

Oil exports exceed 153m barrels

The Sultanate of Oman's overall oil exports during the first half of 2024 increased to stand at 153.36 million barrels. The average price of a barrel was \$82.2, according to the data of the National Centre of Statistics and Information (NCSI). Oil exports constituted 84.6 per cent of the total volume of oil production, which stood at 181.14 million barrels. Production went down by 5.3 per cent to stand at 181.14 barrels compared to 191.35 million barrels during the corresponding period in 2023.

SUNRISE - 05:39 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:17 AM

DHUHR - 12:18 PM

ASR - 03:42 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:52 PM

ISHA - 08:09 PM



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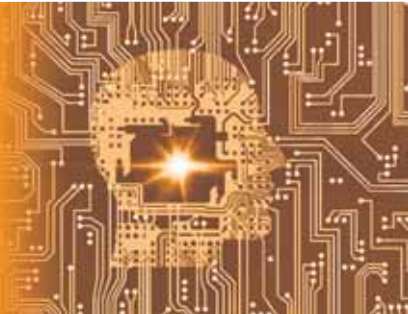
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LYLES WINS OLYMPIC 100M GOLD IN CLOSEST FINISH IN MODERN HISTORY



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OMAN UNVEILS DRAFT NATIONAL POLICY ON AI



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EXPECT FUN-FILLED ACTIVITIES IN RUMMANA'S SECOND EDITION



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO BOLIVIA, JAMAICA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Luis Alberto Arce of the Plurinational State of Bolivia on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Luis and the people of Bolivia. His Majesty the Sultan has sent a cable of greetings to Dr Patrick Linton Allen, Governor-General of Jamaica on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to the Governor-General. His Majesty also wished the people of Jamaica further progress and prosperity.

HOSPITALS IN OMAN RISE TO 92: REPORT

The total number of surgical operations conducted by the Ministry of Health at various hospitals during 2023 stood at 86,955, including 39,976 that were performed on men and 46,979 for women. The ministry's 2023 annual health report showed that the number of hospitals in the Sultanate of Oman stood at 92, including 7,691 hospital beds. This raises the number of beds per 10,000 people in 2023 to 14.9, compared to 14.7 in 2022. Meanwhile, the ministry's expenditure during 2023 increased to more than RO 1 billion, up by 24.6 per cent as against the 2022 figure. It showed that the largest increase in spending. **DETAILS ON P2**

LONDON

STARMER VOWS 'SWIFT' ACTION ON RIOTERS

Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Monday vowed "swift criminal sanctions" against far-right riots in several cities that have seen widespread damage and nearly 400 arrests. Starmer convened ministers and police chiefs to discuss the unrest that broke out last Tuesday in Southport, northwest England, following a stabbing spree in which three children were killed. Mobs threw bricks and flares, attacked police, burnt and looted shops, smashed the windows of cars and homes and targeted at least two hotels housing asylum-seekers in a number of cities at the weekend. The government will "ramp up criminal justice" to ensure that "sanctions are swift", Starmer told the media after Monday's meeting. **SEE ALSO P7**

FLURRY OF DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY AS TENSIONS RISE IN MIDDLE EAST

Mecca conference underscores support for Palestinian cause

MECCA: Represented by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, the Sultanate of Oman on Monday wound up its participation in the 9th Conference of Ministers of Endowments and Islamic Affairs in the Islamic World.

Held in Mecca, the two-day conference was titled "Role of Ministries of Islamic Affairs and Endowments in Promoting the Principles of Moderation and Consolidation of Islamic Values".

Oman's delegation was led by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

In its closing statement, the conference stressed the Islamic World's firm position supporting the just Palestinian cause, the need to grant the Palestinian people their legitimate rights and to protect them against the brutal attacks and genocide staged by the occupation forces, notably in the Gaza Strip.

In particular, the conference laid emphasis on the need to



A woman mourns following Israeli bombardment on the Al Nassr school that houses displaced Palestinians, west of Gaza City, on Monday. – AFP

grant the Palestinian people their legitimate rights, including their right to establish an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, with Al Quds A'Sharqiyah (East Jerusalem)

as its capital. It also called for establishment of a just and lasting peace.

The closing statement urged the international community and all official, civil, charitable,

humanitarian and relief organisations to support the Palestinian people in this ordeal and help end their suffering.

The conference underscored the necessity of Islamic countries' preserving unity, being one of the greatest principles of Islam, and the avoidance of anything that might lead to division or rebellion against the Muslim community or its leaders. It cautioned that division/rebellion entail immense corruption, bloodshed, the violation of sanctities and the incitement of sectarianism.

Meanwhile, diplomatic pressure mounted on Monday to avoid an escalation between Iran and Israel following high-profile killings that have sent regional tensions soaring, while numerous governments urged their citizens to leave Lebanon.

Palestinian group Hamas's political leader Ismail Haniyeh was killed in Tehran last Wednesday in an attack blamed on Israel, which has not directly commented on it. — **Agencies**

Bangladesh PM Hasina flees, military takes over

DHAKA: Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled the country on Monday after hundreds of people were killed in a crackdown on demonstrations that began as protests against job quotas and swelled into a movement demanding her downfall.

Jubilant crowds stormed into the opulent grounds of the presidential residence unopposed, carrying out looted furniture and TVs. One man balanced a red velvet, gilt-edged chair on his head. Another held an armful of vases.

The flight into exile ended a 15-year second stint in power for Hasina, who has ruled for 20 of the last 30 years as leader of the



Anti-government protesters march towards Sheikh Hasina's palace as army personnel stand guard in Shahbag area, near Dhaka university in Dhaka on Monday. – AFP

political movement inherited from her father.

Hasina had left the country for her own safety at the insistence of

her family, her son Sajeeb Wazed Joy told the BBC World Service.

Hasina was "so disappointed that after all her hard work, for a

minority to rise up against her", Joy said.

Earlier, army chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman announced Hasina's resignation in a televised address to the nation and said an interim government would be formed.

Bangladeshi President Mohammed Shahabuddin ordered the release of jailed former prime minister and key opposition leader Khaleda Zia.

The president's press team said in a statement that a meeting led by Shahabuddin had "decided unanimously to free Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia immediately". **SEE ALSO P6**

LOW PRESSURE BRINGS RAIN IN WILAYATS



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH @lakshmioman

The trough of low pressure over the Sultanate of Oman began its peak on Monday night and is expected to continue till Tuesday morning. The convective clouds continued to flow over the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman and brought scattered rain in the wilayats Suhar, Saham and Al Khabourah on Monday. Rainfall is expected to range between 15-25 mm.

The clouds are expected to continue to flow over most of the northern governorates of Oman, with chances of cumulus clouds forming and rain of varying intensity over Al Hajar Mountains and parts of the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South and Muscat.

The speed of active downward winds is expected to range between 15-30 knots leading once again to a reduction in horizontal visibility. Rough waves will continue across the coasts of the Arabian Sea.

Cumulus cloud activity over the mountainous areas of Al Buraimi and Al Dhahirah governorates, with rainfall of varying intensity, active downward winds and hailstones, was observed and rain cells expected to continue during the forthcoming hours.

On Wednesday, there are chances of cumulus clouds to continue to form over Al Hajar Mountains and neighbouring areas and parts of the Al Sharqiyah South and Al Wusta governorates.

Wayanad residents in Oman mourn deaths of family members

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

"Everything was turned upside down in a few seconds and houses, our relatives and family members were swept away before even they could cry out for help," said Oman residents who lost their kin in landslides in Wayanad, a rural district of India's

Kerala state.

Mohammed Naufal, who arrived in Muscat just three months ago seeking a better life, lost 16 members of his family including parents, wife, three children, brother, sister-in-law, their three children, sisters, and their children along with their ancestral home when the landslides wiped three villages

beyond any trace. Naufal arrived back in Kerala on July 31 to pay last rites to his family.

Shihab, a resident of Maabela, lost 7 members of his family and some of his family members are still believed to be under mud while some remains were found and buried.

Abdul Aziz, native of Wayanad, working in Al Buraimi,



Rescuers help residents to move to a safer place, at a landslide site after multiple landslides in the hills, in Wayanad. – Reuters file photo

lost his wife, mother and other relatives.

Aziz, who is currently on vacation, had relatives in Chooralmala and Mundakai region, and has only a temporary shelter to stay.

Ashraf, who works in Barka, lost his life in the landslides along with his relatives and cousins.

TURN TO P5

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 34°C Min 30°C

SALALAH: Max 27°C Min 26°C

NIZWA: Max 45°C Min 31°C



SECOND EDITION OF YOUTH AMBASSADORS PROJECT LAUNCHED

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in collaboration with the Foreign Ministry and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), is set to launch the second edition of the Youth Ambassadors Project in Muscat this September.

Building on the success of its inaugural edition in 2023, the project aims to further its mission of qualifying and empowering 100 young men and women in leadership and diplomacy. The programme has already trained 75 youth in its first edition, equipping them with essential



knowledge of the United Nations and its affiliated councils, thereby fostering their participation in regional and international forums. As part of Oman's Tenth Five-Year Plan, the Youth Ambassadors Project is designed to enhance youth engagement

and develop their capabilities. Hilal bin Saif al Siyabi, Director-General of the General Directorate of Youth, emphasised the project's focus on cultivating young national leaders who can effectively represent the Omani identity on global platforms. The project will reserve 21

seats for participants from various Gulf and Arab countries, most of whom have already given initial approval to join. The programme includes interactions between youth and diplomatic leaders, training sessions in cooperation with UNITAR, and a Model UN simulation. — ONA

Most road accidents in Oman due to speeding and negligence

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, AUGUST 5

Despite substantial fines and extensive awareness campaigns, road accidents continue to occur without regard for the loss of valuable human lives. In its annual report, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) stated that speeding, overtaking and reckless behaviour were the main causes of road accidents in 2023. Out of the total of 595 deaths from traffic accidents in 2023, 304 were attributed to speeding, 103 to negligence, 48 to overtaking, 35 to tailgating and 80 to reckless behaviour. The number of reported road accidents in 2023 increased to 1,009 from 988 in 2022 and 820 in 2021. Deaths due to speeding decreased to 304 in 2023 from 334 in 2022 and 233 in 2021, but still resulted in 1,037 injuries. Notably, 245 people were injured due to speeding, 98 due to overtaking, 160 due to



Speeding accounted for 304 deaths in 2023. – File Photo

tailgating and 418 due to reckless behaviour. Weather conditions caused four deaths and 20 injuries from 19 accidents. There were 41 accidents due to drunk driving, resulting in four deaths and 30 injuries. Tailgating led to 160 injuries from 137 accidents. Surprisingly, reckless behaviour, which claimed 80 lives in 373 accidents,

also caused 418 injuries, an increase from 63 deaths and 433 injuries in 355 accidents in 2022, and 54 deaths and 355 injuries in 282 accidents in 2021. Vehicle defects caused 56 accidents, resulting in nine deaths and 72 injuries. A road user from Maabela, speaking to the Observer, expressed, "In reality, drunk driving, speeding and negligence

should also be considered as reckless behaviour. Some impatient drivers change lanes as if they are the only ones in a hurry and have urgent tasks to attend to. A minor collision can result in the loss of many lives. Tailgating should be treated as a serious criminal offense." Sources in the Royal Oman Police mentioned that accidents cannot be reduced solely through fines, and all drivers, regardless of age, should respect the lives of others. "There are numerous young individuals who could have made significant contributions to the country but lost their lives in road accidents due to poor driving habits," stated Mubarak Khan, an expat who lost a young relative in a tragic accident. Accidents not only claim lives, but also incur significant costs to the national treasury. Insurance companies paid out 74,710,224 claims (vehicle insurance) in 2023, compared to 33,138,788 in 2022 and 44,189,364 in 2021.



Council of Oman key partner in nation's development

MUSCAT: The Council of Oman, with its two chambers, the State Council and the Majlis Ash'shura, is a key partner in the process of development and growth witnessed by the Sultanate of Oman. Its principles and working mechanisms are derived from the Basic Law of the State and the Law of the Council of Oman based on clearly-defined powers held by both councils. Throughout the first session of the eighth term, the State Council held five meetings during which the draft state budget 2024 and a number of draft laws were discussed. This is in addition to a number of topics related to the work of the State Council including the responses of the Council of Ministers to the studies and proposals submitted by the State Council during the past period including the draft law on the protection of bank deposits, the draft law on regulating trade in wildlife and the draft media law. The State Council held a joint session with Majlis Ash'shura during which the disputed articles of the draft laws referred by the government were discussed. The Council Office also held 5 meetings during which it reviewed 41 topics that varied between the Council's work submitted by the standing committees, the Council of Ministers' responses to some topics referred by the State Council and the reports and proposals submitted by the Council members.

During its meetings for the first session, the State Council's Office formed three ad hoc committees namely the special committee to study the contents of the Royal Speech at the opening of the first session of the eighth term of the Council of Oman, the special committee to study mechanism for diversifying sources of income, and the special committee to study the role of plant breeds in strengthening the local economy. The number of meetings of the Council's permanent committees for the eighth term amounted to 58 main meetings and 46 meetings of the subcommittees formed by the Council's permanent committees. During the eighth period of the first session, the State Council hosted a number of officials and specialists who explained the roles, plans and programmes of the institutions they are in charge of. The State Council also hosted the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, the Ministry of Finance, and the Oman Investment Authority. The Majlis Ash'shura held 12 regular sessions during its first annual session of the tenth term. These included 4 sessions dedicated to discussing ministerial statements. The first annual session saw the delivery of 4 ministerial statements, review of 9 draft laws and discussion on 12 draft agreements referred by the government. — ONA

MoH conducts over 86,000 surgeries in 2023

MUSCAT: The total number of surgical operations conducted by the Ministry of Health in its institutions' operating rooms during 2023 stood at 86,955, including 39,976 that were performed for men and 46,979 for women. The ministry's 2023 annual health report showed that the number of hospitals in the Sultanate of Oman stood at 92 hospitals, including 7,691 hospital beds. This raised the number of beds per 10,000 people in 2023 to 14.9, compared to 14.7 in 2022. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health's expenditure during 2023 increased to more than RO 1 billion, up by 24.6 per cent as against the 2022 figure, said the report. It showed that the largest increase in spending was due to ongoing development projects, including the establishment and

expansion of many hospitals and other health institutions. According to the report, infant mortality rate went down to 8.5 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to a rate of 8.8 in 2022. It explained that the mortality rate of children under five years of age decreased from 11.4 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2022 to 10.8 in 2023, said the report. This resulted in a decrease in the rate of deaths during 2023, which stood at 1.7 deaths per 1,000 people, while the maternal mortality rate reached 19.9 deaths per 100,000 live births (among Omani mothers it was 17.5 deaths per 100,000 live births), according to the report. The report indicated that the total number of health institutions affiliated with the Ministry of Health until the end of 2023 stood at 265 health institutions, consisting of 50



hospitals (containing 5,024 beds), 21 health complexes and 194 health centres. To improve the quality of health services provided at all

levels, the ministry has expanded the number of health institutions and added many health services in these institutions, the report affirmed. — ONA

RAO band wins first place in world music competition

DUNDONALD: The Royal Army of Oman's (RAO) music band claimed the first place in the team level at the second stage of the world music competition which was held in the Scottish city of Dundonald. Warrant Officer Mohammed bin Khamis al Amri came second in the baton-bearers competition, Warrant Officer Talal bin Ali al Maamari came third and Staff Sergeant Mahmoud bin Yousef al Sinani won fourth place. In the competition held in the city of Bridge of Allan, Sergeant Nader bin Jamaan Jabali won second place and Warrant Officer Mohammed bin Khamis al Amri won third place. — ONA





Four-day Omani Song Festival begins on Aug 11

SALALAH: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in collaboration with the Office of the Governor of Dhofar, has completed preparations for the 12th Omani Song Festival, scheduled to take place from August 11 to 14 at Al Marooj Theatre in Dhofar Governorate.

The festival aims to highlight and nurture Omani singing talent, showcasing their artistic abilities while fostering cooperation between government agencies and the private sector to enhance cultural and artistic aspects. This year's festival will also continue its tradition of rotating across different governorates in Oman.

A total of 33 contestants competed in the preliminary

round, with six advancing to the finals. The finalists are Omar al Hasani, Abdul Aziz bin Ajeeb bin Arfa Bait Kalib, Hamed Suhail, Nahla al Mukhaini, Aisha bint Hafez and Saif al Gharabi.

Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture and Chairman of the Festival's Main Committee, affirmed the ministry's readiness for the festival's return after a seven-year gap. He noted that the choice of Dhofar for this year's event highlights the governorate's appeal, particularly with its autumn weather during the summer months.

Sayyid Said emphasised that the festival reflects the ministry's commitment to supporting youth



The 12th Omani Song Festival is being held from August 11 after a 7-year gap.

talent in various artistic domains, aligning with Oman Vision 2040's cultural strategy to bolster artistic production. He acknowledged the festival's significant impact on the

artistic scene since its inception in 1994, enhancing the international recognition of Omani artists. Artist Khalid al Sheikh praised the ministry's efforts in

organising the festival, stressing its role in promoting Omani music within the Gulf region and beyond. He highlighted the event's importance for aspiring

singers and its contribution to the evolution of the Omani cultural scene.

Poet Said bin Mohammed al Saqlawi noted the festival's importance as a cultural platform for lyricists, singers, composers and musical groups, providing valuable opportunities for artistic expression and competition. He described the festival as a unique artistic phenomenon that continues the legacy of pioneering Omani musicians such as Hamad bin Halis al Sinani and Salem bin Rashid al Suri.

The main arbitration committee for the festival includes artist Khalid al Sheikh, artist Fayez al Saeed and poet Said al Saqlawi. — ONA

Dermatology conference, expo on August 23 & 24

SALALAH: Salalah is set to host the 8th Oman Dermatology International Conference and Exhibition on August 23 and 24 at the Millennium Resort in Salalah. Organised by the Oman Dermatology Society in collaboration with the Directorate-General of Health Services in Dhofar Governorate and Al Khuwair Dermatology Centre, this event promises to be a significant gathering of professionals in the field of dermatology.

Dr Aisha Abdullah al Ali, President of the Oman Dermatology Society, highlighted the importance of the event as a platform for knowledge exchange and learning about the latest advancements in dermatology, skin surgery, cosmetic



Dr Aisha Abdullah al Ali

dermatology and laser treatments.

She emphasised that the conference will provide an opportunity to discuss the key challenges and innovations in this rapidly evolving field.

Dr Al Ali noted that the conference is expected to attract a diverse group of medical and allied health professionals, including dermatologists,

family physicians, cosmetic surgeons, allergy and immunology specialists, paediatricians, pharmacists, interns and medical students.

The event will not only serve as a networking platform, but also contribute to the advancement of the healthcare sector by facilitating the transfer of skills and sharing the latest scientific developments in the effective management of dermatological diseases.

The conference will feature lectures by esteemed experts and consultants in various specialties, including dermatology, immunology for both adults and children, cosmetic dermatology, laser treatments, oncology, emergency medicine and pharmacy.

These specialists hail from within Oman, GCC, the US, and the Middle East Society of Dermatology.

Since its establishment in 2006, the Oman Dermatology Society has been committed to enhancing education and training in the fields of dermatology and cosmetic dermatology, as well as increasing awareness of this vital medical specialty. The Society has played a pivotal role in organising numerous international and national conferences, alongside general and specialised workshops in dermatology.

The event is poised to be a landmark event, bringing together leading minds in the field to advance the understanding and treatment of dermatological conditions.

Gulf Student Forum for Financial Culture begins in Salalah



The Gulf Student Forum is being held under the theme 'Towards Building a Financial Culture for School Students.'

SALALAH: The Gulf Student Forum for Financial Culture commenced on Monday at Rotana Resort Salalah, under the theme "Towards Building a Financial Culture for School Students."

Organised by the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States, the five-day event aims to instil financial literacy principles among school students across the Gulf region.

Dr Haifa al Maamari, Director of the Financial Literacy Inculcation Project (Khazna), emphasised the forum's strategic importance in equipping the next generation with the necessary tools and knowledge to navigate financial challenges effectively.

She highlighted the urgency of enhancing financial awareness among students to achieve financial stability

and personal success in a rapidly evolving economic landscape.

The forum's first day featured two working sessions focusing on the 'Concepts of Financial Culture,' exploring intellectual methods, habits and standards in the field of financial knowledge.

The forum includes practical applications in financial projects, aiming to enhance students' cognitive awareness of financial culture, exchange experiences and foster positive financial behaviours.

The event is part of a broader project consisting of 19 diverse programmes, including guides, documents, training and awareness activities, designed to build students' capabilities and readiness for life and the evolving labour market. — ONA

Ain Jarziz sought-after destination

SALALAH: Ain Jarziz stands as one of the most prominent natural and touristic landmarks in Salalah. Renowned for its picturesque natural beauty and the continuous flow of its fresh, ever-flowing water, Ain Jarziz has become a sought-after destination for tourists and locals alike. Its serene environment, ideal for picnics and recreation, makes it a year-round attraction.

Just seven kilometres from Salalah via the Itin Plain Road, Ain Jarziz is nestled within a diverse terrain that boasts an extended mountain range and valleys, with Wadi Jarziz being the most famous. The area is a hub for outdoor enthusiasts, offering opportunities for hiking, mountain sports and adventure activities.

The contrasting topography, pleasant climate and rich natural surroundings provide a unique experience for those who enjoy long-distance hiking amidst mountains, valleys and dense forests. For nature photography enthusiasts, Ain Jarziz offers a paradise of opportunities, with its rock formations, lush greenery and abundant wildlife. The area's diverse bird species and other forms of wildlife provide ample subjects for photographers to capture.



To enhance the visitor experience, the area surrounding Ain Jarziz has been developed with facilities such as mobile food carts, family entertainment games, toilets and outdoor seating areas. These improvements have transformed the site into a popular destination for tourists, who come to enjoy the natural beauty and the green vistas of the surrounding mountain peaks.

The authorities are committed to preserving the natural environment of Ain Jarziz by educating visitors on the importance of protecting the water, plants and

perennial trees in the area.

Ain Jarziz is currently experiencing a surge in visitors from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman. Insights from tourists who shared about their experiences and suggestions praise the development aspects of the important natural site.

Abdullah bin Hussein al Marzouqi from UAE, a frequent visitor to Dhofar, expressed his admiration for the continuous development of Ain Jarziz. He suggested enhancing facilities and services, improving road conditions, paving the parking

lot and adding more family-friendly areas.

Mahdi al Yami from Saudi Arabia, on his first visit to Dhofar, praised the picturesque landscapes and the well-maintained facilities.

He emphasised the importance of enhancing tourist services and preserving the site's natural beauty. Local visitor Mohammed al Junaibi shared his love for Ain Jarziz and suggested further developing the area to attract more tourists, including cleaning the spring's waterway and enhancing the surrounding mountain views.

— ONA

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees in Omani Riyals	Last Date For Tender Submission
2024/14	Partition and preparation work for the Ministry building	LO: 25 SME: 10 RE: 25	21/8/ 2024

First

All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.

Second

Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system; <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

etenderhd@mtc.gov.om
 + 96824402200



BEWARE OF ONLINE JOB SCAMS

140

2023

CYBERCRIME CASES

2022

126

2,686

2023

ONLINE CONTENT CASES

2022

2,519

SOURCE: TREND MICRO CYBER SECURITY SOLUTIONS

AHMED AL HABSI, IT EXPERT,
STRESSES THE IMPORTANCE
OF CYBERSECURITY AND
VIGILANCE ONLINE

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Those on the lookout for ‘quick bucks’ or online jobs that give a handsome salary, think twice if some ‘good Samaritan’ offers you in your inbox - chances are, it can be a hoax attempting to free you from your savings.

Mostly, innocent job-seekers as well as those after easy money fall prey to such offers online. This is because while the first one is frantically seeking a job to support himself/herself and his family, the latter is blindly seeking ways to get rewarded without working for the same.

A typical offer letter online reads thus: “I’m the General Manager of the xxx project. I am currently recruiting a team of part-time workers to work from home.

There are no working hours requirements and wages are settled immediately.

Daily salary: up to RO 150
Newcomers will receive RO 3 immediately

If you are interested in this, please click the button below to add WhatsApp below to add online customer service consultation.”

Upon receiving an e-mail like this, chances are high that the above-mentioned two classes of people would respond to it and open the link shared by the owner of the mail following which the unpleasant twist would take place.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has urged people not to respond to such e-mails and to safeguard themselves without even opening such e-mails.

“If you receive a spurious mail or a spam message from an unknown person, one should ignore it or report it to the cyber department of the ROP and alert others not to fall prey to these kinds of unscrupulous cyber frauds,” says an ROP source.

“We never know what modes that the cyber criminals resort to in search of their potential prey and one needs to be careful in the cyber world since one small mistake can mean a lot while taking precautions can protect you from many dangers,” says Ahmed al Habsi, an IT expert.

This precaution applies to downloading apps and material from suspect sites, accessing dubious websites, or even opening a link shared by suspicious sources and the like.

He further said that there were attempts of cyber blackmailing using extortion by suspected international online criminals wanting money lest the users would be exposed and the like.

“We are living in a world where cyber crime is quite rampant hence cybersecurity is every individual’s responsibility. We should be aware of the various risks involved while living in the social media era as every click forward is an opportunity for cyber fraudsters to dupe someone online,” adds Al Habsi.

There were 140 cases of cybercrimes in the country in 2023, compared to 126 in 2022 while cases related to online content increased to 2,686 in 2023 from 2,519 in 2022, according to a study report released by Trend Micro Cyber Security Solutions.

The perpetrators mostly used social engineering methods for obtaining employee data and credentials and more than 75 per cent of targeted cyberattacks started with an e-mail offering a lucrative business or easy money to the receiver.

In terms of cases, phishing was one of the top causes of data breaches, followed by the use of stolen credentials and ransomware, the report said, suggesting precaution as the only way to avoid such online scams.



More facilities for schools in Al Batinah North

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, AUGUST 5

The Ministry of Education is enhancing educational infrastructure in Al Batinah North Governorate as they prepare for the next academic year. Among the key projects, the recently completed the building of Quba Basic Education School (Grades 5-10) in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq, which was constructed at a cost of about RO 2,275,320.

Abdullah al Abdulsalam, the Head of Projects at Al Batinah North Education Directorate, explained that a comprehensive inspection of all facilities preceded the building's official handover to ensure it meets the approved specifications. This new school building is within 13 projects currently being implemented by the Ministry of Education in various governorates.

The newly constructed school comprises 40 classrooms, administrative offices, faculty rooms, two science labs, two computer labs, a learning resources centre, multipurpose halls, a tennis court, athletics track, meeting rooms, and other service facilities.

As the academic year 2024-2025 approaches, the General Directorate of



The building of Quba Basic Education School in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq is one of the recently completed key projects

Education in Al Batinah North Governorate is preparing for an anticipated increase in student enrolment and staff numbers. Dr Waleed al Hashmi, General Director of Education in Al Batinah North Governorate, said there will be about 164,240 students across 244 public schools and 11,675 teachers.

To accommodate this growth and reduce the number of evening schools, two new buildings were inaugurated in the second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. Additionally, four more buildings are set to open with the start of the new school year.

Three ongoing construction projects worth over RO 15 million are being invested. Efforts to enhance educational facilities include adding new classrooms and educational amenities in 18 schools, with another 18 schools in the planning stages. The year 2023 saw RO 900,000 allocated for maintenance and renovation of 63 school buildings. An amount of RO 425,000 is earmarked for 19 schools in 2024. Another RO 900,000 has been set aside to continue maintenance till the end of 2024.

A significant focus is also placed on improving the educational environment, with RO 857,520 allocated for upgrading and expanding school facilities. The Directorate has completed the first phase of replacing 3,136 air conditioning units in 27 schools, costing RO 767,222.4. 5,219 units in 50 schools have been replaced at a cost of RO 1,221,246.

The integration of modern technology in schools remains a priority in their schools too. Over 8,500 computers, televisions and tablets were distributed to schools in 2023-2024. This initiative will continue in the upcoming year, with plans to replace 288 school buses, enhancing both educational and transport facilities.

Agri-investment opportunities launched in Al Dhahirah



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has unveiled six new investment opportunities through the Tatweer platform, aimed at establishing agricultural projects in Al Dhahirah Governorate. These opportunities cover a total area of 27 acres.

The new projects include two ventures focused on growing cucurbits and Omani garlic in the Kabara area of Ibri, each spanning 4.5 acres. Additionally, four projects dedicated to palm cultivation and date production are also available, each covering 4.5 acres in the same region.

These initiatives are designed to bolster the agricultural sector and encourage investors to participate in sustainable agricultural ventures within the Sultanate of Oman.

The move aligns with the Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to enhance agricultural growth.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is collaborating with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and the private sector to develop and allocate lands for these investment projects. The goal is to foster agricultural development and contribute to food security in Oman. — ONA

Summer activity held for Al Rahma Society children

MUSCAT: Mysk Al Mouj recently brought summer to life with a heartwarming event for children from Al Rahma Society in Muscat. The hotel team dedicated an entire day to creating joyful experiences, including pizza making, swimming, a magic show, movies and a variety of games.

The event provided a safe and fun environment where the children could freely express themselves and enjoy a memorable day. Mysk Al Mouj takes pride in giving back to the community as part of its corporate social responsibility, and with the school holidays in full swing, there are no better ambassadors of joy than children.

The hotel's extensive facilities ensured entertainment for children of all ages, offering bicycle rides around the picturesque Al Mouj, PlayStation gaming and board games. The day was further brightened by a special kids' menu featuring ice creams, pizzas and more.

Hotel Manager Meenu Singh shared,



"This is our second collaboration with Al Rahma Society. This year, we've also introduced a booth for school supplies donations, reflecting our commitment to our core values of service and generosity."

"At Mysk Al Mouj, we live by the principles of Ehtiraam (respect) and

Karaam (generosity). These values guide everything we do, driving our dedication to community engagement and hospitality. By sharing our resources and creating meaningful experiences, we strive to uphold these principles and make a positive impact on society."

Vision Investment Services Company SAOC. (Under Liquidation)

P.O. Box. 58, Postal Code 111, Al Seeb, Muscat Governorate, Sultanate of Oman

INVITATION TO ATTEND EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING OF THE SHAREHOLDERS

BDO LLC, Oman being the Official liquidator of Vision Investment Services Company SAOC (Company), is pleased to invite the shareholders of the Company to the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to be held in accordance with Article 54 of Commercial Companies Law promulgated by Royal Decree 18/2019 (CCL) at 21 August 2024, Wednesday at 3.30 pm at Haffa House Hotel, Hai Al Mina, Ruwi, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman to discuss the following agenda items :

1. To discuss and approve the payment of the share capital to the existing shareholders in the agreed percentage of their shareholding;
2. To transfer Solidare, Beirut shares to Owners;
3. Sale of Jiblah shares, Kuwait; and
4. To discuss and approve the interim liquidation report;

As per the regulations for convening EGM, we bring to your attention to the following:

Only a juristic person has the right to authorize a natural person to attend the EGM and vote on their behalf based on the proxy form to received from, as appended below, to be received from the juristic person;

If the quorum for holding the EGM is not achieved, then a second EGM will be held on 22 August 2024, Thursday, at the same time and address/location mentioned above.

Wayanad residents in Oman mourn deaths of family members

FROM PAGE 1

A pregnant daughter of social activist Naushad Kallai's uncle and his family were among the dead. Barka resident Saifuddin Madani's brother-in-law's family and around 10 members of Sameer from Barka along with his maternal family also lost their lives in the torrents of mud that gushed forth wiping off literally everything around.

Sharing his agony over the mass deaths, Hussain, an employee of Nesto Suhar, told the Observer that he lost three of his cousins in the killer landslides.

"I had spoken to my cousins the night before the incident, and they shared their concerns over the ongoing rains. But never ever did I or my family imagined that they would lose their lives to the rains," said Hussain.

Villages like Punjrimattom, Mundakkai, Chooralmala, Attamala, Meppadi and Kunhome of Wayanad district bore the brunt of nature's fury on July 30, when multiple landslides occurred killing nearly 400 and displacing several hundreds.

Authorities said heavy rains triggered the collapse of hillsides, resulting in gushing water, and boulders cascading down onto the area.

Roughly, as many as 387 people have been killed and over 180 are still missing in Kerala's worst natural calamity.

To make the situation grimmer, over 160 body parts have been recovered from under the debris by Monday afternoon and authorities are conducting DNA tests to identify the dead.



TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees In Omani Riyals	Last Date For Tender Submission
2024/13	Request for Proposal for Endpoint Devices	LO: 25 SME: 10 RE: 25	15/9/ 2024

First ● All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.

Second ● Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system; <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

✉ etenderhd@mtc.gov.om
☎ + 96824402200



TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees In Omani Riyals	Last Date For Tender Submission
2024/12	Ministry's Infrastructure Implementation	LO: 25 SME: 10 RE: 25	15/9/ 2024

First ● All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.

Second ● Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

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For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

✉ etenderhd@mtc.gov.om
☎ + 96824402200



UN calls for urgent de-escalation in Middle East

GENEVA: The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk on Monday called for an urgent de-escalation in the Middle East over fears that the Gaza war could spread.

“I am deeply worried about the rising risk of a wider conflict in the Middle East and plead with all parties, along with those states with influence, to act urgently to de-escalate what has become a very precarious situation,” said Turk in a statement.

Iran on Monday said it had the “legal right to punish” Israel over last week’s killing of Palestinian armed group Hamas’s political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.

Israel, which has not commented on the killing but did admit to carrying out a strike on Beirut that left Hezbollah military chief Fuad Shukur dead, has been fighting a war in Gaza since the October 7 attacks.

The international community fears Iran, a backer of Hezbollah and Hamas, could join the conflict.

“Already, over the past 10 months, civilians — mostly women and children — have endured unbearable pain and suffering as a result of the bombs and guns,” said Turk.

“Everything, and I mean everything, must be done to avoid this situation spiralling further



A Palestinian child looks up to watch a military drone as she stands on the rubble of destroyed houses in the Rafah refugee camp. — AFP file photo

into an abyss that will only have even more terrible consequences for civilians.”

A steadily climbing death toll, reported by the territory’s health ministry, nearly 40,000 people killed in Gaza since war between Israel and Palestinian groups

broke out on October 7. With more than 1.5 per cent of Gaza’s 2.4 million people killed during the war, many inhabitants of the besieged coastal territory have lost loved ones. The smell of death is everywhere, but under constant bombardment, shelling

and battles, Gazans often have little time — or place that is not in ruins — to process their grief. Some bled to death before reaching hospitals, many of which had gone out of service due to the fighting or facing severe shortages amid an Israeli siege imposed

early on in the war. Other victims were crushed under their toppled homes, their bodies eventually retrieved from the rubble of bombed-out neighbourhoods. Some are still missing, feared buried under the ruins.



Everything must be done to avoid this situation spiralling further into an abyss that will only have even more terrible consequences for civilians

VOLKER TURK
UN rights chief

The incessant violence has rendered many cemeteries inaccessible, often forcing Gazans to dig makeshift graves with whatever tools they can find. With nearly all Gazans displaced at least once by the war, and often far from home, they have resorted to burying loved ones on any available patch of land, in the street, or sometimes on football fields. Many do not know when they may be able to return to their burial spots or even find them again. — AFP

Bangladesh’s army chief takes charge

DHAKA: Bangladesh army chief Waker-Uz-Zaman spent nearly four decades rising to the top of the military and said on Monday he was “taking full responsibility” after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was ousted and fled.

Bedecked with medal ribbons on his green fatigues and wearing a four-star general’s cap, Waker said 76-year-old Hasina had quit and that the army would “form an interim government”.

“I give you my word that all the injustices will be addressed,” the career infantry officer said in a broadcast to the nation on state television, although it was not immediately clear if he would head the new government. “The country has suffered a lot, the economy has been hit, many people have been killed — it is time to stop the violence.”

The mild-looking, bespectacled officer was appointed as chief of army staff, the military’s top job, only in June. Hasina had trusted him because he was a distant relative. The experienced soldier has served as a UN peacekeeper as well as in Hasina’s office.



Protestors display Bangladesh's national flag as they storm Prime Minister's palace in Dhaka. — AFP

As protesters stormed Hasina’s palace on Monday and she fled by helicopter, Waker said he would speak to the president to form a government. He vowed that the new authorities would “prosecute all murders” following weeks of deadly protests. The army was deployed on the streets to crush the protests last month but shifted on Sunday

and in several instances allowed demonstrations to go on. Waker said he had held talks with the main opposition parties and civil society members, although not with Hasina’s Awami League. “All of us together will forge a beautiful future,” he said. “If we work together, we can achieve a favourable outcome.”

The Bangladesh Military Academy graduate, called for the weeks of protests to stop. At least 300 people were killed in the unrest. “If the situation gets better, there is no need for emergency,” he said. Waker appealed to the university students who first launched protests in early July to support the army. — AFP

N KOREA’S KIM OVERSEES DELIVERY OF NEW BALLISTIC MISSILE LAUNCHERS



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attends a ceremonial event to mark the delivery of new tactical ballistic missiles to his country’s troops. — Reuters

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the delivery of 250 new tactical ballistic missile launchers to front-line troops, state media KCNA reported on Monday. The launchers have been described by state media as a modern tactical attack weapon personally designed by Kim and ready to be transferred to Korean People’s Army units on the border with the South. North Korea said it test-fired a new tactical ballistic missile last month. “We believe the missile launchers are intended to be used in various ways, such to attack or threaten South Korea,” Lee Sung-joon, spokesperson for South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a media briefing, noting deployment near the

border would mean the range was not long. Photographs released by KCNA showed rows of launchers lined up besides red banners that called for victory under floodlights at the event held at night and attended by Kim. In a speech, Kim blamed the United States for creating a “nuclear-based military block” that forced his country to further strengthen military capabilities. A spokesperson for Seoul’s unification ministry handling inter-Korean affairs said North Korea’s nuclear and missile programmes were the primary threat to peace and stability. Pyongyang has condemned joint drills between the US and South Korea as a rehearsal for invasion. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

ISTANBUL

Türkiye summons Instagram officials over freeze

Türkiye’s government on Monday called officials from Instagram to a meeting, four days after blocking the social media platform. Instagram has been accused of censorship and of failing to remove posts the authorities deemed offensive.

Representatives in Türkiye of the platform would meet Transport and Infrastructure Minister Abdulkadir Uraloglu. “We hope they will do what’s necessary to respond to our demands. We’re hoping for positive develop-



ments,” Uraloglu said on X. “Last week there was a meeting with representatives of the platform, in which we set out our views on respect for Turkish laws,” he continued. — AFP

TUNIS

Tunisia president registers election candidacy

Tunisian President Kais Saied on Monday submitted his official candidacy for the country’s upcoming presidential election on October 6. Saied, 66, told reporters in the capital Tunis that his candidacy was part of “a liberation and self-determination war” set to “establish a new republic.” “I did not oppress anyone, and the law applies to everyone equally,” he said. “We will not accept any foreign party interfering in the choices of our people,” he



added. To be listed, candidates are required to present a list of signatures from 10,000 registered voters, with at least 500 voter signatures per constituency. — AFP

LAGOS

Nigerian protests fizzle out after crackdown

Protests in Nigeria over the soaring cost of living ebbed on Monday, with only a few hundred people turning out in major cities following a crackdown by security forces since the demonstrations began. At least 13 people have been killed in clashes with police since the start of the protests. Police put the death toll at seven, saying some of the fatalities were caused by accidents and an explosive device. A police response and a call for a protest



pause by President Bola Tinubu appeared to have dampened the demonstrations. In Abuja, there were no signs of people gathering at the main stadium. — Reuters



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In brief

■ FLORIDA



HURRICANE DEBBY SLAMS INTO FLORIDA'S GULF COAST

Hurricane Debby made landfall as a Category 1 storm in the Big Bend region of Florida's Gulf Coast on Monday morning and began a crawl across the state, where it could trigger dangerous storm surges, heavy rainfall and catastrophic flooding.

The hurricane slammed ashore near Steinhatchee packing maximum sustained winds of 130 kph, the National Hurricane Center said.

Debby has already dumped up to a foot of rain in some parts of the southwest part of the state, Florida Division of Emergency Management Executive Director Kevin Guthrie said. Roughly 223,500 customers have lost power in the state. — **Reuters**

■ BRUSSELS



EU ADDS 28 BELARUS OFFICIALS TO SANCTIONS BLACKLIST

The European Union on Monday added 28 officials and "propagandists" in Belarus to a sanctions blacklist over the repression of opponents of leader Alexander Lukashenko. The 27-nation bloc has imposed repeated rounds of sanctions on the Belarusian government since the authorities launched a crackdown on protests against Lukashenko's rule in 2020.

The measures take individuals sanctioned over the clampdown in the former Soviet country to 261. "These regime propagandists provided the Belarusian public with false information about repression perpetrated by the state authorities," the EU said. — **AFP**

■ KYIV



UKRAINE REJECTS MALI BREAKING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Kyiv on Monday criticised Mali's move to break off diplomatic relations with Ukraine in a row over alleged Ukrainian support to separatist rebels in the African country, an ally of Russia. Mali has accused Kyiv of supplying intelligence to rebel troops who then reportedly used it to kill dozens of mercenaries from Malian soldiers in a battle last month.

Mali said it was breaking diplomatic ties with Kyiv with "immediate effect". Ukraine's foreign ministry said that the decision was "short-sighted and hasty" in a statement that criticised Russia's military presence in Africa. — **AFP**

UK's Starmer vows sanctions on rioters

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Monday vowed "swift criminal sanctions" following an emergency meeting on the far-right riots that broke out across England last week over the murder of three children.

The prime minister met with ministers and police chiefs, including Scotland Yard boss Mark Rowley, to discuss how to quell the violence that first broke out in Southport, northwest England.

Over the weekend, several police officers were injured and scores of people were arrested as mobs throwing bricks and flares clashed with officers, burnt and looted shops, and smashed the windows of cars and homes.

As part of a "number of actions" to come out of Monday's meeting, the government will "ramp up criminal justice" to ensure that "sanctions are swift", Starmer told the media.

He also said a "standing army" of specially-trained police officers was ready to be deployed to support local forces where any further riots break out. "My focus is on making sure that we stop this disorder," he added.

Clashes erupted in Southport a day after three young girls were killed and five more children critically injured during a knife attack at a dance class.

False rumours initially spread on social media saying the attacker was an asylum seeker, but police said the suspect was a 17-year-old born in Wales, with UK media reporting he has Rwandan parents. Police have since arrested hundreds of people in towns and cities nationwide, with anti-immigration demonstrators and rioters facing off against police and counter-protestors.



Restaurant owners clear debris from the street in Middlesbrough, north east England.

— AFP

The prime minister met with ministers and police chiefs, including Scotland Yard boss Mark Rowley, to discuss how to quell the violence that first broke out in Southport

The prime minister on Sunday warned rioters they would "regret" participating in England's worst disorder in 13 years, while his interior minister Yvette Cooper told the BBC on Monday that "there will be a reckoning".

Cooper also said that social media put a "rocket booster" under the violence, and Starmer stressed that "criminal law applies online as well as offline".

Police have blamed the

violence on people associated with the English Defence League, an anti-Islam organisation founded 15 years ago whose supporters have been linked to football hooliganism.

Some of the worst scenes on Sunday broke out in Rotherham, northern England, where masked rioters smashed several windows at a hotel that has been used to house asylum seekers.

At least 12 officers were

injured, including one who was knocked unconscious, as they battled around 500 protesters with "far-right and anti-immigration views", South Yorkshire Police's Lindsey Butterfield told media on Monday. There were also large scuffles in Bolton, northwest England, and Middlesbrough, northeast England, where mobs smashed windows of houses and cars, leading to 43 arrests. — **AFP**

Kamala Harris to announce vice-president pick today

WASHINGTON: Vice-President Kamala Harris is expected to announce her pick for vice-presidential running mate today after conducting weekend interviews with contenders at her Washington home, two sources with knowledge of the matter said.

Speculation has focused on six men - four governors, a senator and a cabinet secretary in the Biden administration.

Harris' decision could be announced any time before her scheduled first public appearance with the candidate at Temple University in Philadelphia at the start of a tour across several battleground states likely to decide the election, the sources said.

Harris closed out her search by interviewing three top candidates — US Senator Mark Kelly of Arizona, Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz — at her Naval Observatory residence on Sunday, the sources said.

Kelly caused a stir on Sunday night when he posted on X "Now, my mission is serving Arizonans," which was interpreted as a sign he was no longer in the running. He deleted the post and replaced it with "I've learned that when your country asks you to serve, you always answer the call."

The senator's spokesman tried to quell speculation around the post, saying, "An Arizona senator tweeting about being an Arizona senator is not news!"

The candidates will be informed on Monday night or Tuesday morning whether they were picked, the sources added. The Harris campaign plans a social media announcement featuring the duo, campaign officials familiar with the arrangements said.

The vice-president met with Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg for 90 minutes on Friday and was also meeting candidates virtually, the



US Vice-President Kamala Harris speaks as she departs to return to Washington, at George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston. — **Reuters file photo**

sources said. Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear and Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker are the other candidates in contention for the job.

Harris' search for a running mate began in earnest two weeks ago, shortly after President Joe Biden withdrew from the race and endorsed her to replace him.

There was no immediate indication that Monday's market selloff would have an impact on Harris' announcement timing.

The choice of a running mate is one of the most consequential decisions of Harris' political career, as she hastily pulls together a campaign to challenge Republican nominee Donald Trump and US Senator JD Vance. Harris' shortlist includes all white men with a record of winning over rural, white or independent voters. — **Reuters**

Russian govt investigates defence official over fraud

MOSCOW: Russian authorities have detained another senior defence ministry official in the latest of a string of corruption investigations, this time related to a military theme park, the state investigative committee said on Monday.

Major General Vladimir Shesterov was detained on suspicion of fraud, it said. Also arrested was Vyacheslav Akhmedov, director of the war-themed Patriot Park near Moscow that is a popular visitor attraction.

"According to the investigation, these persons, together with accomplices, were involved in the theft of budget funds allocated for the activities and functioning of the Patriot Park and convention and exhibition centre," the committee said in a statement.

The park displays a vast collection of Russian and Soviet

weaponry, and offers visitors the chance to clamber on tanks and take part in combat simulations. On its website, it also features a photo gallery of "heroes of the special military operation" - Russia's official term for its war in Ukraine.

State news agency RIA said the investigation was examining evidence going back to 2021, and other park employees had also been detained and were being interrogated.

TASS news agency said Shesterov and Akhmedov were suspected of embezzling more than 40 million roubles. Their bank accounts had been frozen and they faced up to 10 years in prison if convicted. At least a dozen people have now been caught up in the biggest wave of corruption scandals to hit the Russian military and defence establishment for years.

— **Reuters**



President Vladimir Putin (R) meets the Federation Council Speaker, Chair of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly Valentina Matviyenko (C) and Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin (L), in Moscow. — **AFP**

Give peace a chance as Middle East tensions rise



As tensions continue to rise across the Middle East, Oman's role as a facilitator of dialogue becomes increasingly vital.

The Sultanate of Oman's emphasis on diplomacy offers hope amid chaos; it serves as a reminder that even in times of strife, there exists potential for reconciliation through understanding and negotiation.

Oman stands firm in its belief that sustained dialogue can mitigate conflicts and foster an environment conducive to peace, a principle that remains essential for navigating the complexities of Middle Eastern geopolitics today.

The Middle East has long been a region marked by conflict, strife and deep-rooted tensions. The ongoing humanitarian and political crises, particularly between Israel and Palestine, underscore the urgent need for a new approach to peace that transcends historical grievances and addresses the underlying issues fuelling violence.

Letting peace solve the tension in the Middle East requires a multifaceted strategy that prioritises dialogue, mutual understanding and international

cooperation.

Oman's approach to resolving tensions in the Middle East is characterised by its commitment to dialogue and peace-building initiatives led by figures like Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister. His advocacy for an inclusive peace conference and emphasis on humanitarian issues reflect a comprehensive strategy aimed at achieving long-term stability in a volatile region.

This was evident when Sayyid Badr had a phone call with Khaled Meshaal, Head of Hamas Abroad recently.

During the call, he stressed Oman's supportive position of the Palestinian cause and the need to carry on with efforts aimed at achieving a just and comprehensive peace that ensures the rights of the brotherly Palestinian people to establish their independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Sayyid Badr also stressed that the disgraceful assassination operation undermines the mediation and peace efforts undertaken by active players in the region, through which Hamas expressed its readiness to reach a ceasefire agreement.

To effectively address tensions in the Middle

FOR ANY PEACE INITIATIVE TO SUCCEED, BUILDING TRUST BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS WILL BE OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE

East, it is crucial to understand their origins. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not merely a territorial dispute; it encompasses historical injustices, national identities, religious significance and socio-economic disparities.

Given the complexity of this conflict and its implications for regional stability, international intervention is necessary but must be approached with caution.

For any peace initiative to succeed, building trust between Israelis and Palestinians is paramount. Involving regional Arab allies in peacekeeping efforts will enhance legitimacy and foster cooperation among neighbouring countries that share vested interests in stability.

The time has come for decisive action towards a long-lasting peace in the Middle East rather than war.

By prioritising dialogue over military solutions, fostering international cooperation, and addressing root causes of conflict through inclusive policies, world leaders can pave the way toward a more stable future where both Israelis and Palestinians can coexist peacefully.

Understanding the mind of an extremist



Dr Muammar bin Ali al Tobi

The writer is an Omani academic and researcher

I am not used to dealing with extremism and terrorism, but I am curious about what goes on in the mind of an extremist. We need to understand and decode their thoughts from a psychological angle.

A major influence is the mistaken religious motive, which Badr al Abri explains in his book “The Jurisprudence of Extremism.” I won't go into religious details here; instead, I will share some thoughts on understanding an extremist's mind. Years ago, when ‘Al Qaeda’ first appeared — before social media — I wondered why such terrorist groups formed. They attacked civilian societies that had no military or political actions.

We saw mosque bombings and attacks on innocent people, spreading fear and destruction without clear goals. Later, ‘IS’ replaced ‘Al Qaeda,’ emerging during the ‘Arab Spring.’

This period brought political and economic ruin to many countries and new extremist groups followed. These organisations have two faces: the sources that form and fund them, and the individuals within them, many of whom are deceived through material and intellectual means.

We should look at the extremist mind, its thoughts, and what drives it to become a killing machine that disregards humanitarian and religious

principles. We must also ask: Who funds these extremist groups? Research shows that these groups often have hidden backers.

They flourish with ongoing funding and a supportive grassroots base. The extremist mind, from its start, is inclined to accept extreme ideas, often due to psychological tendencies and personal struggles. This leads to practices that adopt misguided ideas. Sometimes, it's the product of an environment that supports extremism and feeds religious, sectarian, or ethnic fanaticism. A person with disturbed psychological tendencies might rebel against societal norms, seeking outlets for their resentment.

Such individuals are easy targets for extremist groups that lure them under a misleading cover. Extremism becomes more active among those with weak psychological stability and in communities with extreme religious or ethnic views.

In the end, the extremist mind loses its human compassion due to wrong religious teachings and psychological issues, including criminal tendencies. Surprisingly, some who adopt extremist views don't have criminal backgrounds or psychological issues but are financially stable.

Understanding the extremist mind is complex and requires gathering extensive information on extremism's psychological and environmental elements.

Extremist groups are skilled in persuasion, using emotional fanaticism and misleading religious motives to turn individuals into killing machines who believe they are pleasing God.

Researching the mind of an extremist is ongoing and must adapt to changing circumstances and technological advances.

Translated by Badr al Dhafari (The original version of this article was published in the print edition of Oman Arabic newspaper on August 4).



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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

SALALAH STANDS OUT AS A PREMIER WEDDING DESTINATION, OFFERING A UNIQUE COMBINATION OF NATURAL BEAUTY, CULTURAL RICHNESS, STUNNING LANDSCAPES AND SPIRITUAL WELLNESS

The monsoon wedding destination

Salalah offers a distinctive blend of modernity, connectivity, natural serenity, cultural richness and spiritual depth, making it an exceptional destination for weddings. Renowned for its unique Khareef monsoon season, lush landscapes and vibrant traditions, Salalah provides an enchanting setting for couples looking to start their blessed journey together.

This picturesque city not only mesmerises with its beauty but also fosters a healthy, blessed start to married life.

Here's why Salalah stands out as the perfect destination for a monsoon wedding.

Serene monsoon season

Salalah's Khareef, or monsoon season, from June to September, transforms the region into a misty paradise unlike any other in the rest of the world experiencing hot summer.

The monsoon rains bring life to the arid landscape, creating lush greenery, misty mountains, and breathtaking waterfalls.

According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Khareef season draws around a million visitors annually, attracted by the cool, refreshing climate and stunning scenery.

The gentle rains and lush surroundings create a romantic and serene atmosphere, perfect for a wedding.

Research indicates that exposure to natural green spaces can reduce stress and enhance well-being, suggesting that the verdant landscapes of Salalah during the Khareef season can provide a peaceful and auspicious setting for a wedding, symbolising fertility, growth and new beginnings.

Rich cultural heritage and traditions

Salalah's cultural heritage offers a unique and enriching backdrop for wedding celebrations.

The city is steeped in history, with sites like the Al Baleed Archaeological Park and the Frankincense Land Museum offering glimpses into its storied past. Weddings in Salalah can incorporate traditional Omani elements such as music, dance, and attire, adding a layer of cultural depth and authenticity to the celebration.

The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) reports that cultural tourism significantly enhances visitor experiences, suggesting that incorporating Salalah's rich traditions into wedding festivities can create memorable and meaningful experiences for both the couple and their guests.

These cultural elements not only provide a distinctive touch but also connect the celebration to the deep-rooted history and traditions of the land, fostering a sense of continuity and blessing.

Stunning natural landscapes

Salalah boasts an array of stunning natural landscapes that provide idyllic settings for wedding ceremonies and photographs. The pristine beaches of Al Mughsail, with their white sands and dramatic cliffs, offer a breathtaking coastal venue.

The lush greenery and cascading waterfalls of Wadi Darbat also create a tranquil and romantic setting. Salalah's diverse landscapes ensure that couples can find a location that perfectly matches their vision of a dream wedding.

Studies in environmental psychology suggest that natural settings can enhance mood and well-being, indicating that the beautiful landscapes of Salalah can contribute to a joyous and relaxed atmosphere on the wedding day.

Whether on a beach at sunset or amid the verdant hills, the natural beauty of Salalah provides a stunning and serene backdrop for a memorable celebration.

Spiritual and holistic wellness

Salalah is also a centre of spiritual and holistic wellness, providing a deeply enriching environment for a wedding.

The region is home to significant spiritual sites, such as the tomb of Prophet Job (Nabi Ayoub), mausoleums of West Asian spiritual leaders, and the ancient frankincense trees, which have been used for centuries in spiritual rituals. These sites offer opportunities for reflection and blessings, imbuing the wedding with spiritual significance.

Additionally, Salalah's reputation for holistic wellness, with its natural spas and wellness retreats, allows couples to enjoy rejuvenating treatments and therapies.

According to a study published in the Journal of Religion and Health, spiritual and holistic practices can positively influence marital satisfaction, suggesting that the spiritual ambience and wellness offerings in Salalah can help lay a strong foundation for a harmonious and blessed marriage. By beginning their journey together in a place that nurtures both body and soul, couples can embark on their married life with a sense of balance, peace and blessing.

Salalah stands out as a premier wedding destination, offering a unique combination of natural beauty, cultural richness, stunning landscapes and spiritual wellness.

The enchanting monsoon season, rich heritage, breathtaking backdrops and holistic wellness opportunities collectively create an environment that nurtures love and commitment.

Choosing Salalah for a wedding ensures not just a memorable event but also a healthy and spiritually enriched start to a blessed marriage. Embrace the magic of Salalah, where every element comes together to celebrate and sanctify the union of two souls.

Having fun at airport with extra time

Passengers travelling abroad must report at Muscat International Airport four hours early... and this is official. The regulation has come into force from this week.

Travellers are of different types. Officially there are three types of travellers — business travellers, leisure travellers and special interest travellers. I think we should add in special categories families and vacationers.

The early birds have plenty of time if things go wrong like forgetting the passport until they remember half way to the airport, then there are travellers who have forgotten where they have kept their passports until they find them after getting to the house. Now through out the holiday you can think about all the organising one has to do upon returning.

We have got few more days of summer vacation where we can squeeze in a few more days of holiday trips. There are few people who are constantly on the move because their work demands it. Now they have to think about what to do with the extra time on hand. So what are the fun things to do at an airport. First of all, hopefully your baggage is not overweight. If you have, then of course you have enough time to rearrange. The fact is that organised people have stress free life to a great extent. In this case they probably would have weighed their suitcases at least three times so they are not left wondering where to drop off the extra stuff they had managed to squeeze into their baggage or delving into their purse to pay for the extra kilos. Imagine all that money you could have used while holidaying?

In other words being prepared matters a lot.

So what can you do with the extra time. Of course the current trend is to have the experience than shop because eventually it becomes part of the clutter, unless you are shopping for a gift, where as a good experience becomes a memorable one. What people look out for and could enjoy would be wellness. Lounges are indeed popular but how about a shoulder massage, a haircut, a



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

WHILE TRAVELLING, TIME IS PART OF THE COST... AND GONE ARE THE DAYS WHEN PEOPLE CAME TO SEE YOU OFF AT THE AIRPORT OR TO RECEIVE

pedicure or a facial on the go? A game area would be ideal or a small library. Would you need that when you own a smart phone? Of course yes, because you are looking for an experience.

Wouldn't it be nice if there is an art corner where you could try your hand at some new hobby?

How about an art exhibition or a small museum? This would give a great opportunity for selfie enthusiasts and a post to share on social media.

The food court is a necessity and then why not a fitness centre? Obviously we can walk around as much as possible but we must get back to the designated gate on time.

For most people it is a quiet place to sleep that matters. Then there are of course special lounges.

Getting ready to travel can be anxiety packed venture on its own so many would just prefer to chill out silently before the flight departure.

However, going back to the 4-hour check-in time, it is a lesson that could be part of time management. There have been many people who have missed their flights just because they miscalculated the duration on road traffic could have an impact on their journey to airport.

Have you ever reached airport and the staff told you the plane is on the runway? There could be thousands of incidents and everyone could have their own genuine reasons, but there has to be a cut off period and so the new rule says 40 minutes before instead of 20.

While travelling, time is part of the cost... and gone are the days when people came to see you off at the airport or to receive. Time sets in our priorities. Travelling has become part of the lifestyle. Along with time, while travelling energy is important. So many of us working till the last minute on the day of travel and gate crash at the airport completely exhausted. If we look to most of our trips we realise how important preparedness is and besides it feeds the anticipation.

So now when in Oman, flying means reaching the airport four hours ahead of departure.

ON THE FRONTLINE



People await their flights at the Beirut International Airport departure hall on Monday. Urgent calls grew for foreign nationals to leave Lebanon, which would be on the front line of a regional war, as Iran and its allies readied their response to high-profile killings blamed on Israel. – AFP

The AI safety debate is all wrong

A huge industry has emerged in recent years as China, the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union have made the safety of artificial intelligence a top priority. Obviously, any technology — from cars and pharmaceuticals to machine tools and lawnmowers — should be designed as safely as possible (one wishes that more scrutiny had been brought to bear on social media during its early days).

But simply raising safety concerns isn't enough. In the case of AI, the debate is focused far too much on "safety against catastrophic risks due to AGI (Artificial General Intelligence)," meaning a superintelligence that can outperform all humans in most cognitive tasks. At issue is the question of "alignment": whether AI models produce results that match their users' and designers' objectives and values — a topic that leads to various sci-fi scenarios in which a superintelligent AI emerges and destroys humanity. The best-selling author Brian Christian's The Alignment Problem is focused mostly on AGI, and the same concerns have led Anthropic, one of the main companies in the field, to build models with their own "constitutions" enshrining ethical values and principles.

But there are at least two reasons why these approaches may be misguided. First, the current safety debate not only (unhelpfully) anthropomorphises AI, it also leads us to focus on the wrong targets. Since any technology can



Daron Acemoglu

The writer is Institute Professor of Economics at MIT, is a co-author (with James A Robinson) of Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty

AT ISSUE IS THE QUESTION OF "ALIGNMENT"—WHETHER AI MODELS PRODUCE RESULTS THAT MATCH THEIR USERS' AND DESIGNERS' OBJECTIVES AND VALUES

be used for good or bad, what ultimately matters is who controls it, what their objectives are, and what kind of regulations they are subjected to.

No amount of safety research would have prevented a car from being used as a weapon at the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017. If we accept the premise that AI systems have their own personalities, we might conclude that our only option is to ensure that they have the right values and constitutions in the abstract. But the premise is false, and the proposed solution would fall far short.

To be sure, the counterargument is that if AGI was ever achieved, it really would matter whether the system was "aligned" with human objectives, because no guardrails would be left to contain the cunning of a superintelligence. But this claim brings us to the second problem with much of the AI safety discussion. Even if we are on the path to AGI (which seems highly unlikely), the most immediate danger would still be misuses of non-superintelligent AI by humans.

Suppose that there is some time (T) in the future (say 2040) when AGI will be invented, and that until this time arrives, AI systems that don't have AGI will still be non-autonomous. (If they were to become self-acting before AGI, let that day be T). Now consider the

situation one year before T. By that point, AI systems will have become highly capable (by dint of being on the cusp of superintelligence), and the question that we would want to ask is: Who is in control right now?

The answer would of course be human agents, either individually or collectively in the form of a government, a consortium, or a corporation. To simplify the discussion, let me refer to the human agents in charge of AI at this point as Corporation X. This company (it could also be more than one company, which might be even worse, as we will see) would be able to use its AI capabilities for any purpose it wants. If it wanted to destroy democracy and enslave people, it could do so. The threat that so many commentators impute to AGI would already have arrived



before AGI.

In fact, the situation would probably be worse than this description, because Corporation X could bring about a similar outcome even if its intention was not to destroy democracy. If its own objectives were not fully aligned with democracy (which is inevitable), democracy could suffer as an unintended consequence (as has been the case with social media).

For example, inequality exceeding some threshold may jeopardise the proper functioning of democracy; but that fact would not stop Corporation X from doing everything it could to enrich itself or its shareholders. Any guardrails built into its AI models to prevent malicious use would not matter, because Corporation X could still

use its technology however it wants.

Likewise, if there were two companies, Corporation X and Corporation Y, that controlled highly capable AI models, either one of them, or both, could still pursue aims that are damaging to social cohesion, democracy and human freedom. (And no, the argument that they would constrain each other is not convincing. If anything, their competition could make them even more ruthless.)

Thus, even if we get what most AI safety researchers want — proper alignment and constraints on AGI — we will not be safe. The implications of this conclusion should be obvious: We need much stronger institutions for reining in the tech companies, and much stronger forms of democratic and civic action to keep governments that control AI accountable. This challenge is quite separate and distinct from addressing biases in AI models or their alignment with human objectives.

Why, then, are we so fixated on the potential behaviour of anthropomorphised AI? Some of it is hype, which helps the tech industry attract more talent and investment. The more that everyone is talking about how a superintelligent AI might act, the more the public will start to think that AGI is imminent.

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sport

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Squash team train in Kuwait ahead of West Asian tourney

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 5

The Oman squash team are training in Kuwait for the forthcoming assignments including the West Asian Championship which will take place in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq at the end of October.

The camp will begin on Sunday and will run until Friday. The squad comprised Salim al Maqbali, Waleed al Neri, Mohammed al Battashi and Mohammed al Tamimi.

The camp aims to enhance technical and physical readiness of the players ahead of the main events. It also acts as an opportunity for the

players to interact with top-seeded players from the Kuwaiti national team and the Kuwaiti clubs. The camp will include various matches and training sessions which is part of the cooperation between Oman Racquet Sports Committee and Kuwait Squash Federation.

Kuwait is one of the top Gulf and Arab teams. The external camp includes several training sessions focusing on technical and skill aspects. These sessions are targeted to develop the players' technical skills and experience beside preparing them for various international tournaments. The camp also includes strategic preparation, instructing players on the

best ways to score more points, how to read opponents' movements and focus on their weaknesses.

Egypt's Ahmed al Khouli, the national squash team head coach, said that this camp would significantly contribute to the preparation of the national team players for upcoming events.

"The camp in Kuwait was selected after a comprehensive technical study. Players will get more experience by interacting with highly ranked Kuwaiti players. The selection of players for this camp was based on their recent local tournament results and their technical and physical levels during the previous training sessions.

I hope the external camp will achieve all the set technical goals."

Waleed al Neri of Masirah Club said that this camp is an opportunity to get trained for upcoming local, regional and international events. "Kuwait is one of the leading Arab countries in squash with a wide range of distinguished players and varying levels of skill. The external warm-up camp will boosting confidence and improve technical skills for upcoming tournaments.

The joint technical and physical training sessions with Kuwait national team players and coaches will provide a great experience for us ahead of the coming assignments."

Former England batsman Thorpe dies aged 55



Graham during Edgbaston practice in 2019. – Reuters

LONDON: Former England batsman and coach Graham Thorpe has died at the age of 55, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced on Monday.

Thorpe won 100 Test caps between 1993 and 2005 and scored 16 centuries during a stellar England career and was regarded as one of the best batters of his generation.

In total he scored 6,744 Test runs for England at an average of 44.66 and also appeared in 82 one-day internationals.

Alongside his international exploits he enjoyed a 17-year spell with his county side Surrey.

After retiring in 2005, he transitioned into coaching, working with the England international teams in various roles between 2010 and 2022.

"There seem to be no appropriate words to describe the deep shock we feel at Graham's death," the ECB said in a statement.

"More than one of England's finest-ever batters, he was a beloved member of the cricket family and revered by fans all over the world.

"His skill was unquestioned, and his abilities and achievements across a 13-year international career brought so much happiness to his teammates and England and Surrey CCC supporters alike.

"Later, as a coach, he guided the best England men's talent to some incredible victories across all formats of the game."

After leaving his role with England following defeat to Australia in the 2021-2022 Ashes series, Thorpe was appointed head coach of Afghanistan.

However, he did not take up the role after the Professional Cricketers' Association revealed in May 2022 Thorpe had fallen seriously ill with an unclear diagnosis.

Tributes from stars past and present have poured in for a player who was often a shining light during a difficult time for the England Test side during the 1990s.— AFP

Hockey goalkeeper coaching course concludes

SPORT REPORTERS
MUSCAT, AUGUST 5

The Oman Hockey Association concluded goalkeeper coaching course on Saturday. It was attended by 15 men and women coaches to train club and national team players in various age groups, under the supervision of Dutch coach Salman Akbar and Pakistan's Muzaffar Abbas.

Madain bin Ahmed Habtha, Vice-President of the OHA,



emphasised the importance of specialised training for goalkeeping coaches, noting that it is part of the Association's plan to develop the performance of national and club team players. Habtha pointed out that goalkeepers play a crucial role in the team, significantly impacting

match outcomes. He praised the participants' interaction in the course and confirmed that the Association will continue organising future training courses to meet the coaches' needs.

Siegfried Aikman, Oman national hockey team coach, highlighted the importance of

the information provided in the course for qualifying coaches, praising the participants' engagement and eagerness to apply the acquired knowledge. Aikman called for adherence to training rules and international regulations to enhance the goalkeeping coaching system in



Oman, affirming the Association's role in the growth and prosperity of Omani hockey.

Akbar, the course instructor, noted the participants' engagement and their high level of technical skills, indicating that the course focused on the essential specifications and skills

that goalkeeping coaches should possess. He added that the course is part of a series of courses to prepare coaches at the local and international levels, highlighting the Association's need for a good number of goalkeeping coaches to form national teams in various age groups.



Aitana Bonmati. — AFP

Spain, US on course for women’s football final showdown

LYON: World Cup holders Spain and four-time gold medallists the United States are on course for a showdown in the Olympic women’s football final with the two heavyweights favourites to win on Tuesday.

Led by reigning Ballon d’Or Aitana Bonmati, Spain face surprise semi-finalists Brazil in Marseille while a rejuvenated USA under new coach Emma Hayes meet Germany in Lyon.

The Americans are the traditional powerhouse of women’s international football and their performances at the Olympics suggest they are back as a force after a disappointing World Cup last year.

Hayes only took over in May and is still getting to know her team but the USA topped their group with three wins from three and edged an impressive Japan after extra time in the quarter-finals, with Trinity Rodman scoring the crucial goal.

They have already beaten Germany in the tournament, and that 4-1 thumping in Marseille in the group stage suggests they should fancy their chances of winning through to the gold medal match in Paris on Saturday.

“We are so confident going into games. That comes from Emma. She believes in us so much,” said the forward Sophia Smith when asked about the impact of the new coach.

Hayes, 47, arrived after over a decade of success at Chelsea and is hoping to lead the USA to a record-extending fifth gold since women’s football was introduced at the Olympics in 1996. They last won the title in 2012.

“I coached Chelsea for 12 years. I am not going to be disappointed at anything this team does because I respect football at the top level, and for us to arrive tactically at the place we have so quickly is

real credit to the players,” the coach said of her new charges.

Germany were gold medallists in 2016, the one Olympics in which the USA did not win any medal in women’s football.

Under Horst Hrubesch, they finished second in their group behind the USA and then edged out reigning Olympic champions Canada on penalties in the quarter-finals.

Goalkeeper Ann-Katrin Berger, who played under Hayes at Chelsea, was the star against Canada as she saved two penalties in the shoot-out before converting the winning kick herself.

“It was a very tough game, but when it went to the shootout, I knew we had a great goalkeeper. It gave us confidence, and she got us the victory,” defender Kathrin Hendrich said.

- Marta ban for Brazil -

Spain are appearing in the Olympic women’s football for the first time but their World Cup triumph last year showed they are currently the most accomplished side in the international game.

However, they were moments away from being eliminated in the quarter-finals by Colombia, as they trailed 2-0 before fighting back to equalise through Irene Paredes deep in injury time. They then won on penalties, with Barcelona’s Bonmati converting the decisive spot-kick.

“We don’t want to leave here. We want to keep our Olympic dream alive. This team has no limits,” declared young attacking star Salma Paralluelo ahead of facing Brazil.

The Brazilians have twice won Olympic silver, in 2004 and 2008, but were not expected to get this far at the Paris Games.

They scraped through their group as a best third-placed side despite a 2-0 defeat by Spain in a game marked by the sending-off of legendary captain Marta.— AFP

ITALY’S ERRANI AND PAOLINI WIN WOMEN’S DOUBLES GOLD

PARIS: Sara Errani and Jasmine Paolini claimed Italy’s first ever Olympic tennis gold medal as they beat Mirra Andreeva and Diana Shnaider 2-6 6-1 (10-7) to win the women’s doubles on Sunday.

Russians Andreeva and Shnaider, who were competing as neutrals, took the opening set but had to settle for silver after the Italian pair fought back.

“(It’s) not easy after the first set, just wanted to do better in the second set. It’s so important.. we gave everything and we got the gold medal,” Paolini said.

“Obviously we were struggling in the first set, in the end we made it great,” Errani added.

Spain’s Cristina Bucsa and Sara Sorribes Tormo beat Czech pair Linda Noskova and Karolina Muchova to win the bronze.

Errani, the 37-year-old former doubles world number one, became the seventh player to complete the career Golden Slam in women’s doubles having won all four majors and the Olympic title.

Errani also became the oldest player to win an Olympic tennis gold, snatching the record that Novak Djokovic, one month her junior, had claimed two hours before by winning the men’s singles final.

It was Italy’s first ever gold medal in an Olympic tennis event, a day after compatriot Lorenzo Musetti defeated Felix Auger-Aliassime to win bronze in the men’s singles.

Italy’s only previous tennis medal at the Olympics came at the 1924 Games in Paris, when Uberto de



Gold medallists Jasmine and Errani bite their medals.— Reuters

Morpurgo won bronze in men’s singles.

Errani and Paolini said they had to settle their nerves to come back from a disappointing first set.

“During the first set we had to slowly find our way into the game,” Errani told reporters.

“It was also physically challenging. It was a lot of nervous tension, a lot of pressure,” added Errani, who had physio for a muscle issue after the seventh game.

The Italian pair, however, quickly got a foothold in the contest, serving better and hitting deeper as they took the second set, before coming out on top in the super tiebreak.

“The second set was a complete change. We went for it at the beginning,” Errani said. “From that

moment on also Jasmine has loosened up and we put more pressure on Andreeva and Shnaider and we found the right approach.

“We also tried more smashes. We didn’t play close to the net. We got into the game, got into the fight and I can say that both I and Jasmine moved a lot better and that did it.”

Andreeva, 17, became the second youngest player in history to win a medal in tennis at the Olympics, after Jennifer Capriati won singles gold in Barcelona 32 years ago at the age of 16 years.

The Russian pair were happy with silver on their Olympic debut.

“We are proud of it. We could do better but first time, we are happy with the result,” Shnaider said.

— Reuters

South Korea’s An, Denmark’s Axelsen clinch gold in singles finals

PARIS: South Korea’s An Se-young beat He Bingjiao of China 21-13 21-16 to capture the badminton women’s singles Olympic gold medal, while Denmark’s Viktor Axelsen defeated Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand, 11-21 11-21, to successfully defend the men’s title.

Upon winning, Axelsen wrapped a Danish flag around himself and did a victory lap before giving his badminton racket to a child in the crowd. Vitidsarn, ranked world number eight, whose silver was Thailand’s first badminton Olympic medal in history and first medal in Paris across all sports.

Malaysia’s Lee Zii Jia bagged the bronze after defeating India’s Lakshya Sen, 13-21 21-16 21-11, at the Port de La Chapelle Arena in Paris on Monday.

Indonesia’s Gregoria Tunjung took the women’s singles bronze by default as her would-be opponent, Spain’s Carolina Marin, was forced to retire midway through her women’s singles semi-final against China’s He on Sunday with what appeared to be a serious knee injury.

“We met in the medical centre after the matches,” Tunjung said, adding that Marin congratulated



Viktor Axelsen celebrates with a Danish national flag.— AFP

her. “Carolina said her condition was very bad.

“I hope she can continue playing badminton.”

An was already the women’s singles world’s number one player and world champion. Her presence on court has been compared to that of China’s Lin Dan, widely thought to be the best men’s singles badminton player of his generation as a two-time Olympic gold medallist and a five-time World champion.

On Monday, An had large bandages strapped around her right

leg, which she injured at the 2023 Asian Games. She had to withdraw during the 2024 India Open in January after causing more damage.

“My injury was very difficult to overcome. At first there was a little bit of a misdiagnosis,” An said, adding by the time they rediagnosed it there was very little time before the Olympics. “My coach helped me through.”

“I always try to dream big and have the confidence that I can achieve that dream,” An said. “My golden age is not here yet because I’m still young - I will be able to show better games to you.”

The 22-year-old An powered through in Paris, however, as her controlled pacing finished off He, with the pair at one point delivering a rally that lasted nearly a minute.

The South Korea fans came to the arena in droves to chant the name of their last hope of a Paris gold medal in badminton.

The country is the sport’s third-most successful at the Olympics after China and Indonesia, medalling at least once in each Games since badminton became an Olympic sport in 1992.

— Reuters

Noah wins 100m gold in closest finish in modern history

PARIS: World champion Noah Lyles roared to victory in 9.79sec to claim gold in a dramatic men's Olympic 100m final in Paris on Sunday.

Lyles won in the closest Olympic 100m finish in modern history as just five thousandths of a second separated him from Jamaica's Kishane Thompson.

Both were given the rounded-up time of 9.79sec but the American's name carried the all-important (.784) to Thompson's (.789.)

It made Lyles the first American, male or female, to win the event since Justin Gatlin took gold in the 2004 Athens Games.

"It's the one I wanted," said Lyles, whose winning time was a personal best. "It's the hard battle, it's the amazing opponents."

"Everybody's healthy, everybody came prepared for the fight and I wanted to prove that I'm the man amongst all of them. I'm the wolf amongst wolves."

Lyles' victory was only confirmed after a photo-finish.

The American said of the wait for the final results: "I went up to Kishane and I was like, 'I'm going to be honest, bro, I think you had that one'."

"And I was fully prepared to see his name pop up and to see my name pop up, I'm like goodness gracious. I'm incredible."

Lyles added: "It's been a rollercoaster, ups and downs."

"I'm usually a guy who likes to come out blazing in all my rounds, especially in the 200m. But the 100m, it's my first time here on the Olympic stage."

NOT 'FRESH ENOUGH'

The relatively unknown Thompson, the fastest man this year with a best of 9.77sec, said he hadn't been "fresh enough" over the final 30 metres.

"I couldn't really see Lyles, I wasn't sure," 23-year-old Thompson said of the photo-finish. "It was that close."

"I'm going to take it and move forward from here," he said. "Everybody loves a winner so I would have loved to win today, but I loved the competition overall."

Lyles' US teammate Fred Kerley took bronze in 9.81sec, just one-hundredth ahead of South African Akani Simbine, who timed 9.82sec.

"I don't feel any frustration because I'm facing the best in the world," said Kerley, the 2022 world champion and Olympic silver medallist over 100m three years ago at the Tokyo Games.

"At the end of the day, not many people can say they came to the Olympic Games," Kerley said. "Whoever came off the best is



Noah Lyles crosses the finish line. – AFP

the best. It's my second time around and I'm going off with a medal."

In an astonishing race, defending champion Marcell Jacobs of Italy was fifth in 9.85sec, Botswana's Letsile Tebogo sixth in 9.86sec, American Kenny Bednarek seventh in 9.88sec and Jamaican Oblique Seville eighth in 9.91sec.

Starting in lane seven, outside Seville and inside Tebogo, Lyles got off to an average start but was soon into his stride pattern.

Head tucked down through to the 40-metre mark, the American opened up, but the whole field pushed him all the way.

As Lyles dipped for the line with Thompson charging alongside him, the crowd erupted and a photo-finish was called before Lyles was confirmed as gold medallist.

TENSE BUILDUP

There was an electric pre-race atmosphere in a 69,000-capacity Stade de France, a light show and booming music keeping the crowd entertained as the sprinters adjusted their starting blocks.

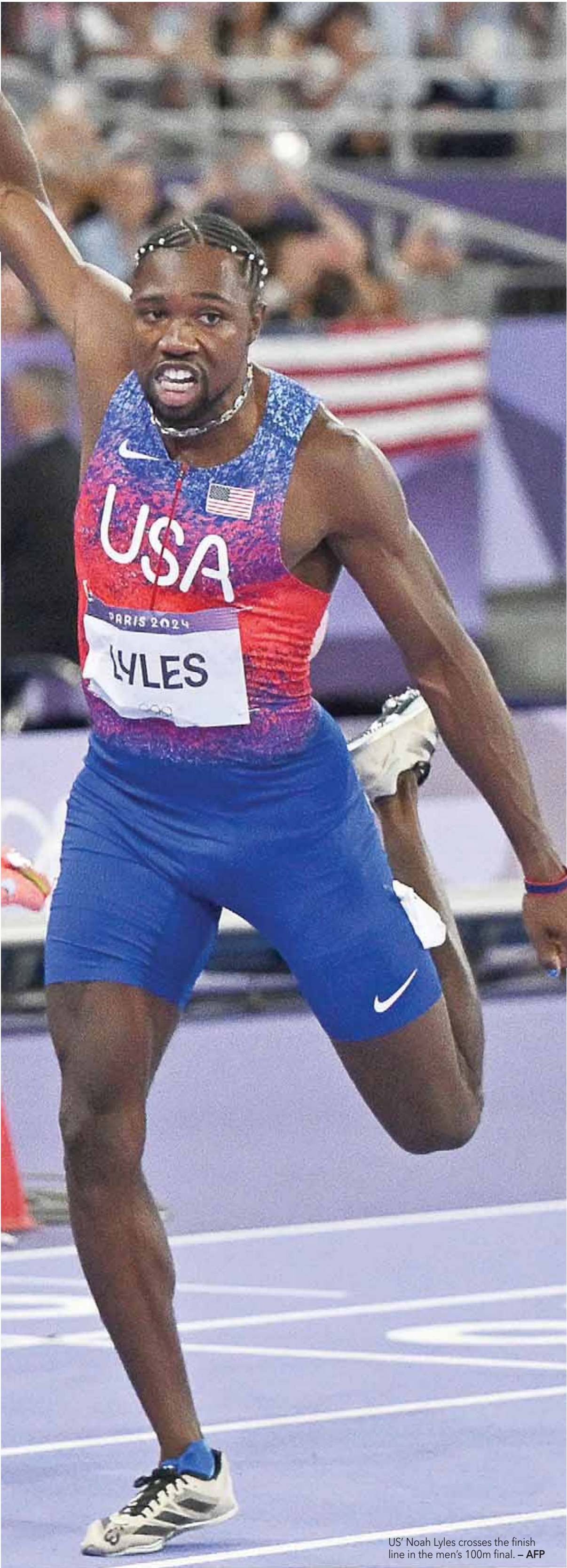
The lights then went off and the sprinters leaving the track to remake their entrance like prize fighters in a colosseum, with each sprinter individually introduced behind an image of their name above their flag.

Thompson roared, hands clenched in fists as his head rolled back. Kerley patted his heart.

Lyles bounded out like a kangaroo, bouncing 20 metres down the track. Jacobs was the definition of cool, raising both arms and calmly walking to his blocks.

Then came the moment where the sprinters set, at the starter's beck and call.

— AFP



US' Noah Lyles crosses the finish line in the men's 100m final. – AFP

Oman unveils draft national policy on AI

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 5

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is seeking public feedback on the draft of its National Artificial Intelligence Policy — a key framework document that aims to ensure optimal utilisation of AI technologies, while safeguarding national interests and individual rights.

In a post, the ministry said the public consultation phase spans the August 2-28, 2024 period. “The ministry aims to develop a comprehensive national policy

for artificial intelligence (AI) that reflects the needs and aspirations of all segments of society.

“This public consultation serves as an open platform for all relevant stakeholders, inviting individuals, experts, academics, decision-makers and stakeholders to contribute their opinions and suggestions on various aspects of the policy.”

Interested stakeholders and members of the public can contribute to the survey through an electronic questionnaire on the ministry's website.

Participants can also refer to the published consultation document by the ministry which contains a draft of the



National Artificial Intelligence Policy
and a National Charter for Artificial
Intelligence Ethics.

According to the ministry, the policy aims to provide a governing framework

for the use and development of AI technologies, while safeguarding national interests and individual rights.

An accompanying National Charter for Artificial Intelligence Ethics, on the other hand, aims to “establish general rules and ethical practices that should be observed when using or developing AI systems to mitigate potential risks and negative impacts, ensuring responsible and safe use.”

Launched in 2021, initiatives aimed at harnessing AI and other advanced technologies represent one of the main pillars of Oman's Digital Economy Programme, which aims to boost the

sector's contribution from 2 per cent currently to 10 per cent of GDP by 2040.

Earlier this year, Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, shared that the volume of investment inflows into the Artificial Intelligence (AI) sector in Oman is expected to reach \$250 million.

Additionally, he shared that due to the growth of start-ups in the sector, Oman has attracted \$78 million (RO 30 million) worth of investments in the field of Artificial Intelligence in 2023.

Enhancing food sector self-sufficiency key goal of Oman Vision 2040



A presentation during the Oman-Arab Investment Forum focused on the food sector landscape in Oman.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 5

The Sultanate of Oman has made major strides in strengthening national food security in line with strategies and targets set out in the country's 2040 Vision, according to prominent food sector visionary Eng Saleh al Shanfari.

Speaking to the *Observer* during the just concluded Oman-Arab Investment Forum, Al Shanfari underlined the key role of Oman Vision 2040 in boosting the agricultural and fisheries sectors.

Al Shanfari began by pointing out that Oman Vision 2040 places a strong emphasis on enhancing exports and reducing imports, thereby improving the trade balance in favour of Oman.

He explained that the goals related to self-sufficiency and food security have begun to materialise clearly in the agricultural and fisheries sectors.

According to the expert, Oman has achieved excellent results in the field of self-sufficiency, especially in the fisheries sector,

OMAN HAS ACHIEVED
EXCELLENT RESULTS IN THE
FIELD OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY,
ESPECIALLY IN THE FISHERIES
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EXPORTS NOW REACHING
MORE THAN 80 COUNTRIES.

with Omani fish exports now reaching more than 80 countries.

Another key goal of the strategy is to provide healthy and safe food for every citizen resident of the country.

He cited in this regard the example of Dhofar Governorate, which receives about one million tourists annually, where abundant and safe food is provided at reasonable prices.

No tourist has complained about a lack of food availability in the governorate, indicating the success of the efforts made, he noted.

Al Shanfari added that Oman has achieved advanced positions in the Global Food Security Index over the past decade.

He attributed this achievement to the significant efforts made by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources,

in addition to the companies affiliated with the Oman Investment Authority, which operate in various agricultural and fisheries production sectors.

Al Shanfari spoke about a number of new projects and factories being established, as well as farms that have begun producing wheat on a large scale.

He mentioned the ongoing cooperation between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning to provide arable land through usufruct contracts, facilitating investors' start-up of agricultural projects.

Al Shanfari concluded his remarks by highlighting the opportunities available to investors in the agricultural and food industries sectors, pointing to successful projects such as A'Saffa Foods, and other fish processing companies.

Dhofar Governorate is a promising area thanks to the presence of a global port and a free zone that provides all the services and opportunities necessary for investors, he stressed.

ABRAJ

ENERGY SERVICES SAOG

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Abraj Energy Services SAOG, I am pleased to present the condensed interim financial statements for the Second quarter of 2024.

The Company is focused on providing services around Oil and Gas Wells, during and post wells

construction. From building a wider service portfolio, Abraj now focuses on strategic top-tier services coupled with strong operational efficiency to realize maximum financial returns and sustainable growth. Abraj continues to benefit from the strength of long-term contracts in generating sufficient cash flow for growth.

HSE:

Abraj HSE performance in Q2 2024 was excellent as there was no Loss Time Incident (LTI), no recordable incident or any other major incident in Q2 2024. All Units have achieved Unit KPI target score in Q2 2024 as per defined criteria. In Q2 2024, a dedicated HSE engagement session conducted with drivers and journey managers to enhance awareness about road safety requirements.

Company Financial Performance

Key Financials of your company: -

- During the six months ending on June 30, 2024, revenue increased by 11.9% compared to the same in 2023, increasing from OMR 69.6 million to OMR 77.9 million.
- During the six months ending on June 30, 2024, the total expenses increased by 6.1% compared to the same period in 2023, rising from OMR 63.5 million to OMR 67.4 million. This increase can be mainly attributed to the increase in Rig Move cost as an additional revenue stream and increase in manpower cost.
- In the period ending on June 30, 2024, the profit after tax increased by 64.8% to OMR 10.7 million from OMR 6.5 million for the same period in 2023.

Segment Performances – Q2 -2024:

Drilling and Workover

Abraj is seeking to increase its regional operations post penetrating the Kuwaiti drilling market with the award of 3 drilling rigs with KGOC which started its operations during the first quarter in 2024. Abraj fleet remained at 25 Drilling rigs with 97% utilization for our drilling rigs and 100% utilization for workover rigs. Our national market share remains at 29% for drilling rigs and becoming the leader and national champion of Oman in the drilling rig market.

Well Services and Others

The company maintains its operations in Well services having 20% market share for the core services and progressively expanding this market share by outperforming service quality and New Technology differentiation being a trusted technical provider for all our customers.

Acknowledgements:

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I take this opportunity to express their sincere and deep gratitude to the vision and wise leadership of the country's leader His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tankar for maintaining the sustainable growth and prosperity of the Omani Economy. Abraj Board also appreciates the valuable support and guidance from the various stakeholders such as Government agencies, Shareholders, Clients, Management, Employees, Bankers, and Suppliers.

Ayad Al Balushi

Chairman of the Board

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder in Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	30 June 2024 (Unaudited) RO'000	31 Dec 2023 (Audited) RO'000
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property and equipment	203,745	191,405
Right-of-use assets	4,079	5,502
Intangible assets	189	231
Deferred tax assets	461	426
Deferred expenses – non-current	81	94
Capex advances	15,625	4,546
Total non-current assets	224,180	202,204
Current assets		
Trade receivables	38,717	39,448
Advances, prepayments, and other receivables	2,396	2,937
Deferred expenses – current	25	25
Inventories	27,724	23,785
Cash and cash equivalents	4,236	8,071
Total current assets	73,098	74,267
Total assets	297,278	276,471
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Capital and reserves		
Share capital	77,020	77,020
Legal reserve	11,785	10,718
Retained earnings	51,315	58,040
Total equity	140,120	145,778
Non-current liabilities		
Term loans – non-current portion	65,444	72,060
Deferred income - non-current portion	1,080	1,094
Deferred tax liabilities	4,190	4,407
Employees' end of services benefits	2,440	2,218
Lease liabilities - non-current portion	2,117	3,565
Total non-current liabilities	75,271	83,344
Current liabilities		
Term loans - current portion	14,270	13,232
Lease liabilities – current	2,234	2,212
Short term loan	17,000	-
Trade payables	32,294	16,401
Other payables	13,207	12,068
Deferred income - current portion	728	762
Income tax payable	2,154	2,674
Total current liabilities	81,887	47,349
Total liabilities	157,158	130,693
Total equity and liabilities	297,278	276,471

CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE (UNAUDITED)

	(Unaudited)			
	Three months ended 30 June		Six months ended 30 June	
	2024	2023	2024	2023
	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
Revenue from contracts with customers	38,682	36,308	77,921	69,647
Cost of sales	(28,833)	(27,981)	(57,887)	(55,111)
Gross profit	9,849	8,327	20,034	14,536
General and administrative expenses	(2,333)	(1,813)	(4,149)	(3,232)
Other expenses	(330)	(443)	(357)	(541)
Other income	-	-	-	14
Expected credit loss reversal on trade receivables	-	-	-	204
Operating profit	7,186	6,071	15,528	10,981
Finance costs	(1,573)	(1,422)	(2,983)	(3,286)
Finance income	38	57	111	101
Net Finance costs	(1,535)	(1,365)	(2,872)	(3,185)
Profit before tax	5,651	4,706	12,656	7,796
Taxation	(931)	(829)	(1,986)	(1,313)
Profit for the period	4,720	3,877	10,670	6,483
Other comprehensive income for the period	-	-	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the period	4,720	3,877	10,670	6,483
Earnings per share				
Basic and diluted earnings per share-Baiza	6.1	5.0	13.9	8.4

OAB introduces Elite Exclusive segment and Visa Elite Exclusive metal card

MUSCAT: Continuing its efforts to reinforce its leading position in delivering unparalleled banking experiences, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently introduced a new segment of premium banking services tailored for elite customers, named “Elite Exclusive”.

This distinguished offering was unveiled during an exclusive ceremony hosted by the bank at the Crowne Plaza Salalah. The event was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, the Governor of Dhofar.

Positioned as the pinnacle of excellence in Oman's banking sector, the new “Elite Exclusive” segment boasts stringent eligibility standards while offering exclusive services and unparalleled benefits.

Customers within this elite group will receive a state-of-the-art metal card, the first of its kind in the market. This card epitomises elegance, durability, and sophistication, serving as a symbol of luxury and providing enriching, exclusive experiences.

Commenting on the launch of this exclusive offering, Khalid al Amri, Chief Retail Banking Officer at OAB, stated: “The introduction of the new segment aligns with the bank's ongoing



efforts to redefine exclusive banking. Clients in this segment expect exceptional care, and their expectations must be not only met but surpassed. Therefore, we have crafted this segment to provide them with special privileges tailored to their lifestyle.

Our primary goal is to deliver the highest levels of excellence in banking and personal services. Being an Elite Exclusive client means receiving unparalleled service locally, regionally and globally.”

Designed to provide an

unparalleled banking experience that defines luxury and exclusivity, the Elite Exclusive segment offers a range of exceptional benefits, including a dedicated relationship manager available around the clock to cater to clients' banking needs, special wealth management services and exclusive insurance coverage, as well as a private deposit box.

Additionally, clients will enjoy exclusive memberships to world-class golf clubs, special invitations to prestigious events and parties, complimentary

chauffeur services, and unlimited premium lounge access to over 1,000 VIP lounges in more than 300 global airports.

Furthermore, clients can indulge in complimentary room upgrades at luxury hotels, inclusive of breakfast and a special \$100 credit for spa and health club services. Membership in this elite segment also grants access to exclusive discounts on villa rentals and premium accommodations, as well as private chef services and more, ensuring a lifestyle of unparalleled luxury and

convenience.

Additionally, the membership offers a plethora of unique benefits, including fine dining experiences at over 40 Michelin-starred restaurants, with guaranteed discounts of up to 50 per cent for an unlimited number of guests. Members also enjoy a 35-per cent discount on car rentals and a 10-per cent discount on flight tickets.

Also, Elite members gain access to the global yacht programme, complete with a credit balance of EUR 5,000.

The exclusive luxury yacht programme available to Elite members includes distinguished voyages with The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection, Ponant, and Regent Seven Seas Cruises.

Members can also take advantage of a complimentary shore tour and receive up to \$250 in onboard credit for themselves and their families, ensuring a truly luxurious and memorable experience.

“Elite Exclusive is the epitome of exclusivity. This segment is not open for application; it is available by invitation only. Membership in this exclusive tier guarantees that one is among the elite, enjoying unparalleled privileges and bespoke services,” Al Amri further stated.

Equip your minors with financial management skills via Dhofar Islamic minor account



MUSCAT: As the school season is approaching; Dhofar Islamic continues to offer innovative banking solutions that meet the various financial requirements of customers throughout the year, with the Minor Savings Account, a Sharia compliant account based on Mudarabah Structure.

The account is designed to empower young individuals and instil positive financial habits from a young age.

The Minor Savings Account offers a comprehensive range of features that provide a strong foundation for a secure financial future.

It brings to fore Dhofar Islamic's commitment to financial literacy, demonstrating that the account isn't just about deposits and withdrawals.

The Minor Savings Account is specially crafted to cater to the unique needs of minors aged between 13 and 18 years, providing them with a safe and accessible platform to manage their funds while learning the essential principles of money management.

With no minimum balance requirement, profit payment with expected rates based on monthly average balance, flexibility in changing withdrawal limits as per the request of the father/ guardian, young account holders enjoy the benefits of an innovative product whilst being assured of monthly financial assistance through social protection programme.

NBO partners with Aster Al Raffah Hospital to offer exclusive health benefits



MUSCAT: In a continuous effort to enhance the benefits for its valued customers, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) is pleased to announce an exclusive partnership with Aster Al Raffah Hospital.

This collaboration brings a range of significant discounts and complimentary services to NBO cardholders, making quality healthcare more accessible across Oman.

From August 1, 2024, all NBO credit cardholders will receive a complimentary annual basic health check-up, designed to promote health and wellness, includes eleven essential tests and consultations that comprehensively overview one's health status.

Abdullah bin Zahrán al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer at NBO commented on the partnership: “We are delighted to collaborate with Aster Al Raffah Hospital to offer these exclusive health benefits to our credit cardholders.

This partnership underscores our commitment to providing value-added services that enhance the well-being of our customers. By making quality healthcare more accessible and affordable, we aim to support our customers in leading healthier lives.”

Shailesh Guntu, Chief Executive Officer at Aster Hospitals and Clinics said: “We are honoured to partner with the National Bank of Oman, marking a significant milestone in our commitment to enhancing healthcare accessibility in Oman.

This collaboration will provide NBO account and credit card holders with special discounts and the option to pay their healthcare bills in instalments through an EMI service, ensuring that quality medical care is within everyone's reach.

Additionally, special discounts will be available for card holders and employees of NBO across all Aster Hospitals and Clinics in Muscat, Sohar and Ibri. Aster Al Raffah Hospital & Clinics, Oman, exemplifies our dedication to delivering world-class healthcare locally, eliminating the need for patients to seek treatment abroad.

With over 16 years of presence in Oman and a legacy of 37 years in healthcare excellence, we are proud to redefine patient experience and clinical excellence in the country. Together, we aim to foster a healthier future for the people of Oman.”

Enjoy some fire gaming at Khareef champions zone

MUSCAT: Want to amp-up your online gaming experience? Are you in Dhofar or planning to travel there soon to escape the summer heat with a quick getaway? Do you want to do something really cool while enjoying the even cooler weather?

If yes, then the Khareef Champions dedicated gaming zone, powered by Ooredoo, is for you! It's on now at Auqad Park in Salalah until the end of August 2024.

The ultimate gaming experience is open to all and for free at the khareef season, Dhofar's



main entertainment venue during the balmy season, and powered by Ooredoo's lightning

fast Fibre network. So when you're ready for some online entertainment, you'll get the best gameplay experience at the Khareef Champions Gaming Zone.

So, join your peers and race, battle, build, and just game on! The khareef season, sponsored by Ooredoo, offers loads of fun experiences, activities, and youth engagement.

There's a little something for everyone planning to enjoy the rainy weather, because in addition to the thrilling gaming event, visitors can enjoy stage shows every Friday.

Chery and athletes unite in Paris: Preview of 5 thrilling activities

MUSCAT: As the eagerly awaited Paris Games approach, Chery is gearing up to join athletes in celebrating this historic event. To mark the occasion, Chery has meticulously planned five major activities designed to infuse the sports festival with even more enthusiasm and vitality.

Paris is set to witness a unique spectacle as Chery showcases its star models, the Tiggo 7 and Tiggo 8, in a grand champion parade.

These vehicles will act as moving emissaries, inviting global audiences to experience Chery's innovative spirit and exceptional craftsmanship.

The parade will traverse Paris's iconic landmarks and renowned attractions, with Chery eager to share this journey with every consumer and continue to deliver unforgettable driving experiences in the future.

Chery will also host a special landmark illumination event worldwide. This initiative extends Chery's brand footprint globally



and builds bridges between different cultures. The event will illuminate landmark buildings or large screens in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iraq, the Philippines and South Africa.

As the event progresses, the spotlight will shift to Paris, where Chery's light will shine on the city's famous landmarks.

This global lighting event aims to share Chery's honour and joy with audiences worldwide and we look forward to witnessing more

remarkable moments at the Paris Games.

On the evening of July 28, Chery will invite loyal customers to join the Paris Brand Night as esteemed Chery Honorary Partners for an elegant and memorable evening at the Perruche restaurant in Paris.

Attendees will enjoy gourmet cuisine and have the opportunity to connect with Chery's senior executives and fellow enthusiasts, sharing vehicle experiences, life insights and future aspirations.

The evening will feature live performances by special guest artists, who will share their creative inspirations and artistic insights.

This event promises to be a celebration of fine dining, art and brand engagement, offering a valuable opportunity to deepen connections with the Chery brand.

Chery is offering owners an exclusive opportunity to experience the atmosphere of the Paris Games.

The company has organised a special on-site viewing event, allowing fortunate owners to witness the excitement and glory of the Games up close.

In Oman, Chery vehicles are distributed by Saud Bahwan Group. For the latest Press Releases, Test Drive requests and more, please visit www.chery.om, www.youtube.com/@OmanChery, www.facebook.com/CheryAutoOman, and www.instagram.com/cheryoman.

Oman could utilise a floating solar farm in Wadi Dayqah Dam for hydrogen generation: Study

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUGUST 5

Green hydrogen is becoming a key solution to reduce carbon emissions and combat climate change. Oman plans to produce a significant amount of green hydrogen by 2030, and one way to achieve this is through floating solar panels at the Wadi Dayqah Dam in the Wilayat of Qurayat.

A recent study looked into how floating solar panels combined with hydrogen storage can generate electricity efficiently.

Using advanced software, researchers from UK's University of Exeter designed a system with 26.57 MW of floating solar panels, a 22 MW hydrogen generator, a 13 MW hydrogen fuel cell, a large hydrogen storage tank, and a 12.4 MW converter.

This setup is expected to produce 65.5 gigawatt-hours (GWh) of electricity and 826,624 kg of green hydrogen annually. While the hydrogen production cost is high at \$29.7 per kg due to the large storage components, the system can power 422 households near the dam with minimal shortages, proving its technical feasibility.



The floating solar installation at Wadi Dayqah Dam saves valuable land for agriculture and other uses, and it reduces water evaporation from the dam, which is a significant benefit.

Switching from fossil fuels to renewable energy is critical for Oman's goal of net-zero emissions by 2050.

This project contributes to this goal by providing 100 per cent renewable electricity through floating solar panels and hydrogen

storage.

The floating solar installation at Wadi Dayqah Dam saves valuable land for agriculture and other uses, and it reduces water evaporation from the dam, which is a significant benefit.

Constructed in 2011, Wadi

Dayqah Dam is presently the country's biggest man-made reservoir with a capacity to hold an estimated 100 million cubic metres.

The floating solar panels use high-efficiency bifacial modules, which perform well due to the

SWITCHING FROM FOSSIL FUELS TO RENEWABLE ENERGY IS CRITICAL FOR OMAN'S GOAL OF NET-ZERO EMISSIONS BY 2050. THIS PROJECT CONTRIBUTES TO THIS GOAL BY PROVIDING 100 PER CENT RENEWABLE ELECTRICITY THROUGH FLOATING SOLAR PANELS AND HYDROGEN STORAGE.

cooling effect of water. However, high temperatures in summer can still affect their performance.

Effective energy storage is crucial for renewable energy, and Oman is particularly interested in green hydrogen technology.

The study showed that the system met all the electricity needs of the targeted households, with only a tiny unmet load of 0.0284 per cent.

Excess electricity, about 0.747 per cent of total production, can be used for site lighting and equipment. The system's green hydrogen production aligns with Oman Vision 2040, highlighting its strategic importance.

The cost of electricity from this system is \$0.97 per kilowatt-hour (kWh), making it economically

viable and competitive. Implementing this floating solar and hydrogen storage system could significantly transform Oman's energy sector. It positions Oman as a leader in renewable energy, attracting international investments and fostering collaborations. The project supports Oman's broader energy strategy to diversify its energy mix, reduce reliance on fossil fuels and enhance energy security.

Solving the problem of solar power intermittency ensures a stable electricity supply, which is crucial for economic growth and better living standards.

For the success of floating solar and hydrogen systems, supportive policies and regulatory frameworks are essential. The Omani government should provide incentives, facilitate financing and streamline approvals.

Policies promoting research, development and public-private partnerships will drive innovation and cost reduction.

Establishing standards for deployment and operation ensures safety, reliability and environmental protection, paving the way for future projects.

NEPALI DELEGATION ON VISIT TO OMAN FOR BCM MEETING

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUGUST 5

A high level Nepali delegation led by Sewa Lamsal, Foreign Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman to hold the first meeting of Bilateral Consultation Mechanism (BCM) between the two countries, which is scheduled to be held on August 7, 2024.

During her stay in Oman, Lamsal is scheduled to hold official meetings and programmes with various ministerial and other government bodies in Muscat before the delegation's return on August 9.

Some of the areas where the discussions will be based on are bilateral relations, cooperation in the field of foreign employment, trade and investment, tourism, energy, among others.

"The delegation will also discuss several pending Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) between Nepal and Oman, pertaining to a diverse spectrum of areas between the two nations," a foreign ministry spokesperson said.

"There is tremendous scope for promoting further cooperation between the two countries in the fields of investment, trade, tourism and human resource utilisation.

Nepal could be a destination country for tourism, trade and investment opportunity for Omani nationals. Both Nepal and Oman should further strengthen their

economic ties in the domain of having their competitive strength," he said.

The team will also explore ways to offer Nepal as a destination of choice for them for investments as it has adopted liberal economic policies since the early 1990s.

The trade between Nepal and Oman is negligible and is in favour of the Sultanate of Oman.

Nepal imported mainly organic compound, plate sheet, film, foil, strip of plastic, motor car and parts of accessories of motor vehicle. Nepal exported mainly carpets, knotted of wool or fine animal hair.

According to Trade and Export Promotion Centre, there is need of enhancing trade relations in the interest of both countries. If explored and pursued, Nepalese tea, vegetables, honey, handicrafts, carpet and pasmina seem to be viable and profitable export items to Oman.

The high level delegation will also explore the possibility of establishing trade linkages, frequent regular meetings and engage in discussion between the two Chambers of Commerce and Industries as well as between businessmen of the two countries.

There are few MoUs existing between Nepal and Oman, MoU on Bilateral Consultations, Visa Exemption for Diplomatic and Official/Service Passports, Air Services, MoU between National Museums and also MoU between Chambers of Commerce and Industries.

Omani-Arab Investment Forum concludes with pledge to strengthen economic ties

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 5

The Omani-Arab Investment Forum concluded here on Monday, August 5, 2024, with the adoption of a communique identifying several decisions and proposals for boosting investments and accomplishing the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

A large number of investors and economic experts from several Arab nations attended the two-day forum.

Dr Nabil Saeed Ghanem, Vice-Chairman of the Organising Committee, said the forum resolved to meet annually in Dhofar Governorate, given its strategic and geographical importance.

The annual forum will also be organised as part of the khareef season events, expanding its appeal and attendance and participation possibilities.

There will be annual sessions



Attendees adopted a communique proposing, among other things, the hosting of future editions of the forum in Dhofar Governorate.

to address subjects relevant to the foundations of Oman Vision 2040, which will help to assess progress and achieve targets.

The next edition will focus on tourism investments, considering the sector's importance in sustaining the national economy and diversifying income streams.

Participants suggested a number of recommendations meant to improve investment and collaboration between Arab nations.

These recommendations included: Speeding up the creation of an air route that connects Yemen and Oman; Quickening the process to

launch a direct flight path between Yemen and Oman to make it easier for travellers and investors to travel; Creating a cooperative bank between Oman and Yemen; Seeking to establish a bank to facilitate and finance investment initiatives between the two nations; Streamlining worker recruitment from Arab nations; and Streamlining investment procedures to increase Oman's appeal as an investment destination.

The Omani-Arab Investment Forum demonstrated a strong desire to further the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and to foster economic cooperation amongst Arab nations.

Future forums will be crucial in promoting investments and attaining sustainable development in Oman and the larger Arab world through the decisions and recommendations made.

UK-Oman trade sees 11.4 per cent rise in Q1 2024

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 5

Trade between the UK and Oman saw an increase over the past year. The latest trade data reveals that total trade between the UK and Oman reached £1.4 billion (approx. RO 690 million) in the four quarters leading up to the end of Q1 2024.

This figure marks an 11.4-per cent increase, or £138 million, compared to the previous year.

Oman is currently ranked



UK exports to Oman totalled £1.0 billion during the four quarters leading up to the end of Q1 2024.

as the UK's 81st largest trading partner, representing 0.1 per cent of the UK's total trade. UK exports to Oman totalled £1.0 billion in the latest data, reflecting a 4.3-per cent increase, or £43 million.

Within this, UK exports in goods amounted to £530 million while services exports were valued at £508 million (48.9 per cent). On the import side, the UK imported £312 million from Oman, a notable increase of 43.8 per cent or £95 million.

The majority of these imports

were goods, totalling £268 million, with services making up £44 million (14.1 per cent).

Comparing this with the full calendar year of 2023, total UK-Oman trade was £1.3 billion, a rise of 11.9 per cent or £139 million.

The UK's exports to Oman increased by 12.8 per cent to £1.1 billion, with goods exports reaching £542 million (51.5 per cent) and services exports at £510 million (48.5 per cent).

UK imports from Oman also grew, reaching £258 million, with

goods making up £232 million (89.9 per cent) and services accounting for £26 million (10.1 per cent).

In terms of market share, the UK held a 2.5-per cent share of the total trade with Oman in 2022, a slight decrease of 0.1 percentage points from the previous year.

For goods alone, the UK's market share was 1.6 per cent, down by 0.2 percentage points, while its share of services increased to 5.5 per cent, up by 0.3 percentage points.

The rise of sustainable consumerism



NAJAH AL RIYAMI

The author is a Media and Communication Master's graduate skilled in diverse writing formats, specialising in storytelling, branding, and in-depth journalism

Our world is always changing; technological advancements and modern developments have led us to a lifestyle very different from that of our ancestors.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs — a concept proposed by American psychologist Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper “A theory of Human Motivation” — is based on the idea that certain needs must be met before individuals can progress up the hierarchy to more complex needs.

Maslow's Pyramid of Needs describes 5 levels, with the lower levels addressing the basic

physiological needs and safety needs (air, food, water, shelter, sleep, clothing, reproduction), the next two addressing social and esteem needs — referred to as psychological needs (personal security, employment, resources, health, family, sense of belonging), and the top two levels addressing self-actualisation needs (respect, self-esteem, freedom).

The rise of consumerism arrived with our climb higher on Maslow's Pyramid of Needs — local farming, local products, expanding to factory manufacturing encompassing international brands and mass products on a larger and cheaper scale. So that we weren't simply

surviving anymore, we were (apparently) ‘thriving’ with an excess of products selling us the things we needed, and also convincing us we needed the things we didn't.

This 20th century brought with it advancements in technologies that have allowed us to do more, buy more, have more, and everything much, much faster than it was before.

But something was amiss. This excess had a downside. Local companies struggled to keep up with large scale competitors, impacting our in-country-value.

Moreover, the implications of over consumerism on our planet were becoming increasingly

evident. So we shifted our mindset to something more mindful.

From Oman's plans to derive at least 30 per cent of renewables by 2030, to the rise of SMEs, and the efforts to reduce our single-use plastic bags, it seems, we are in the next stage of our Maslow's Pyramid of Needs, another step to add onto the peak of this Pyramid - and that is of Sustainability.

To mindfully consider the world outside of us and work together towards establishing a sustainable foundation in our actions, our lifestyles, our societies and our systems.

From renewable energy sources to using sustainable

products, buying local, and implementing slow fashion into our lifestyles; our collective efforts are helping us shape a more sustainable future.

Today, we witness the rise of sustainable consumerism, and move forward with an eye on our Net-Zero targets and our decarbonisation efforts alongside emphasising the eco-friendly, the recycled, the plastic-free, the minimalist approach.

We go for local products; understand the benefits it provides to both our economy and our planet, and make the right choices in our steps towards an increasingly sustainable and greener lifestyle.

Markets are rattled by fears of slowing US growth



DAISUKE WAKABAYASHI

The author is an Asia business correspondent for the New York Times based in Seoul.

A sell-off in markets around the world quickened pace on Monday as investors grew uneasy about signs of a slowing US economy, with stocks tumbling across Asia.

The declines were especially pronounced in Japan, where the Topix index, which includes companies that represent a broad swath of the country's economy, fell more than 10 per cent.

The decline at one point triggered a “circuit breaker” mechanism that halts trading to let markets digest large fluctuations. The Nikkei 225 index, considered the benchmark in Japan, fell as much as 9 per cent.

South Korea's benchmark Kospi index fell more than 5 per cent. Equity markets in Taiwan, Singapore, Australia and Hong Kong were all lower. The declines were expected to continue on Monday in Europe and the United States.

In the market for stock futures, the S&P 500 was down 1.5 per cent and the Nasdaq was more than 2

per cent lower. Stock futures for key indexes in Europe, including Germany's, pointed to declines of about 1 per cent. Bitcoin, a main cryptocurrency, fell more than 10 per cent in another apparent sign of investor anxiety.

The drops followed a US jobs report on Friday that indicated that employers had slowed hiring significantly in July, with unemployment rising to its highest level in nearly three years.

This deepened fears that the economy was cooling and that the Federal Reserve may have waited too long to cut interest rates.

Nomura, the Japanese investment bank, said in a research note on Monday that the “slowing US data causes a growth scare for markets,” and that it has “reignited fears of a faster-than-expected US slowdown.”

Based on the weakness in the jobs report, Goldman Sachs said in a note that it now expects the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates at its next three meetings — a more aggressive timetable for cuts than the investment bank had previously expected.

In Japan, the soft US data only added to the uneasiness of investors. The Topix is down more than 18 per cent from last Wednesday, when the Bank of Japan raised interest rates for only the second time in nearly two decades. A circuit breaker was also triggered for trading in long-term Japanese government bonds and the Nikkei 225. — Reuters



People walk down a street lined with outdoor seating for restaurants in the Little Italy neighbourhood of Manhattan, in New York City. — Reuters

What international tax negotiations should achieve



JOSÉ ANTONIO OCAMPO

The author is a Colombian writer, economist and academic.

In recent decades, the availability of preferential tax regimes and tax havens has deprived governments worldwide of huge amounts of revenue.

According to the EU Tax Observatory, multinational corporations shifted \$1 trillion – the equivalent of 35 per cent of all the profits booked outside their headquarter countries – to tax havens in 2022.

Meanwhile, super-rich individuals faced very low effective tax rates, equivalent to just 0-0.5 per cent of their total collective wealth.

The problem is that, rather than cooperating on taxation, countries have been competing to attract big corporations and wealthy people. Fortunately, steps are now being taken to change this.

The OECD and G20 agreed in 2021 on an Inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting, aimed at limiting tax avoidance, ensuring the coherence of international tax rules, and establishing greater global tax transparency.

But the agreement was far too limited in scope, requiring only very large multinationals to allocate a small share of their global profits to the countries where their customers are located.

And the convention that would implement even this limited requirement has yet to be ratified, with the United States emerging as a key barrier to progress.

The Inclusive Framework also agreed on a low minimum tax rate for multinationals, 15 per cent, well below these countries' current average corporate tax rate of 25 per cent, and lower than the minimum rate proposed by the US, 21 per cent.



The OECD and G20 agreed in 2021 on an Inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting, aimed at limiting tax avoidance, ensuring the coherence of international tax rules, and establishing greater global tax transparency. — Project Syndicate

Yet another flaw in the framework is that signatories would be required to avoid unilateral measures, such as taxes on digital services. Overall, benefits to developing economies were minimal.

Today, however, two initiatives are underway that, while incomplete, represent important improvements on the Inclusive Framework. First, last week in Rio de Janeiro, G20 finance ministers agreed to work together to ensure that ultra-high-net-worth individuals are taxed more effectively.

Brazil made such an agreement – which was also supported by France, South Africa, Spain, and others – a top priority of its G20 presidency.

While the details have yet to be decided, one possible approach – recommended by Gabriel Zucman of the University of California, Berkeley, and of the Independent Commission for the Reform of Corporate Taxation – would be to impose a 2 per cent global wealth tax on the world's billionaires (in US dollar terms). That is roughly 3,000 people.

The second promising initiative is a United Nations framework convention on international tax cooperation, negotiations for which are now underway in New York.

The resolution to negotiate such a convention – spearheaded by the African Union – was overwhelmingly approved by the UN General Assembly last November, with developing economies leading the way.

According to the “zero draft,” released in June, the convention should include commitments on a “fair allocation of taxing rights, including equitable taxation of multinational enterprises,” and “effective taxation of high net-worth individuals.”

It should also ensure that tax measures contribute to addressing environmental challenges, guarantee “transparency and exchange of information for tax purposes,” and enable “effective prevention and resolution of tax disputes.”

How should the final document reflect these commitments? For starters, the convention should reallocate taxation rights fairly among all countries where multinational firms do business, based on the concept of “significant economic presence”: if a company engages in substantial business activity in a country, it should have to pay taxes there.

The convention should also include a 25 per cent global effective minimum tax on multinationals' profits, as well as a tax on capital gains.

And it should introduce minimum standards for the taxation of the richest people globally and each country's wealthiest residents, including anti-avoidance instruments, such as a global minimum income tax.

All countries should agree to tax both wealth and income appropriately. The convention should also include coordinated mechanisms for digital-services taxes and clear criteria for taxing

activities associated with the exploitation of natural resources.

In addition, it should require public, country-by-country reporting of multinationals' economic activities, and enshrine common principles for ensuring the transparency of wealth ownership, including through the creation of a global asset register that identifies beneficial owners of financial and non-financial assets.

Finally, the UN convention should establish a system of governance for international tax cooperation.

To this end, either the UN Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters could be transformed into an intergovernmental organ or a new UN organisation could be created.

Improved regional tax-cooperation processes – supported by a strengthened OECD mechanism for cooperation, African Tax Administration Forum, and Latin American and Caribbean Taxation Platform – are also needed.

By discouraging capital flight, enhancing fiscal and macroeconomic stability, and increasing the resources available to address poverty and inequality, improve public services, and advance climate mitigation and adaptation, such reforms would go a long way toward correcting the economic distortions generated by a handful of CEOs and ultra-wealthy individuals.

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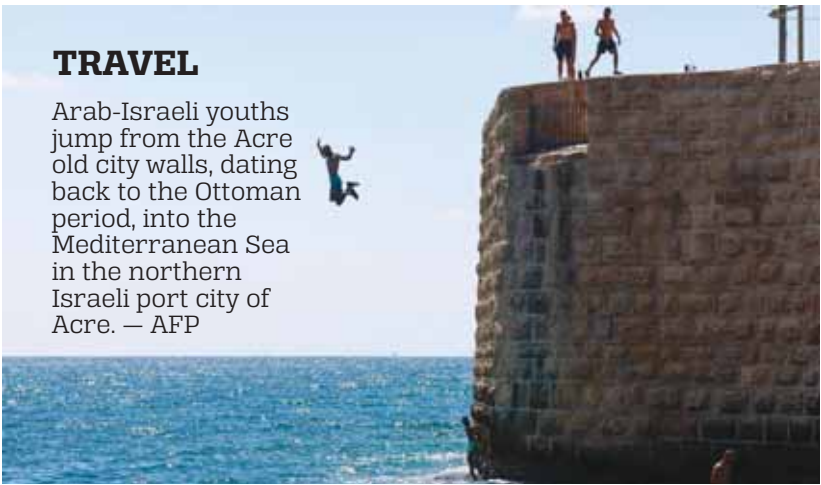
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TRAVEL

Arab-Israeli youths jump from the Acre old city walls, dating back to the Ottoman period, into the Mediterranean Sea in the northern Israeli port city of Acre. — AFP



FILM

Director Kevin Costner [file photo] leaves following the screening of the film "Horizon: An American Saga - Chapter 1" Out of competition at the 77th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, France. — Reuters



CULTURE

An Indonesian performer dressed in costumes parades during the Jember Fashion Carnival, in eastern Java island. The annual parade brings designers creating elaborate and vibrant costumes with motifs of Wayang, Versailles, Rio carnival, zodiac signs and was attended by some 900 participants. — AFP



TREND

Sweden's Henrik Pilerud, inside the Totoro costume, and his team member Victoria Christensen (R) pose during an interview with AFP ahead of a rehearsal before the World Cosplay Championship 2024 during the World Cosplay Summit in Nagoya. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

Visitors walk in the sunflower fields at Kasai Rinkai Park in Tokyo. Japan sweltered through its hottest July since records began 126 years ago. — AFP

art & life

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EXPECT FUN-FILLED ACTIVITIES IN RUMMANA'S SECOND EDITION

The Rummana Festival in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is a vibrant celebration of agricultural tourism focused on pomegranates. In its second edition, the festival offers immersive experiences, workshops and activities for all ages, showcasing Oman's unique climate and agricultural heritage boosting local commerce and tourism and strengthening community ties... **P20**



ENTERTAINMENT

Fans Are Deprived and Willing to Die for MrBeast's \$5 Million

JIMMY DONALDSON is the internet's fairy godmother. Better known online as MrBeast, Donaldson, 26, has made a name for himself as a benevolent YouTube star who has racked up hundreds of millions of subscribers for his provocative brand of philanthropy, like the time he paid for 1,000 people to receive cataract surgery. The resulting eight-minute video was hyper-

bolically titled "1,000 Blind People See for the First Time." Extravagant prizes have become his calling card. He's given away homes, cars, a private island and lots and lots of cash. Usually, it comes with a dark twist: Once, he offered a man \$10,000 a day for each day he was willing to live in a grocery store without leaving. In his most popular video, "\$456,000 Squid Game in Real Life!" 456 people competed in a game show inspired by the dystopian Netflix drama "Squid Game." (In the Netflix show, down-and-out contestants play deadly versions of children's games to win \$38 million.) When in March Donaldson and Amazon MGM Studios announced "Beast Games," a reality competition show in the mold of MrBeast's popular videos, thousands of people jumped at the chance, posting on Reddit threads about the application process and waiting hopefully to be accepted. The prize: \$5 million. Familiar with MrBeast's content and with the lengths to which those who appear in his videos must go in order to win, many expected outlandish and even potentially risky challenges. During an intake process this year, several contestants told The New York Times that they had been asked whether they



would be willing to be buried alive or travel to outer space. One contestant recalled being asked if she would be able to swim to shore if thrown overboard from a boat. "I understand that such activities may cause me death, illness, or serious bodily injury, including, but not limited to exhaustion,

dehydration, overexertion, burns, and heat stroke," read a line in a contract, reviewed by the Times, that applicants were required to sign. (Such language is commonplace in reality television contracts.) What they did not expect, however, were the more mundane yet potentially danger-

ous inconveniences that they said had befallen them during the competition. Speaking with the Times on the condition of anonymity due to nondisclosure agreements, over a dozen people who participated in the first instalment of "Beast Games" said that they had not received adequate food or medical care and that some competitors had suffered injuries from the physical challenges. (The event was being filmed for Donaldson's YouTube channel to select contestants to participate in the Amazon MGM show later this summer.) Some contestants left the competition arena on stretchers, a contestant said, though it was unclear if any of those contestants had faced serious medical conditions. Another described watching fellow contestants vomiting and appearing to pass out. There were several hospitalisations. In a text message, a spokesperson for MrBeast said the shoot "was unfortunately complicated by the CrowdStrike incident, extreme weather and other unexpected logistical and communications issues." The spokesperson said MrBeast had started a formal review and had "taken steps to ensure that we learn from this experience." — NYT

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LIFESTYLE



Shaping Uzbekistan's Literary Landscape

BY SIROJIDDIN SAYYID

IN TODAY'S NEW UZBEKISTAN, a lot of attention is paid to the development of reading culture and book publishing. As the head of our state says, "There will be no break in education," in every meeting with representatives of the intellectuals, culture, literature and art, in every historical speech that sounded like an appeal to our people, he paid special attention to the issue of studying and gaining knowledge about the fundamentals world civilisation, the achievements of modern world science. He never gets tired of emphasising the words "knowledge, knowledge, knowledge" over and over again.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev: "Each country in the world, each nation is powerful primarily with its intellectual potential and high spirituality. It is not for nothing that he said that the source of such mighty power is the great discovery of human thinking - books and readers.

Decree of the President of Uzbekistan dated January 12, 2017 "On the establishment of a commission on the development of the system of printing and distribution of book products, the promotion of book reading and reading culture", The decision of September 13, 2017 "On the programme of comprehensive measures to develop the system of publication and distribution of book products, increase and promote book reading and reading culture" together with the decision "On additional measures for the further development of the publishing and printing industry". It is well known that great work has been done on the decisions "On further improvement of information-library services to the residents of the Republic of Uzbekistan".

On December 14, 2020, the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On approval of the national programme for the development and support of reading culture in 2020-2025" was adopted.

The implementation of this national programme has shown positive results.

The fourth initiative put forward by our president—to raise the spirituality of young people, and widely promote reading among them—is serious practical work being carried out in our country. Young people, especially teenagers and children, are widely participating in reading contests.

Members of the Writers' Union of Uzbekistan actively participate in events dedicated to book reading and the development of reading. The Children's and Adolescent Creative Council operates under the association, and master classes are regularly held by well-known poets and writers in all schools and higher and secondary educational institutions in our country.

In April-May of this year, in order to attract students and pupils of all higher educational institutions and general education schools in our country to read books, to raise the level of artistic literacy, and to educate them in the spirit of patriotism and concern for the future of our country as part of the "Sharing Enlightenment" project, 156 famous artists held meetings with writers and educational events in 202 higher educational institutions and 606 secondary schools, under their auspices. At these events, 150 works of art were recommended for reading, and films and performances were shown.

During 2020-2023, the Writers' Union of Uzbekistan published 403 books in the fields of prose, poetry, playwriting, children's literature, literary studies, and artistic translation. Over the past years, our poets, writers and translators prepared 100-volume "Masterpieces of Russian Literature" and 100-volume "Masterpieces of Turkish Literature" for publication. This great project was supported by the Head of State, published and distributed to the regions.

At this point, it should be noted that the 16-volume set of books entitled "Masterpieces of Karakalpak Literature" was prepared for publication and submitted to the press by the Writers' Union of Uzbekistan.

Within the framework of the "Book campaign" project, in the first quarter of 2023, 4,679 books were sent to higher education institutions, and general education schools, 14,800 books to the provinces, 50 books to the penal colony, 950 to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Spirituality, Information and Library Centers, 500 to the State Security Service, 7,267 to event participants, book authors, 461 to newspapers and creative houses, 300 to Uzbekistan-Kyrgyz Friendship Society, 350 to neighbourhoods, 134 to the Office of Muslims, More than 30 thousand 791 books were distributed indiscriminately to Uzbekistan's "Veteran" Association of Combatants, Veterans, and disabled people, 500 books to Halq Bank, and 600 books to children's camp. To date, more than 1 million books have been distributed in four years.

At the moment, the 100-volume set of books "Masterpieces of World Children's Literature" is being prepared for publication by the Writers' Union of Uzbekistan.

In 2020-2023, the first books of 87 young authors were published in tens of thousands of copies each in the "My First Book" project by the Writers' Union of Uzbekistan, and presentation events were held. The books were freely distributed to higher education institutions, general education schools, and military units.

All these are aimed primarily at the development of reading among young people, children and adolescents. Publication of books and promotion of book reading will be continued consistently.

The writer is Chairman of the Writers' Union of Uzbekistan.

TRANSFORMATIVE HOBBY: GOING FOR GOLD AT JAPAN'S WORLD COSPLAY SUMMIT

IT TAKES INTENSE dedication, hours of prep and a whole lot of sewing, dressing up as Japanese characters may not be an Olympic sport, but these competitors are at the top of their game.

Teams from 36 countries and regions faced off in central Japan



on Saturday, having faithfully recreated the elaborate outfits, colourful hairstyles and all-important attitude of their chosen anime, manga and video game stars.

The championship is part of the World Cosplay Summit in Nagoya, a three-day event that draws thousands of fans -- many keen to show off their own costumes.

"People really commit to cosplay competitions," said Lettie Shiels from Britain, who won last year's contest with her teammate

Claudia Maw.

"We're not just talking about weekends and evenings -- I probably averaged about four hours' sleep for a good number of months," she said.

The pair, who go by the stage names Tsupo and Clood, met in

cosplay circles over a decade ago and have seen their hobby transform from a crafty, DIY subculture into a global phenomenon.

Perfecting self-taught skills from make-up artistry to prosthetics, dressmaking and prop design is a key part of cosplay, a combination of the words "costume" and "play".

In Nagoya, contestants are judged on the accuracy and quality of their costumes.

"They go pretty hard on that. You have a reference picture, and

everything has to be exactly the same. If anything's missing, you'll have points docked," Shiels explained.

Then they must perform a two-and-a-half minute skit in character, which former champions Tsupo and Clood have been invited back to Japan to judge.

"I want to feel immersed. I want to feel like they love the source material," which will shine through in the choreography, acting and visual effects, Shiels said.

SMILING INSIDE

Braving the mid-summer heat and humidity, crowds of Japanese and international cosplay enthusiasts throng the city centre for the annual event, which was first held in 2003.

Characters from top manga comics such as "Naruto" and "Slam Dunk" pose for photos next

tional flights.

Each team is picked at national heats, similar to Eurovision, and this year cosplayers have travelled from places including France, South Africa, India, Mongolia and Thailand.

In one of the shared dressing rooms, Irina Tsapreva of Bulgaria, dressed as a character from "Mononoke", is busy affixing realistic looking pointy ears to her partner.

"I love many things about cosplay. First of all, I have always loved carnivals and dressing up, so this is like a holiday for me," said Tsapreva.

She has a master's degree in theatre costume design, which helps when embroidering her costume with silk and creating everything else from scratch, including assembling traditional wooden Japanese shoes.

However, many other competitors have varied day jobs, from kindergarten teachers to healthcare innovation workers.

Cosplay began as a hobby but



to others in full-body get-ups, including the fantastical mechanical fighters from "Gundam".

There are some ground rules: gore such as bloody wounds and bruises is forbidden, as well as costumes that show too much skin or underwear, and any real-life uniforms.

Behind the scenes ahead of the performance round, the pressure is on for the national teams, each formed of two competitors, who have squeezed all their homemade gear on to interna-



EXPECT FUN-FILLED ACTIVITIES IN RUMMANA'S SECOND EDITION

BY ZUWAINA AL SULIMANI

The second season of the Rummana Event in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is a vibrant celebration of agricultural tourism, offering unique interactive experiences to guests. With a special focus on cultivating pomegranates and set against the breathtaking backdrop of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, known for its unique geographical features and mild climate, the festival offers an unforgettable experience unlike any other in the region.

Globally, countries like Iran, India, Spain, Türkiye, the US and Afghanistan are renowned for their pomegranate production. Oman is emerging as a destination for pomegranates due to its unique climate, particularly in regions like Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, which provides ideal growing conditions.

The harvest of pomegranates in Oman usually begins in September and the visitors to the festival will have an immersive experience of how the fruits are harvested and try them. This hands-on involvement offers a rare glimpse into the agricultural traditions that define the local culture, making it a highlight of the event.

Building upon the success of last year's event, Rummana Festival offers a suite of interactive activities and workshops tailored for children and youth. These sessions educate participants on the nuances of pomegranate cultivation and harvesting techniques, underscoring the fruit's nutritional benefits and fostering a deeper appreciation for agricultural practices. This educational focus not only enriches the participants' knowledge but also strengthens community ties to agriculture and its significance.

In addition, the event serves as a bustling marketplace, empowering local farmers by providing them with a direct channel to sell their produce. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) also benefit from showcasing their products and invigorating the local economy. The festival's economic impact is multifaceted, boosting tourism, increasing farmers' sales and encouraging local commerce. Seasonal job opportunities also arise, further supporting the community.

Last year's success resulted in the festival being extended to October, with hun-

dreds of visitors coming every week enthralled not just by the pomegranate trees and fruits but by the series of activities specially curated for the event.

This season, highlights include guided tours of lush pomegranate fields and the opportunity to pick the fruit during the September harvest. For families, there are engaging recreational activities such as go-kart tracks and a mini zoo. A vibrant souvenir market and dedicated spaces for small and medium enterprises showcase local crafts and products. With a range of food and beverage options, the event offers something for everyone. Tailored entertainment and workshops for children make this an ideal family destination, ensuring a memorable experience for all ages.

Looking to the future, plans are underway to expand the event, incorporating more activities and increasing the participation of farmers and local businesses. A strategic agreement between Janaen Company and Teepee Company aims to enhance the agritourism experiences at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, promoting the region year-round as a premier tourist, agricultural and cultural destination. This partnership will see the development and commercial marketing of Janaen farms alongside workshops designed to pass on agricultural knowledge to the younger generation.

The Rummana Festival positions Jabal Akhdhar as a standout destination for agritourism, drawing visitors from across Oman and beyond. The organisers have successfully navigated challenges such as coordinating with various agencies and ensuring public safety through meticulous planning and collaboration with local partners. Weather fluctuations present another hurdle, yet the event's past successes—such as a local farmer who significantly increased his pomegranate sales—demonstrate the festival's positive impact on the community. Similarly, a small enterprise expanded its reach and product demand through event participation.

Stay updated with the latest news and participation details through the Rummana Festival's social media platforms: @rummana.om, where you can follow their journey and join in the celebration of Oman's agricultural heritage.

