate reply with Jody Brown's shot cleared off the line.

Behind for the first time at the World Cup and facing the exit door, Jamaica

abandoned their defensive posture and threw players forward frantically looking for the equaliser.

Drew Spence almost grabbed it with a header that spun just wide, but Colombia held on.

They will play European champions England in Sydney on Saturday.

who sent holders the United States home — face Japan.

JAMAICAN CALL FOR HELP

Jamaica bowed out but made history of their own, winning a World Cup game for the first time with a 1-0 victory over Panama and holding heavily fancied Brazil and France to goalless draws.

But despite boasting the prolific Manchester City striker Khadija Shaw, Jamaica's lack of goals proved to be their undoing — they scored just one all tournament, against Panama.

It was a victory, though, of sorts in the team's wider battle with their federation — they hope their displays will mean more support in future from Jamaican football bosses.

"Obviously we need some help from mainly the government," said coach Lorne Donaldson, whose team has been in a row with their federation over pay and conditions.

"Hopefully now we can all come together and try and figure something out so we don't do things hodgepodge all the time," he added. — AFP



Colombia's Catalina Usme celebrates scoring their first goal with teammates. – Reuters

JAMES SAYS SORRY

England will be missing attacker Lauren James after she was sent off for stamping on Nigeria's Michelle Alozie in their last-16 game on Monday.

England went on to squeeze through on penalties.

The 21-year-old James apologised on Tuesday.

"All my love and respect to you," James tweeted to Alozie, who had written on social media that she had "all respect for Lauren James". "I am sorry for what happened," James added.

In the other quarterfinals, Spain play the 2019 runners-up the Netherlands, and Sweden —

Oman to take part in seven events at 19th Asian Games

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, AUG 8

The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), headed by Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, has approved Oman's participation in seven categories at the 19th Asian Games in China.

Oman will take part in athletics, weightlifting, sailing, shooting, hockey, beach volleyball and swimming at the Asian Games scheduled from September 23 to

October 8 in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, China.

The OOC board of directors under the chairmanship of Khalid al Zubair met on Tuesday at the OOC headquarters to approve the disciplines in which the country will take part at the Games.

Omani Olympians sprinter Barakat al Harthy, swimmer Issa al Adawi, lady sprinter Mazoon al Alawi, shooter Hamad al Khatiri and weightlifter Amer al Khanjari are all expected to feature in the Oman squad for the Asian Games.



During the last Asian Games, Oman had took part in eight disciplines. Tennis was not included in the latest edition of

Asian Games by the OOC.

The country did not win any medal in the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia which marked Oman's 10th appearance in the continental sports event.

Oman competed with 46 athletes in the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta and Palembang, Indonesia.

Till now, Oman have a lone gold and three bronze medals to their kitty in the Asian Games.

Mohammed al Malki created history when he became the first

Omani to claim a gold in Asian Games when he achieved the feat in the men's 400m race in Beijing Games in 1990. In the previous edition in Seoul 1986, Al Malki bagged a bronze medal in the same category.

In 1998 Bangkok Games, Oman's men's 4x100m relay team won the bronze medal.

Omani sprint sensation Barakat al Harthy rose to fame when he clinched the bronze in men's 100m at the 2010 Guangzhou Games in China.

Oman miss out against hosts Belarus in CIS Games semifinal



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 8

Oman beach soccer team suffered another defeat in the underway second CIS Games when they lost 4-0 to hosts Belarus in the semifinal clash after a tight match on Tuesday. The win saw the hosts securing slot in the final of the beach soccer competitions of the Games.

The first and second halves ended at 2-0 for the hosts before ending the overall match at 4-0 to move into the final and vie for the gold medal.

Oman team will meet Russia

on Wednesday for the third and fourth play-off. The match will begin at 6:00 pm (Oman time).

Oman team confirmed their progressing into the semifinals after they ended the group stage as runners-up by six points. Toppers Russia finished with same points while Egypt team which owned six points as well left from the group stage with goal difference.

The national team, led by the long-serving national head coach Talib Hilal, had commenced their campaign strongly with a 13-1 victory over Uzbekistan in the opener on Saturday.

Then, the national team

suffered to 6-3 loss against Egypt in the following match on Sunday. In the concluding group game, Oman team players beat world champions Russia 7-4 to book spot in the semifinals.

In the semifinal, coach Talib Hilal began the match with a similar starting line-up featured from Younis al Owaisi as the goalkeeper. Mashal al Oraimi was in the back line while Yahya al Murkhi was the man who monitored the centre. Nooh al Zadjali and Abdullah al Souti were the strikers. The head coach made several substitutions in between the sets of the match.

The opponents opened the match with more focus as they managed to score an early goal from header in the third minute. After two minutes later, the hosts goalie doubled the results as he sent a long shot to the net to make it 2-0. In the deciding set, the hosts confirmed their triumph by registering the third and fourth goals. Oman beach soccer players took part in this friendly meet to gear up for the top assignment at the 2024 Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup in UAE which will take place in next February.

Oman will aim for a different show in their fifth attendance.

Pokri Warriors lift MOCL T16 Cup

MUSCAT: Pokri Warriors lifted the MOCL T16 Champions Cup by defeating Konkani Warriors by 4 wickets in the fifth edition of the MOCL Grand Final held at the Challengers Cricket Club ground, Al Amerat.

Winning the toss, Pokri warriors elected to field and Konkani Warriors posted a score of 141 runs for the loss of 8 wickets in the allotted 16 overs. Pokri Warriors achieved the target in 14.5 overs for the loss of 7 wickets.

The second runners-up for the Muscat open cricket league was awarded to Star XI.

Iqbal from Pokri Warriors scored 59 runs in 30 balls securing the man of the match of the final.

Gururaj Rakshith from Pokri Warriors took 3 wickets and Sachin Hegde took 2 wickets respectively.

Salman Khan from Konkani Warriors scored 43 runs from 26 balls.

Shibin from Mabella XI was

awarded the man of the series for his outstanding performance with the bat and the ball.

Saju Raghavan from Al Saheer became the best wicket-keeper of the tournament.

Rajesh Jaison from Rex Stars Tuskers won the honour for most five wickets (5) in the league.

Atheeb Mohammed from Lankan Lions won the best batsman award, (990 runs) maximum sixes award (116 sixes) and maximum centuries award (4 centuries) in the tournament. Shiraff from Lankan Lions won the best bowler award with 49 wickets.

Alif Juval Khan from Shine XI won the highest single individual score (208 not out).

The tournament was conducted in the spirit of fun for all cricket lovers in Oman.

The trophies and cash award were given away by Robert, Arun, Moin, Rejeesh, Raheem and Noor from MOCL organising committee.



OSSA to hold School Beach Games 2023 in Salalah

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, AUG 8

The Oman School Sports Association (OSSA) is all set to launch the second School Beach Games 2023 tournament, on the sandy courts at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex in Salalah from August 13 to 17.

As many as 102 students representing 11 educational directorates will compete in two competitions, beach handball for those born in 2007, 2008 and 2009. Also beach volleyball for male students born in 2006 and 2007.

The tournament draw will be on Saturday. The teams will be divided into two groups, the first and second placed teams will qualify for the semifinals. Winners will advance to the final

while the two losers will play to determine the third and fourth places.

On August 13 morning, the championship matches will start, where the group league matches will be held from August 13 to 15. The semifinals will be on August 15, while the final will be played on August 17 morning time.

The championship aims to spread educational values and sports culture among school students and spread awareness on the importance of sports and physical activity.

It also shares the importance of investing students' free time in some useful sports activities. The main focus will be to discover and develop talented players in beach games to join the national team.

On the sidelines of the

tournament, many accompanying activities such as tourist visits, where the participants will visit the areas of Al Mughsail beach and Atin mountain.

There will be a football festival for children and family in the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex.

The tournament is supported by OQ Group and Oman Natural Gas Company, where the OQ Group will present number of events like a life-saving and cardiopulmonary resuscitation programme on August 13 and a lecture on emergency management in weather conditions will be held in Dhofar University on August 15.

Al Dakhiliyah Educational team had won the handball title in the last edition in 2022, while the Al Batinah North Educational team won the volleyball title.





FOOD

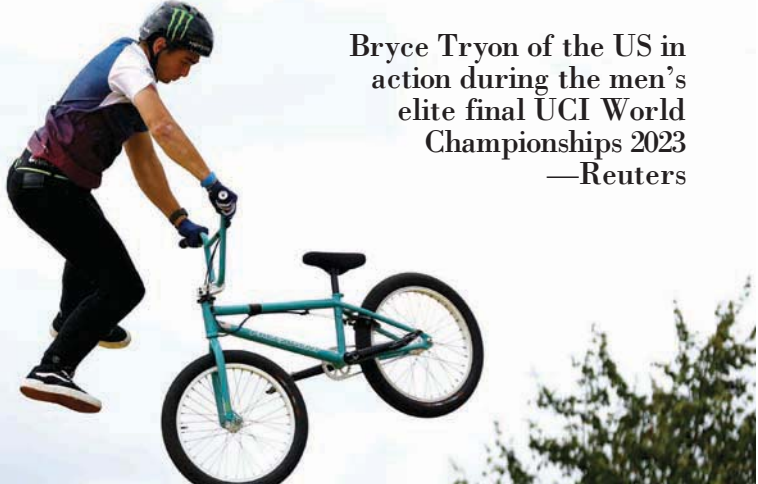
The organic farmers Beate and Walter Brenner pose inspect a field of champagne rye on their organic farm in Schoenfeld an der Wild, Lower Austria — AFP

MUSIC

British artist Rag'n Bone Man performs on stage of the Smukfest Music Festival in Skanderborg, Denmark, The festival takes place until August 6 — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

Bryce Tryon of the US in action during the men's elite final UCI World Championships 2023 — Reuters



BOLLYWOOD

Bollywood actors Sunny Deol (R) and Ameesha Patel (not pictured) attend the promotion of their upcoming Indian Hindi-language film 'Gadar 2' at the India-Pakistan Wagah border post, about 35 km from Amritsar —AFP



LIFESTYLE

A vendor pushes his cycle-rickshaw loaded with cloth along a street in New Delhi — AFP



art & life

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Why you should also look forward to Dhofar spring?

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI
PHOTOS BY ADNAN DHAISH

Right after khareef, residents of Dhofar also look forward to the spring season or locally referred to as serb. During this time, the pastures become shades of different colours not only green but as nature take it regular annual journey, start to fade to brown.

Dhofar is known for its astonishing mountain ranges with their unique terrains, on which the autumnal "monsoon" wind blows with its rain, mist and wonderful fog, making the slopes, plains and valleys look like green gardens that delight the beholder with their vibrance.

When the spring sun finally rises, those trees and herbs acquire a bright golden colour, announcing the beginning of the spring grazing season which is locally called Khateel Al Ibil.

The owners of camels in the Dhofar Mountains start preparing for the various rituals of the season, heading their herds in groups to the grazing places that were closed at the beginning of autumn. Many lovers of these rituals from different regions of Dhofar join them. While grazing the camels in the pastures, Dhofaris carry different heritage Arts such as Habot and Al Nana.

Like other wilayats of Dhofar, Rakhyout celebrates this season,



when the camels are released to graze in nature among the green forests. Rakhyout is one of Dhofar's wilayats that is well-known for Al Khatla season with more than 30 sites for spring camel grazing, which is accompanied by a prior preparation of Al Mabarek which is the local name for the places where camels are released to graze and the expansion of grazing paths that were affected by the rains.

Khattlat Hejailan in Rakhyout is considered one of the most important sites of spring grazing, because of the ancient traditional rituals that

coincide with it, and the presence of visitors to enjoy that wonderful atmosphere, where fire stoves ignite at night away from the city, the place is very calm, where the camels eat, while the wonderful voice of some chanters who chanter the amazing Omani traditional songs with which silence prevails. After a while, the camel's owners start milking the camels.

The milk is served cold and fresh to the guests, which is favoured by many, or sometimes boiled on the fire or by placing pebbles on the fire and then placed in the milk pot until



it reaches the boiling point, and it is called locally (Ma'atheeb milk).

Khattlat Hejailan is distinguished from others by having Al Badh plant,



which is a small coconut-like seed that is abundant in the spring in "Hejailan" region, where many residents of Dhofar Mountains flock to this place in order to reap this fruit, which is extracted by simple digging in the ground. Where it is cooked with methane gas found in animal fertilisers and served after being peeled to be eaten with ghee, and it is considered one of the delicious spring meals preferred by most Dhofari people, and many of its extractors sell it in cans worth about 50 Omani riyals.

The grazing season lasts for about a month until all the herbs and trees dry up and it becomes difficult for the camels to climb to the grazing places where they cannot stand on those herbs because they might fall, leaving the grazing place for the cows to graze throughout the winter.

This interesting season is considered a relaxation and purification from the pressures of life, as some employees take vacations during this season to enjoy the most beautiful moments that combine wildlife and charming nature.



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Pianist dedicates music to Indigenous people who inspired him

ROMAYNE WHEELER SITS at his grand piano overlooking Mexico's Copper Canyon and plays music inspired by the mountains and remote Indigenous communities that he now dedicates his life to helping.

The 81-year-old California-born composer no longer lives in the cave where he slept with his solar-powered portable piano after arriving several decades ago in the Sierra Tarahumara in north-western Mexico.

But he feels as close as ever to the nature and Indigenous Raramuri people who welcomed him into their lives, sharing their food, music and culture.

"I feel truly that all of this area around me is my studio," Wheeler said in his stone house perched on the canyon's edge, several hours from the nearest significant town along winding mountain tracks.

"Every tree, every plant, every flower — everything here has something to tell me," he said.

Wheeler's love affair with the Sierra Tarahumara began in 1980 when he was in the United States studying Indigenous music and a snowstorm made it impossible to travel to a Native American reservation near the Grand Canyon.

Leafing through a copy of *National Geographic* magazine, he

came across pictures of the remote Mexican region and decided to see it for himself.

"It was like coming home," he recalled, wearing the Indigenous-style shirt and traditional sandals that he now prefers to Western attire.

"The people that are most revered here are the musicians. They stand in high honour like the shamans," he said.

The mountainous corner of Chihuahua state is part of the notorious "Golden Triangle," a region with a history of marijuana and opium poppy production as well as drug cartel violence.

RARAMURI PHILOSOPHY

Wheeler identified so much with the philosophy of the Raramuri — also known as Tarahumara — that he came back for several weeks each year before settling there permanently in 1992.

"They were 'people who shared everything they had, who considered the person that is of most value is the one that helps others the most, and contributed something positive to humanity,'" he said.

When he first arrived, the Raramuri — whose name means "light-footed ones" and who are renowned for their running stami-



na — showed Wheeler a small cave where he could practice and keep his electric piano dry.

"My friends said sometimes with the wind just right they could hear my little tiny instrument all the way across the canyon," he remembered.

One young child, a neighbour's son, showed particular interest, so Wheeler taught him to play and sent him to study in the Chihuahua state capital.

Now Romeyno Gutierrez, his protegee, is an acclaimed pianist in his own right who performs abroad and accompanied Wheeler on two tours of Europe.

"He's the first pianist and composer of Indian heritage that I know of on our continent," Wheeler said proudly.

Bringing his 1917 Steinway grand piano to the village of Retosachi was almost as much of an odyssey as Wheeler's own.

The dream to put a piano on a mountaintop was born in Austria where Wheeler, a keen mountaineer, studied and lived for 32 years, but where harsh winters made it impossible.

In Mexico, he hired a professional moving company to bring the fragile musical instrument from the western city of Guadalajara as far as it could into the mountains.

It then took 28 hours to reach Wheeler's home by truck along dirt mountain roads with the piano laid on its side, supported by piles of potatoes, he said.

"We went at a walking rhythm for most of the way because of all the potholes," he added.

HELPING HUMANITY

Despite the remoteness of his home, affectionately named Eagle's Nest, visits from his neighbours and the company of his dogs mean that Wheeler never feels alone.

"I feel more lonely in the city because of all the people around that have nothing to say to each other," he said.

He has 42 godsons in the area, one of the poorest in Mexico, where limited access to clean water, sufficient food and healthcare pose major challenges to communities that rely mostly on subsistence agriculture.

In the early 1990s, Wheeler decided to use proceeds from the concerts he performs around the world to establish a school, a clinic and a scholarship programme.

"They're very good people. They help a lot," said one of his neighbours, Gerardo Gutierrez, who was a child when he first met Wheeler.

"They gave away blankets when it was very cold. And sometimes they got groceries for the people here," the 49-year-old added.

Giving back to the community has also given Wheeler a deeper sense of purpose.

"These years have been the most happy years of my life really because I feel like my music is doing something of value to help humanity," he said. — **AFP**

LIFESTYLE

Swiss paper cutting artist takes the scissors to old ways

MARIANNE DUBUIS STARED intently through a magnifying glass, using a slim cutter to make tiny incisions in paper as she carved out delicate tab-

leaux of life and human emotions.

The 64-year-old designer is reinventing the Swiss traditional art of paper cutting, which typically shows Alpine landscapes and cows heading to mountain pastures, by infusing a large dose of poetry and modernity.

Dubuis, a florist by training, said that she has devoted herself to paper cutting since childhood and now spends around six hours a day on her passion.

At her home studio in Chateau d'Oex, in the Pays-d'Enhaut area where the Swiss tradition was born around 200 years ago, she showed off her craft, using scissors or a cutter to carve out intricate scenes inspired by the surrounding woods and the people she meets.

The works, either in black and white or in colour, have been shown in Switzerland, France, Germany and Japan.

Some of them, more than a metre (three feet) high, are on display until September 6 at the new Swiss Paper Cutting Centre in Chateau d'Oex, a picturesque village in the pre-Alps of western Switzerland.

"I am very proud of paper cutting, and what it represents of Switzerland. It is a way of representing our values, our roots," she said.

However, "if we keep doing the same things over and over, the tradition dies," said Dubuis, who wants to



reinvent the art form in her own way.

CLASSIC ALPINE SCENES

Paper cutting originated in Asia and spread to Europe around the 17th century.

Johann-Jakob Hauswirth, a farm worker who died in poverty in the 19th century, is considered the father of the art form in Switzerland.

When the opportunity arose, he took his scissors to scraps of paper and began creating naive representations of Alpine scenes, and the annual "poya" ritual of driving cows up the mountain to graze.

He would then leave them as a thank-you gift after a meal.

His works, as well as the more numerous creations of other masters in the field such as Louis Saugy and Christian Schwitzguebel, sell at auction for "several tens of thousands of francs (dollars)", according to Emmanuel Bailly, of the auction house Beurret & Bailly Auktionen.

Close to nature, Dubuis draws her inspiration from the forest.

Her cuttings, some of which likewise sell for tens of thousands of francs, reflect her emotions and also tell a life story, like a biography in carved paper.

"When I have a private commission, they come and tell me about their life," she said. "I put in what I feel about this person; the essence of



what they told me."

FROM WILLIAM TELL TO THE UN

This approach has brought comfort, help and relief, she said, citing a work created for a father who lost his son, or one for a couple on the verge of splitting up but who thought again after seeing the cutting representing the journey of their years together.

With Dubuis's work, "there is something spiritual", said Monique Buri, vice-president of the Swiss Paper Cutting Association, which has around 500 members.

Dubuis weaves in modernity with tradition to carve out images of Switzerland today.

At the end of 2021, she created a

50-square-centimetre work representing historical heroes like William Tell as well as chocolate, mountain rescue helicopters or the international organisations based in the country, such as the United Nations and the Red Cross.

Pierre Mottier, head of the association running the museum that houses the Swiss Paper Cutting Centre, said: "It's very nice to make little cows and chamois, but it's also very interesting to cut out other things."

Modernity also has its dangers, with an increasing number of companies making cuttings with lasers.

But Dubuis says she is not worried. With laser machines, "the soul is missing". — **AFP**



Vanadium and Niobium ingots plant to come up in Sohar Freezone



SUHAR: Sohar Port and Freezone signed a land lease agreement with Sohar Noble Metals (FZC) Company, for the production of Vanadium and Niobium metals in Sohar Freezone to the tune of \$7 million.

The project will significantly enrich the minerals portfolio in the zone, enhancing industrial diversity. Vanadium and Niobium play crucial roles as additives in the metals industry, enhancing the strength and durability of various types of metals.

Moreover, the project, covering an area of 5,000 square metres, will be designed and constructed to supply the superalloys industries within the United States and Europe markets with Vanadium and Niobium ingots.

Khalid bin Ahmed al Balushi, Director of Sohar Noble Metals (FZC), said, “This agreement with Sohar Freezone offers promising opportunities to

investors. By leveraging the strategic advantages provided by Sohar Freezone and its continued growth, the upcoming Vanadium and Niobium production plant will not only expand our minerals range, but also foster local value creation.”

On his turn, Haitham al Omairi, Business Development Manager at Sohar Port and Freezone, said, “The production of Vanadium and Niobium plant in Sohar Freezone represents a significant milestone and a crucial step in our continuous efforts to industrial diversification.

“Establishing the plant reflects our commitment to foster a robust industrial ecosystem, reassuring our strategic role in driving the end-to-end metal manufacturing value chain.”

The project output is expected to attract further investments from companies reliant on these crucial metals which will enhance the continuous development of Sohar Freezone. — ONA

Omani desalination plants say no financial impact from algal bloom

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, AUG 8

The recent algal bloom menacing a number of desalination plants operating along the Sea of Oman and Arabian Sea coasts has not resulted in any financial impacts to the project companies in question.

Publicly listed companies Muscat City Desalination, Barka Water & Power Company, and Sharqiyah Desalination stated in regulatory filings this past week that the phenomenon did not result in any financial impacts to their businesses.

But algal blooms can be damaging to coastal installations and local economies in general. In 1995, a two-month algal bloom off the coasts of Korea resulted in significant loss of \$95 million.



The National Centre For Coastal Ocean Science in the United States estimates that annual potential losses from harmful algal blooms (HABs) can range anywhere between \$10 million to \$100 million. These losses can span across various sectors, such as fishery and aquaculture, healthcare, and tourism.

However, according to an official from Oman’s Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, with the exception of an outbreak during 2008-2009, algal blooms have very minor effects on local fisheries in the Sultanate of Oman.

Impacts to desalination plants are

notable, though.

For example, in March 2018, the Barka Water & Power Company reported a financial loss of RO 330,000 due to red tide disruptions, followed by another loss of RO 140,000 later that year due to another algal bloom.

Additionally, in 2008-2009, the desalination plant at the Barka site ceased operations for 55 days, an incident that was dubbed as “unprecedented” in the water desalination industry, according to experts.

According to a UNESCO manual on Harmful Algal Blooms

(HABs) and Desalination, Algal blooms can affect plant production by clogging intake systems, fouling membranes and increasing chemical usage resulting in decreased operational effectiveness and increased costs.

According to the authors of the manual, desalination plants can implement various strategies in place to combat the effects of algal blooms.

These include designing efficient intake systems to remove algae and other particles methods like dissolved air flotation (DAF)

and ultrafiltration (UF), closely studying water quality and historical bloom patterns, and adjusting how the plant operates during bloom events.

However, when it comes to the effects HABs have on fisheries, Dr Issa bin Mohammed al Farsi, Director of the Fisheries Development Department at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, shared that the Ministry will implement a financial and technical support programme to help fishermen and the seafood industry as a whole despite the rare occurrence.

Oman to weigh use of EVs, green alternatives in e-commerce sector

Net Zero: Use of e-scooters in metropolitan areas proposed as part of recommendations to reduce sector’s carbon footprint

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 8



Seeking to decarbonise Oman’s rapidly expanding e-commerce sector, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has launched a public consultation aimed at garnering stakeholder feedback on a number of proposals to reduce the industry’s carbon footprint.

The ‘Postal Sector Environmental Sustainability Initiatives’ include proposals for the deployment of Electric Vehicles (EV) and e-scooters for postal and e-commerce deliveries, use of renewable energy in office buildings, and a switch to recyclable materials for packaging, among other sustainable practices.

“As part of its role in regulating the postal services sector, the TRA endeavours to contribute to achieving the Oman Vision 2040 environmental (goals) by facilitating a number of sustainability initiatives aimed to

INCREASED DEMAND FOR POSTAL AND DELIVERY SERVICES TRIGGERED BY E-COMMERCE HAS LED THE SECTOR TO FURTHER UTILISE VEHICLE FLEETS (COMMERCIAL AND PRIVATE) ON A NATIONAL LEVEL FOR ITS POSTAL ACTIVITIES WHICH IMPACTS THE ENVIRONMENT

reduce emissions, pollutants and encourage energy conservation in the postal sector operations.

“Increased demand for postal and delivery services triggered by e-commerce has led the sector to further utilise vehicle fleets (commercial and private) on a national level for its postal activities which impacts the environment,” the Authority said in an introductory note on its public consultation.

It urged postal and e-commerce industry stakeholders, including courier companies, green vehicle distributors, investors and other members of the general public to share their thoughts on its initiatives to support the introduction of environment-friendly and sustainable practices across the sector.

Key among the initiatives proposed by the Authority is the use Electric Vehicles and e-scooters in metropolitan areas with a view to reducing carbon emissions from the delivery side of the business.

To this end, it has also proposed the use of renewable energy in offices and touch points, as well as the adoption of online videoconferencing options in place of physical meetings.

Furthermore, the Authority

has mooted a large-scale switch to solar PV based renewable energy sources and LED lighting in postal offices, deployment of energy management systems, and adoption of sustainable energy conservation practices in buildings.

Additionally, given the prodigious volumes of card and paper consumed by the sector for packaging and other uses, the TRA has called for all players to be suitably plugged into the circular economy.

It has proposed the use of recyclable materials for packaging, utilisation of locally produced packaging material, and procurements only from sustainable suppliers.

Further, to reduce paper consumption in the industry, the Authority has proposed a switch to digital invoicing in place of printed invoices, digital payments, and the digitisation of most services.

And with a view to embedding sustainability in the sector, the Authority has mooted the implementation of ISO 50001 Energy Management Standards, the institution of a Green Post Day and other sustainability initiatives.

Interested respondents have until August 17, 2023 to share their feedback on the TRA’s proposals.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUG 8

Tethys Oil, a Swedish oil and gas exploration company, has released its second quarter 2023 results, showcasing not only the positive outcomes of the extended well test on the Al Jumud discovery in Block 56 in Oman, but also its strong financial performance during the period.

The extended well test on the Al Jumud discovery in Block 56 remained active throughout the quarter, yielding favourable results for Tethys Oil.

A total of 34,699 barrels gross was produced, indicating significant oil reserves in the area and providing an optimistic outlook for the block’s future development.

Magnus Nordin, Managing Director of Tethys Oil, said “The results of the extended well test on the Al Jumud discovery and very encouraging interpretations from the new 3D seismic study covering the wider Al Jumud trend suggests that this area of Block 56 holds promising commercial potential. The next steps in evaluating and eventually realising this potential includes requesting an extension of the second exploration phase



to allow for additional appraisal and exploration drilling to be carried out and a provisional field development plan to be prepared.”

In Block 58, the work during Q2 work was centred on firming up the prospectivity of the South Lahan prospects, which are currently being peer reviewed. The three Fahd prospect with close to 200 mmbo of unrisksed prospective resources remains the main target in the Block but South Lahan has proven to be interesting.

“Tendering for a drilling rig is in progress and we are also investigating the appetite for potential partners to join the exploration effort on Block 58,” Nordin added.

In terms of financial performance, Tethys Oil reported revenue and other income of \$34.7 million during Q2.

TURN TO PAGE 16

Sohar Steel resumes operations at full capacity

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 8

Sohar Steel celebrated the revival of operations on Monday, August 7, 2023, under the ownership of Jindal Group and Vulcan Investments.

After a three-year hiatus, the steel melting shop with a capacity of 700,000 tonnes per annum was re-commissioned, and more than 150 Omanis were re-employed to operate the plant.

The successful acquisition represents a pivotal juncture in the steel industry, underscoring Jindal Group's commitment to fostering social sustainability and economic growth and supporting the nation's vision for economic diversification.

Harssha Shetty, Senior Official



from the Jindal Group, said: "The successful acquisition of Sohar Steel represents an extraordinary stride forward for Jindal Group,

cementing our position as a prominent leader in the steel industry. This strategic move aligns harmoniously with our

steadfast dedication to Oman's socio-economic growth, reflecting our resolve to progress Oman's industrial landscape."

Hamed al Farsi, HR and Admin GM of Sohar Steel, emphasised the company's commitment to nurturing and developing its employees, saying, "We deeply empathise with the challenges faced by the individuals affected by the work stoppage and their subsequent joy upon learning about Vulcan International's acquisition of Sohar Steel.

In response, we have taken the necessary steps to nurture and develop our workforce by providing them with on-the-job training and assigning them to various departments within the company."

Shetty thanked the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Qais bin Mohammed al Yusef and the

members of the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre who played a crucial role in ensuring the smooth and fair completion of the acquisition process.

Jindal Group is an industrial powerhouse with a global steel presence and a leading player in the Global Steel sector.

It bolsters its commitment to the Sultanate of Oman by undertaking several strategic investments to foster socio-economic growth and support the nation's transition to a green, circular economy.

These investments under the Vulcan International Holding Company include Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel, Sohar Steel, and Vulcan Pelletising Plant in Sohar and Duqm Vulcan Green Steel.

Meethaq Islamic Banking participates in 2023 Salalah Eat Festival



MUSCAT: In line with its role in supporting national events and tourism, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has extended its strong support to the Salalah Eat festival in its second edition, which will be held till August 19, 2023.

This year's edition witnesses the participation of 58 MSMEs. The Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSME) sector has a huge potential for improving economic diversification around the world.

As part of the importance given to the sector, Meethaq facilitates the participation of a number of its MSMEs customers in the festival this year.

In addition, customers and visitors will have the opportunity to visit Meethaq's stall and know more about the various sharia-compliant products and services it provides to retail and MSME customers, including financing products, cards, takaful insurance, as well as various accounts including children's account

Speaking on the occasion, Ali Ahmed al Lawati, AGM – Meethaq Corporate Banking, said: "We are delighted to participate in this important festival, which will help promote tourism in Dhofar considering that it is one of the favourite summer destinations and support MSMEs who are participating in the festival this year.

Meethaq is keen to participate in various local events to meet customers and listen to their feedback and aspirations, as well as, introduce them to the latest products and services offerings. We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the organisers and we wish all visitors an enjoyable experience during the event."

BankDhofar opens branches on Saturday, extends working hours for children's account

MUSCAT: BankDhofar is pleased to announce the extension of its banking hours from Sunday till Wednesday (3:00 – 6:00 pm) in all 97 branches as well as opening 50% of the branches on Saturday (10:00 am – 1:00 pm) throughout the opening of Children's Accounts.

This initiative aims to enable children to receive the benefits of the Children's Social Security Scheme, making it easier for parents and guardians to secure their children's financial future.

The Children's Account offers a secure and reliable platform to lay the foundation for a prosperous financial journey.

From new born to children under 13 years old, this account is designed to nurture lifelong financial confidence in children, empowering them with essential money management skills.

The key objective of the Children's Account is to help children unlock a world of possibilities while setting them on a path to financial success and responsibility.

We believe that investing in



Open an account for your child and
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children's financial education is an investment in Oman's future.

By instilling financial literacy and encouraging regular savings habits, we are fostering a generation of responsible, financially literate citizens who will contribute positively to the nation's growth and prosperity.

The Children's Account offers numerous advantages throughout the account holder's

life. Whether it is intended for higher education or long-term aspirations, this account acts as a firm foundation for every child's future savings.

With options such as 'no minimum balance,' 'flexible recurring deposit,' and 'monthly financial assistance through the social protection programme' opening and maintaining the account is as easy as 'child's play.'

Finance made fun for children at OAB's kids branch



MUSCAT: Children of Oman Arab Bank (OAB) employees enjoyed an unforgettable banking experience at the bank's interactive, educational Kids Branch.

Designed to be a compelling destination for families, the Kids Branch is full of exciting, fun activities that promote financial literacy among children, located in the Corporate Branch of the bank's HQ.

A first for OAB, this branch aims to educate young people on the fundamentals of banking to promote a culture of saving from a young age. After the exclusive phase for the children of OAB employees, the branch will be extended to students ages 10-12.

Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of OAB, said: "Our children are our future, and it is vitally

important that they learn the skills that will help them to spend sensibly and save successfully by the time they are old enough to open a bank account. Our Kids Branch provides them with a fun, interactive introduction to financial literacy from a customer's point of view, as well as engaging their minds with an enjoyable experience across various roles in the banking industry."

He added, "We are excited to extend the Kids Branch to the wider community over the coming months. We hope that it will continue to spark imaginations and help to give children the start they deserve in life on their journey towards becoming irreplaceable members of our nation's fast-growing economy."

Own the Lexus LX with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: The Lexus LX is now available with exclusive benefits. Service 5 years / 50,000 kms (whichever is earlier) and 1 year free registration (Conditions apply. For details visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom).

The LX is available with a choice of two powertrain options, including two newly developed V6 twin-turbo engines.

The V6 twin-turbo 3.5-litre petrol engine achieves class-leading performance that surpasses that of a conventional V8, producing 409 hp and up to 66.28 Kg.m torque. Meanwhile, the V6 twin-turbo engine 3.3-litre diesel variant is capable of 302 hp and up to 71.38 Kg.m torque.

Both versions are mated to a 10-speed automatic transmission. The LX's updated Tazuna cockpit organises the principal controls and information displays within the driver's immediate sight-line for easy, intuitive operation. Its



slim instrument panel creates a sense of balance, particularly in off-road driving, giving the cabin a wide and open feel.

The cabin offers a range of advanced features such as dual-centre displays, which include an upper 12.3-inch Multimedia touchscreen display that is compatible with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, and a lower

7-inch display for navigation, audio, and climate controls as well as other driver support function.

It features a colour head-up display, an 8-inch colour Multi-information Display (MID) in the cluster gauge, wireless charging for smartphones, and a 4-zone automatic climate control system with rear control switches. Owners also benefit from

enhanced security with Lexus' first fingerprint-authentication push-button start switch.

Additional features include a 25-speaker Mark Levinson sound system with Quantum Logic Immersion QLI, Clari-Fi & PurePlay technology for precise, lossless audio and amazing 3-D surround sound experience.

As with any Lexus vehicle, safety is a top priority for the all-new Lexus LX.

Drivers can enjoy complete peace of mind thanks to the Lexus Safety System+, an advanced safety and driver assistance system that includes a Pre-Collision System (PCS) with new features and expanded detection range.

The system also includes Full-Speed Dynamic Radar Cruise Control (DRCC) with Curve Speed Reduction (RSR) that suppresses vehicle speed when entering a curve to offer additional

acceleration upon exit. Drivers also benefit from Lane Tracing Alert (LTA), Lane Departure Alert (LDA), and Adaptive High-beam System (AHB).

In addition the car features a comprehensive array of safety features such as all-round SRS airbags including side-curtain airbags for the rear seats, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Traction Control (TRC), Anti-lock Brake System (ABS), Brake Assist (BA), Parking Support Brake (PKSB), Blind Spot Monitor (BSM), Multi-terrain Monitor (MTM) including Panoramic View Monitor (PVM), Rear Cross Traffic Alert (RCTA), Downhill Assist Control (DAC), Tyre Pressure Warning System (TPWS) and Drive Start Control (DSC) among many others.

For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or www.youtube.com/lexusoman or www.facebook.com/LexusOmanSBA or instagram.com/oman.lexus/.

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan, Jathair bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Abdullah bin Al-Haili, Chairman of the Supreme Court, Saad bin Abdullah bin Al-Haili, Chairman of the Supreme Court, Saad bin Abdullah bin Al-Haili, Chairman of the Supreme Court.

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Revolution and in commemoration of the centenary of the founding of the Omani Bank of Oman (OBO), the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknotes, which will begin circulation this month.

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SOME PEOPLE ARE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

are not "in those critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves, and follow the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many



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Lack of diversity in venture capital ‘unacceptable’



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

The UK’s venture capital industry has come under sharp criticism from an influential group of MPs. The Treasury Committee has taken aim at the sector’s diversity record and accused VC firms of focusing their investments too heavily on London and the south-east.

The cross-party panel of MPs said in a new report that all-female founders received just 2 per cent of venture capital funding in 2021, while less than 2 per cent were to businesses with Black or minority ethnic leaders.

The committee said the statistics were ‘unacceptable’ and called for greater transparency.

It also said that venture capital investment is ‘unacceptably concentrated in London and the south-east. Roughly 80 per cent of VC investment flows to the “golden Triangle” of London, Oxford and Cambridge, with London receiving almost half of all equity deals.

“Given firms elsewhere in the UK can take longer to become established, the maximum company age limit of seven and ten years written into the tax reliefs currently hold back economic growth and innovation and should be extended,” the MPs concluded.

The committee has also flagged the importance of globally competitive tax reliefs designed to promote investment in UK companies.

It called on the government to provide clarity on when VC tax reliefs with expiry dates will be extended.

“Statistics that show just two pence in every pound of investment goes to all-women led businesses demonstrate a shocking dereliction of duty, given the level of government support for the industry through tax reliefs,” said committee chair Harriet Baldwin.

“In the 21st century, it shouldn’t come as a surprise to investors that women and those from ethnic minority backgrounds can start successful businesses,” she added.

“Given public funds play a key role in the success of the UK’s venture capital sector, more must be done. Firms must be compelled to reveal diversity data when applying to these tax reliefs in an effort

STATISTICS THAT SHOW JUST TWO PENCE IN EVERY POUND OF INVESTMENT GOES TO ALL-WOMEN LED BUSINESSES DEMONSTRATE A SHOCKING DERELICTION OF DUTY, GIVEN THE LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR THE INDUSTRY THROUGH TAX RELIEFS

to increase transparency and drive change. Government incentives could also be tweaked to encourage more regional venture capital investment.”

The MPs said all VC firms should sign up to the Women in Finance Charter and the Investing in Women Code. Both initiatives require firms to publish gender and diversity statistics.

They also recommended the government and British Business Bank consult on creating a fund to promote gender diversity in venture capital allocation.

Meanwhile with emphasis on equality, firms are looking not just at gender and race but also on background. The latest major law firm to set a target for hiring people from lower social background is Slaughter and May.

The legal heavyweight has joined the likes of KPMG in trying to up how many working-class people it employs.

The proportion of working-class staff — defined by what their parents had when they were 14 — at the firm is currently 18.8 per cent.

The firm wants to increase this to 25 per cent.

Currently, 10 per cent of the firm’s lawyers are working-class and it is aiming to increase that to 15 per cent.

It is also looking to grow the equivalent proportion of its support staff from 34 per cent to 40 per cent.

“We’re sure there are lots of talented people out there who either don’t think of a career in law or who don’t think of a career here,” managing partner Deborah Finkler said.

She added: “Tracking the socio-economic make-up of our workforce over a long period of time means that we have confidence in the data we are using to set these public targets and measure our progress.”

Another major law firm, Clifford Chance reported its 44 per cent gap between those from ‘professional’ and working-class background for the first time last year. However, it had not at the time set a target level for representation.

KPMG set its targets two years ago after finding the median pay gap between staff from working-class and professional backgrounds was 8.6 per cent. The gap at rival PwC is 12 per cent.

Oman ranks 11th in global real estate investment return index

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUG 8

Nomad Capitalist, a renowned global consulting firm specialising in offshore banking, tax optimisation, and citizenship planning, has released its first Real Estate Yield Index, placing the Sultanate of Oman in the 11th position globally.

The ranking highlights the country’s attractiveness as an investment destination and underscores its potential for lucrative real estate opportunities.

The Real Estate Yield Index evaluates various key factors to determine the investment potential of different countries’ real estate markets.

These factors include price-to-income ratio (25%), net rental income (37.5%), ability to afford loans (12.5%), purchase cost, real estate and subsequent sale (12.5%), and tax on rental income (12.5%).

The UAE secured the top position globally, followed by Saudi Arabia at 9th, Qatar at 11th, and Oman also at 11th.

The Index evaluates real estate markets in 103 countries, encompassing both developed and developing markets, to gauge the true value of international real



estate. Oman’s strong performance in the index can be attributed to several factors.

Firstly, the country offers attractive rental yields, providing investors with the potential for stable and significant returns on their real estate investments. The combination of high rental demand and favourable rental prices contributes to the overall appeal of Oman’s real estate market.

Secondly, Oman boasts a favourable price-to-income ratio, which indicates the

affordability of properties relative to the average income levels of its residents. This affordability factor is crucial for attracting both local and foreign investors, as it allows for a broader pool of potential buyers and tenants.

Furthermore, Oman’s ease of doing business plays a significant role in its high ranking. The country has implemented reforms to streamline business processes, enhance transparency, and improve investor protection.

These efforts have created a favourable business environment

that encourages real estate investment and facilitates smoother transactions.

Oman’s economic stability also contributes to its strong position in the global Real Estate Yield Index. The country boasts a diversified economy, driven by sectors such as oil and gas, tourism, logistics, and manufacturing.

This economic diversification minimises the reliance on any single industry and enhances stability, making Oman an attractive destination for long-term real estate investments.

MENA IPO momentum continues into Q2 with 13 deals raising \$1.8 bn

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 8

IPO activity in the MENA region continued to gather momentum with a total of \$1.8 billion in proceeds from 13 IPOs – a 44% increase in the number of listings but an 80% drop in proceeds when compared to Q2 2022, EY announced in its latest report on the IPO industry.

The growth in Q2 2023 was driven predominately by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). KSA dominated the region’s IPO activity in terms of the number of listings in Q2 2023, with four listings on the Tadawul main market raising \$0.8 billion and seven IPOs on the Tadawul (Nomu) parallel market with proceeds of \$0.1 billion.

Jamjoom Pharmaceuticals Factory Company raised \$336 million, the highest raise on the Tadawul for the quarter, followed by First Milling Company SJSC which raised \$266.4 million. Both offered a free float of 30% of the company’s share capital and were oversubscribed.

In the UAE, the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX) completed their largest IPO of the quarter with ADNOC L&S raising \$769.5 million.

The IPO saw the largest demand globally for a



transaction so far in 2023, with an oversubscription level of 163x in aggregate — the highest oversubscription for a UAE book-build IPO.

On the Dubai Financial Market (DFM), Al Ansari Financial Services PJSC was the UAE’s first family-owned company to be listed, raising \$210.4 million in proceeds.

Brad Watson, EY MENA Strategy and Transactions Leader, says: “The second quarter of 2023 confirmed that MENA IPOs are not experiencing the downward trend witnessed globally.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia continue to be the most active markets in the MENA region in terms of both the number and size of IPOs.

As just one example, ADNOC’s second portfolio company listing in 2023 outpaced the global markets in terms of demand.

The MENA region continues to have strong economies and low debt; coupled with the reform and deregulation in the region, it continues to be an attractive environment for new listings.”

Overall, in H1 2023 the MENA IPO market registered a total of 23 IPOs (4% year-on-year decrease), all of which were in the GCC with total proceeds of \$5.2 billion.

While the general EMEIA region continues to see a significant contraction in IPO values, the MENA region has a promising pipeline for the rest of the year, particularly from KSA.

So far, 23 Saudi companies have announced their listing plans on the Tadawul for H2 2023. Further afield, two companies in Egypt intend to list, indicating a strong pipeline of IPOs to come in the remainder of the year.

Tethys Oil reports positive Q2 results for Al Jumd discovery in Oman

FROM PAGE 13

This figure demonstrates the company’s ability to generate significant revenue from its operations in Oman.

Furthermore, Tethys Oil achieved an EBITDA of \$16.9 million, highlighting its strong operational efficiency and profitability.

Cash flow from operations amounted to \$25.7 million, underscoring the company’s robust financial position and its ability to generate substantial cash inflows from its core activities.

This healthy cash flow allows Tethys Oil to reinvest in its operations and pursue further growth opportunities.

During the Q2, the company made investments of \$21.4 million in oil and gas properties. These investments reflect the company’s commitment to expanding its asset base and developing its exploration and production capabilities in Oman.

By allocating resources to strategic investments, Tethys Oil aims to maximise the long-term value of its operations.

Despite its investments, Tethys Oil maintained a positive free cash flow of \$4.0 million during the quarter.

This signifies the company’s ability to generate excess cash after meeting its operational and capital expenditure requirements.

A positive free cash flow provides Tethys Oil with financial flexibility, enabling it to pursue growth opportunities, reduce debt, or return value to its shareholders.

Tethys Oil remains focused on its exploration and development activities in Oman.

The positive results from the extended well test on the Al Jumd discovery in Block 56 provide a solid foundation for future development.

Tethys Oil holds interests in Oman’s Block 3&4, Block 49, Block 56 and Block 58.