

HM greets Vietnam President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr To Lam of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Dr To Lam and the people of his country.

SUNRISE - 05:49 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:32 AM

DHUHR - 12:12 PM

ASR - 03:39 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:29 PM

ISHA - 07:41 PM



P12

CHELSEA HELD BY PALACE AS NEWCASTLE SINK SPURS

P15

DEME PROGRESSES CERTIFICATION PILOT AT HYPORT DUQM PROJECT IN OMAN

P20

THE TERRIFYING YET AWE-INSPIRING SIDE OF OMAN'S NATURE

MUSCAT

MERGER OF KEY FOOD ENTITIES

The Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has initiated the process of merging the activities of Oman Food Investment Holding Company (Nitaj) and Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) into a single business entity. This move is part of efforts to enhance the food security sector in the Sultanate of Oman and aligns with OIA's mission to maximise efficiency and optimise spending in this vital sector, based on a clear and unified vision. It is a significant step towards ensuring improved performance, high-quality products, cost efficiency, effective decision-making and alignment with the national priorities of Oman Vision 2040.

DETAILS ON P13

BACK TO SCHOOL

Around 811,679 students returned to schools across the Sultanate of Oman on Sunday to begin the new academic year 2024-2025. The Sultanate of Oman, through its Oman Vision 2040, aims to prioritise citizenship, identity, heritage and national culture, ensuring that society takes pride in its identity, culture and citizenship.

DETAILS ON P4

NO FOREIGN INVESTORS IN 28 ACTIVITIES

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has issued a ministerial decision amending certain provisions of Ministerial Decision No 209/2020 by updating the list of activities in which foreign investment is prohibited. The specified business activities in the decision are now exclusive to Omani investors only. This decision aligns with Article 14 of the Foreign Capital Investment Law, issued under Royal Decree No 50/2019, which stipulates that "a list of activities in which foreign investment is prohibited shall be compiled through a decision to be issued by the minister."

SEE P13

Asna is now a deep depression

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

The latest satellite imagery and analysis from the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre indicate that tropical storm Asna has downgraded to a deep tropical depression, with its centre currently located 220 km off the coast of the Sultanate of Oman (Ras Al Hadd). The wind speed around the centre ranges between 28 and 33 knots.

The centre predicts that the weather system will further downgrade to a tropical depression over the next 12 hours. The governorates of Muscat, Al Batinah South and Al Sharqiyah South have witnessed rising waves of between 3 to 5 metres, with seawater extending into low-lying coastal areas.

A meteorologist at the Oman Met Office said, "The rain clouds are about 70 km from Oman's coast. Light rain is expected in the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South, but nothing is impossible. The depression is expected to move towards the southwest, so the Arabian Sea coasts will be rough for the next two days."

Initiatives to cut waiting time for health services

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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The Ministry of Health, through Khoula and Al Nahda Hospitals, will now introduce evening clinics in certain areas and offer services during weekends to reduce delays for surgeries as part of initiatives aimed at shortening the waiting period for operations.

The initiatives were launched on Sunday at Khoula Hospital by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, and Dr Rashid bin Mohammed al Alawi, Director-General at Khoula Hospital, who, along with other team members, introduced eight initiatives.

Six of the initiatives are primarily surgical, said Dr Hamdoon al Numani, Assistant Director at Al Nahda Hospital. According to him, these include performing 1,000 knee replacement surgeries for elderly patients suffering from knee issues and 1,500 cataract surgeries.



Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, launching the initiatives.

He said, "The health initiatives include conducting 12,000 MRI scans at Khoula Hospital over the next year. This will involve performing 45 to 50 scans daily during weekdays and 20 scans on weekends, amounting to 1,000 MRI scans each month. The aim is to reduce the waiting time for MRI appointments to less than four weeks during this initiative, compared to the up to 16 months experienced in 2021 and 2022."

One of the initiatives announced is the reduction of waiting lists for endoscopies.

This involves expanding the endoscopy unit at both Khoula Hospital and Al Nahda Hospital by increasing the number of rooms from one to three, thereby shortening the waiting period from one year to two months. The second phase of this initiative aims to further reduce waiting time to four weeks for routine appointments. The endoscopy unit at Al Nahda Hospital will be activated to support this effort.

Furthermore, the initiatives include performing 1,000 tonsil and adenoid removal surgeries within a year. This will involve conducting 83 surgeries each month, with the activation of the operating rooms in the Day Care Building at Khoula Hospital to facilitate these procedures.

The initiatives also include performing 1,000 knee replacement surgeries, with 27 surgeries to be conducted per week and the number of weekly appointments gradually increased.

TURN TO P2





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ASNA: HIGH TIDAL WAVES IN MUSCAT

Oman Meteorology has issued a warning about high sea waves along most of the coasts of the Sultanate of Oman, with waves measuring between 3 to 5 metres. High tidal waves were reported by visitors to the Muttrah Waterfront in Muscat on Sunday. The Royal Oman Police has restricted movement in the area as a precautionary measure. It urged everyone to take precautions, avoid going to the sea and refrain from engaging in marine activities. The sea state will be moderate in coastal areas around the Sea of Oman but rough along those facing the Arabian Sea, particularly in the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South and Al Wusta.



‘Parents have crucial role in safeguarding children’

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

In light of the inclement weather prevailing in the Sultanate of Oman as Cyclone Asna is set to make landfall, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) has cautioned all citizens and expatriates to be more vigilant, particularly with regard to the safety of their children, to prevent drowning incidents.

Last week, two children died

following a drowning incident in the Wilayat of Ibri and such incidents have become more common, especially during adverse weather conditions and ensuing flash floods.

“Parents have a crucial role to play in safeguarding their children from drowning, ensuring they are under constant supervision during adverse weather conditions, and not allowing them to play near bodies of water,” a CDAA spokesperson said.

In Oman, mortality from drowning reached 211 cases, or 1.42 per cent of total deaths, with an age-adjusted death rate of 4.91 per 100,000 of the population, ranking Oman 26th in the world. More than 500 drowning incidents were reported in Oman in a given year, the report revealed.

The water rescue teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) respond to nearly 600 calls of drowning incidents during rainy periods.

Natural water bodies can be dangerous if proper care and attention are not exercised by adults when children are near them, according to the CDAA.

Mostly children, males and individuals with increased access to water are at high risk of drowning. Carelessness during rainy periods, inattention to warning signs near water tourism spots, lakes, ponds, swimming pools, or the sea and leaving children unattended at pools are major factors

contributing to drowning incidents in the country, the report noted.

CDAA statistics show that the main causes of drowning deaths include crossing running wadis, swimming in undesignated areas such as dams, water channels and waterlogged areas, leaving children unattended near water and not following safety instructions.

“By law, crossing wadis and low-lying areas despite warnings is a punishable offence and can

have serious repercussions,” the spokesperson added.

In recent years, 12 people lost their lives on the Salalah road, a drowning incident occurred in Wadi Darbat, three family members lost their lives on Al Jabal Al Akhdher. In another incident, two individuals lost their lives last year at Al Mughsail beach after losing control while taking selfies and falling into the sea. Another person recently lost their life in the Wilayat of Barka.

Initiatives to reduce waiting for health services

FROM P1

The goal is to reduce the waiting time from 700 days to 120 days during the initiative and to include weekends for performing these surgeries.

Additionally, the initiatives involve carrying out 1,500 cataract surgeries within a year. This includes 1,000 surgeries at Al Nahda Hospital and 500 additional surgeries at Khoula Hospital in the Day Care Building. The procedures will be scheduled with an average of 8 cases per day, spread between morning and afternoon sessions, with the aim of reducing waiting lists by 50 per cent.

Challenging medical cases from regional hospitals will be referred to Khoula and Al Nahda Hospitals.

Cataracts are the leading cause of blindness in Oman and worldwide. Cataracts are a reversible

condition because patients regain full vision after surgery.

“The number one operation in all eye departments around the world is cataract surgery. Today, we aim to increase the number of cataract surgeries performed at Al Nahda Hospital from 1,000 to 1,500 per year. This will significantly reduce the waiting time,” said Dr Haitham al Mahrrouqi, Senior Specialist in Cornea, Cataract, and Refractive Surgery. Among the initiatives launched by the Ministry of Health is the activation of the evening clinic for the Dentistry and Oral, Maxillofacial Surgery Department at Al Nahda Hospital over the next three months. More than 900 patients will be treated during its implementation, reducing the waiting time for emergency cases to a maximum of two weeks and for routine appointments to less than six weeks.

Workshop highlights food safety, public health

SALALAH: A Health Control Workshop held in Salalah, addressing critical issues related to food safety and inspection, concluded its activities last week at the Rotana Salalah Resort. The workshop was organised by the Ministry of Interior in cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the municipalities of Muscat and Dhofar governorates.

Specialists from Muscat Municipality presented several working papers on topics such as food safety concepts, spoilage detection, foodborne diseases, and the importance



Workshop highlights food safety and public health

of health inspections in the food industry. The sessions also covered the activities of street vendors and mobile cafes, the impact of pesticides on public

health, the application of the Lean methodology in food safety, and the HACCP system.

Ali bin Saeed al Hammadi, Director-General of

Administrative and Financial Affairs at the Ministry of Interior, noted that the workshop was conducted in line with the GCC countries’ goals to achieve coordination and integration in various fields, particularly in municipal work. The workshop aimed to exchange expertise and share modern experiences, furthering the implementation of decisions made by the GCC Ministers of Municipal Affairs at their 25th meeting in September 2022 in Saudi Arabia. The workshop concluded with an award ceremony to honour the participants.

— ONA

Arabian Horse Beauty Championship 2024 crowns winners in Dhofar

MIRBAT: The Dhofar National Arabian Horse Beauty Championship 2024 culminated on Saturday in the Wilayat of Mirbat under the esteemed auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. The event saw the participation of over 50 horses owned by local breeders.

The championship results were as follows:

One-Year-Old Fillies Category:

1st Place: ‘Ayla DS’ owned by Dhabia al Busaidy

2nd Place: ‘Aliya Jamran’ owned by Shaikha Fawzia al Mukhaini

3rd Place: ‘Qatouf ARSI’ owned by the Royal Cavalry

Fillies Category:

1st Place: ‘Al Qithara RC’ owned by the Royal Cavalry

2nd Place: ‘Mazaya RC’ owned by the Royal Cavalry

3rd Place: ‘Farids Jahira’ owned by Sultan al Farsi

One-Year-Old Colts Category:

1st Place: ‘Zahi DS’ owned by Omar al Harrasi

2nd Place: ‘Shaheer RC’ owned by the Royal Cavalry

3rd Place: ‘Mutabahi Al Batin’ owned by Raqiya al Zaabi

Colts Category:

1st Place: ‘Abha Ghazal’ owned by Dr Hilal al Kharousi

2nd Place: ‘Mushir Granada’ owned by Khalid al Kindi

3rd Place: ‘Anbar Al Bustan’

owned by Munther

Mares Category:

1st Place: ‘Pristina LD’ owned by the Royal Cavalry

2nd Place: ‘Alila RC’ owned by the Royal Cavalry

3rd Place: ‘Princess Eliha’ owned by the Royal Cavalry

Stallions Category:

1st Place: ‘Shraim RC’ owned by the Royal Cavalry

2nd Place: ‘Labeeb RC’ owned by the Royal Cavalry

3rd Place: ‘Prestige RC’ owned by the Royal Cavalry

The event concluded with a ceremony honouring the sponsors of the Dhofar National Arabian Horse Beauty Championship. — ONA



The Dhofar Arabian Horse Beauty Championship was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.





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Smart cities conference spotlights urban development

SALALAH: The Smart Cities Conference, organised by the Omani Society of Engineers, in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, and in partnership with Dhofar Municipality, commenced on Sunday in Salalah. The two-day event brings together a diverse group of engineers, designers, and industry experts.

Eng Fouad bin Abdullah al Kindi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Society of Engineers, opened the conference with a keynote address. He emphasised that this year's session focuses on the concepts, trends, and future visions of smart cities, urban development, and infrastructure sustainability within Oman, particularly in Dhofar Governorate.

Al Kindi highlighted that the conference aims to showcase the



The Smart Cities Conference brings together engineers, designers, and industry experts



latest technologies and techniques that enhance urban life, sustainability, and policies that support sustainable urban growth through smart city initiatives and projects.

The first day featured a visual presentation on sustainable smart cities and the presentation of six working papers covering flexible and sustainable transportation systems in smart cities, their

construction map in Oman, green buildings, and strategies for integrating comprehensive smart cities into the urban ecosystem of the Sultanate of Oman. A dialogue session followed,



discussing emerging technologies in sustainable smart cities. It reviewed global experiences in developing smart cities and establishing infrastructures aligned with the latest

technologies and practices, with an emphasis on sustainability and environmental conservation. The Sustainable Smart Cities Conference is part of the third edition of the Salalah Engineering Forum. The event aims to facilitate the exchange of experiences and knowledge among participants and explore the latest methods for developing sustainable smart cities. It also seeks to strengthen partnerships between government, academic, and private sector institutions. Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, inaugurated the conference, attended by numerous officials, experts, and specialists in engineering, planning, and innovation from Oman and beyond.

— ONA

Media coverage propels Dhofar to global spotlight

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 1

The Khareef Dhofar Season 2024 has been a standout success, marked by comprehensive media coverage that captured the essence of Dhofar's natural beauty and cultural richness. Dr Mohammed al Shashai, who heads the Directorate General of Media in Dhofar Governorate, played a crucial role in ensuring that the governorate's unique offerings were effectively communicated to both local and global audiences.

Throughout the season, media outlets across print, radio, television, and digital platforms collaborated to showcase Dhofar's diverse landscapes, cultural events, and vibrant community life. The coverage was instrumental in portraying Dhofar as a prime tourist destination, enhancing its reputation on both national and international levels.

Key contributors included media professionals who exhibited outstanding dedication, ensuring that every aspect of the khareef season was covered with accuracy and depth. Their work provided audiences with a vivid portrayal of Dhofar's scenic beauty and cultural festivities, significantly broadening the reach and impact of the event.

Private media channels too played a vital role in disseminating timely and engaging content,



Media professionals were instrumental in portraying Dhofar as a prime tourist destination

helping to amplify the season's visibility. Their contributions were crucial in maintaining the momentum of coverage throughout the khareef season.

The involvement of international journalists added significant value, bringing a global perspective to the coverage. Their participation not only enriched the content but also extended Dhofar's appeal to international audiences, enhancing the region's global profile.

Likewise, influencers from Oman and abroad played a pivotal role in the digital promotion of the khareef season. Through creative content on social platforms, they effectively showcased Dhofar's beauty to a vast audience, generating widespread interest and engagement.

The logistical support provided by local authorities was integral to the success of the media coverage. Their efforts ensured that media teams could operate smoothly,

overcoming any logistical challenges and maintaining high standards of reporting.

While the media coverage was largely successful, some challenges were encountered, particularly in accessing remote locations. These issues were swiftly addressed through coordinated efforts between media teams and local authorities, ensuring uninterrupted coverage and the delivery of high-quality content.

The media success of the Khareef Dhofar Season 2024 was a testament to the collaborative efforts of all parties involved. From dedicated media professionals to the unwavering support of local authorities, every contribution was vital in showcasing Dhofar as a leading tourist and cultural destination.

Dr Mohammed thanked everyone who played a role in this success.

He emphasised that the coverage would not have reached this level of excellence without the dedicated and tireless work of the media teams spread across different sites in the governorate.

These teams succeeded in showcasing various aspects of khareef, from the breathtaking natural landscapes to the cultural and social activities hosted in Dhofar during this period.



Winners of top performers in the milking competition were honoured

Dhofar camel beauty contest concludes

SALALAH: The Dhofar Camel Festival concluded on Saturday in the Wilayat of Salalah. The festival was organised by the Salalah Wali's Office in collaboration with the Oman Camel Racing Federation and Dhofar Municipality. The festival was held over for 17 days.

The event featured various competitions, including Omani camel races across categories such as the Majahim, Dharib, Hajaj, Laqaya, Jadha Thanaya, Haul, and Hairan. The festival also

honoured the winners of these races, along with the top performers in the milking competition, and recognised the contributions of supporting entities that played a role in the festival's success.

The festival aims to preserve Oman's national identity, heritage, and culture, ensuring the sustainability of traditional practices. It also encourages Omani society to invest in these cultural legacies, which hold significant historical and cultural value for camel owners in Oman.

— ONA

Scout camp empowers future leaders

SALALAH: The 14th Scout Camp for Scouts of Universities and Higher Education Institutions in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries concluded on Thursday in Salalah. Held under the theme 'Inspiration and Empowerment,' the camp was hosted by the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Dhofar Governorate.

The camp aimed to equip GCC university students with essential knowledge, skills, and leadership abilities, fostering unity and solidarity while highlighting the capabilities of scouts from higher education institutions.

Dr Ahmed bin Ali al Shahri, Assistant President of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Salalah Branch,



250 scouts from 20 Gulf universities took part in the camp.

and Chairman of the Supervisory Committee of the camp, remarked, "The University of Technology and Applied Sciences, in hosting this significant event, played an active role in shaping the future of our youth. We believe that building generations starts from the halls of knowledge and the interactive platforms provided by such camps."

The camp saw the participation of 250 scouts from 20 Gulf universities, who engaged in leadership, safety, and technology courses, training workshops, lectures, and dialogue sessions. Additionally, the scouts took part in sports and cultural activities and visited tourist and heritage sites in Dhofar Governorate.

— ONA

NOTICE



This is to notify that **Mr. Prem Kumar Velayudham**, bearing **Indian Passport No. S0549002** and formerly serving as Data Analyst, was terminated as of 29th August 2024. From that date onward, he no longer represents **Platinum Shield United LLC** in any capacity. We have no affiliations with him, and any engagements with him are at their own risk. **Platinum Shield United LLC** shall not bear any responsibility for any dealings with him.



The first day of the school year is always filled with anticipation and mixed emotions

WELCOME BACK, SCHOOL IS COOL



AMAL AL RIYAMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

As the school year begins, students enter schools with new backpacks, filled with a mix of hope and nerves. Yet, behind these moments lies a wave of mixed emotions for parents, who experience a blend of joy watching their children embark on a new chapter in their lives and anxiety over the potential challenges ahead. This is particularly true for parents of kindergarteners.

Maha al Rashidi, a mother, shared her feelings, saying, “I couldn’t hold back my tears when I saw my son entering school for the first time. I felt both happiness and pride, but also anxiety, especially since my son Fahad is very shy and not accustomed to being around strangers.” Said al Shukaili, another parent, expressed his happiness, saying, “This day was filled with joy, especially when I saw my daughter smiling and waving at me from the school door. What made me even happier was seeing how content my daughter was at this stage, without any sign of anxiety. I wish her a successful school year.” Khalid al Rawahi shared his concerns: “Although I’m pleased about the start of the school year, I can’t shake off the anxiety about the challenges my daughter might face in this new phase. I hope the school is mindful of this and prioritises safety measures and the mental well-being of our children.” Fatima al Harthy described her mixed feelings: “It was tough to leave my child at school. I hesitated before leaving and even wanted to take him back home because he was crying a lot. But I know he needs to start this educational journey. I am excited to see how he grows and hope he enjoys making new friends.” While parents bid farewell, teachers welcomed the students with warmth and anticipation.

Hafsa al Abri, both a mother and a teacher at Bareem Nizwa Private School, said, “I completely understand the anxiety and stress parents feel on the first day of school. As a mother, I share those fears, but as a teacher, I want to assure everyone that I treat each of my students like my own children. I strive to make them feel safe and secure, just as I would want for my son on his first day.” On this day, many schools aim to create a fun and engaging atmosphere to ease children’s fears and anxieties, helping them adjust to their new surroundings and peers.

Hanan Yousef Ibrahim, Principal of Bareem Nizwa Private School, discussed the school’s efforts for the first day: “The first day of the school year is always filled with anticipation and mixed emotions. We strive to make this day as special and calm as possible. Our preparations begin well before the start of school; we decorate with bright colours and organise interactive activities to help children quickly adapt to their new environment.”

“One of our main challenges is easing children through the separation from their parents, so we focus heavily on psychological and emotional support. We also encourage parents to prepare their children for this transition and cooperate with us during the early days. Ultimately, we want every child to feel that school is their second home.” Offering further guidance, Dr Samiah al Zadjali, an educational consultant, explained: “It’s normal for parents to have mixed emotions on the first day of school. It’s helpful for parents to discuss these feelings with their children and reassure them of their ongoing support. Parents should avoid displaying their anxiety in front of their children, as this can negatively impact their emotions. Instead, focus on the positive aspects, such as meeting new friends and learning new skills.”

To ensure a smooth and enjoyable start to the school year, parents are encouraged to prepare their children emotionally by discussing school beforehand and even visiting the school together before the first day to familiarise them with the surroundings. Establishing a daily routine helps children adjust to the school schedule, ensuring sufficient rest and sleep. Involvement in school activities can enhance a child’s sense of belonging and foster positive relationships with the school community.





FREE STOPOVERS FOR PASSENGERS TRAVELLING THROUGH MUSCAT

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

Oman Air and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism have joined forces for a special stopover promotion for passengers transiting through Muscat.

Available until November 30, 2024, the offer provides a free one-night hotel stay for premium

class passengers when booking a stopover in Muscat, while those travelling in Economy Class can enjoy two nights for the price of one. In addition, guests have access to exclusive discounts on tours, car hire, and other services, making it the perfect opportunity to explore Oman's charming capital and beyond.

Visitors can experience Muscat at its very best, with



warm weather, stunning landscapes, and cultural activities promising an unforgettable retreat.

Committed to promoting the natural beauty, rich heritage, and friendly, genuine hospitality of its home base.

Passengers who hold a return ticket to any destination on Oman Air's network with transit through Muscat can take

advantage of the limited-time offer.

Guests can simply fill out the online request form and make their stopover booking by November 2024 30.

It is important to note that the complimentary hotel stay includes the room only and is subject to availability.

A maximum of one stopover per return ticket applies.

MOL ADDS NEW PROFESSIONS TO OMANISATION LIST



The new decision introduces additional professions that are now restricted from being practiced by non-Omani workers

MIDHUN RAJ
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has announced ministerial decision No 501/2024, which amends several provisions of decision No 235/2022.

The new decision introduces additional professions that are now restricted from being practiced by non-Omani workers, in line with the Labour Law issued under Royal Decree No 53/2023.

The decision is a significant move aimed at enhancing employment opportunities for Omani nationals across various sectors, reinforcing the government's commitment to prioritising local talent in the

workforce.

Restricted professions include driver of a refrigerated trailer and truck for transporting food and medical products, driver of a truck and trailer for water transport, hotel reception manager, swimming rescuer, tourist agent, travel agent, room service supervisor, quality control manager, quality officer, drilling means engineer, drilling supervisor, electrician/general maintenance technician and mechanic/general maintenance technician.

Other jobs to be Omanised include drilling measurement engineer, quality supervisor, aircraft loading supervisor, marketing specialist, ship mooring and tying worker,

labour supervisor, cargo loading and unloading supervisor, commercial promoter (sales representative), commercial broke, goods arranger, flatbed crane driver, forklift driver, new vehicles salesperson, used vehicles salesperson, new spare parts salesperson, used spare parts salesperson, general system analyst, information systems, networks specialist and marine supervisor. The decree specifies that certain professions will come under the restriction starting from different dates.

While the majority of these professions will be restricted starting from September 2, 2024, others will follow from January 1, 2025, 2026, and 2027, ensuring a phased implementation.

Students set to shine at Global Robotics Challenge in Greece

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, SEPT 1

Omani students are ready to showcase their talents on the world stage for the 2024 FIRST Global Challenge, an esteemed international robotics competition taking place in Athens, Greece, from September 25 to 29.

The South Al Batinah team will be representing Oman this year, under the guidance of the Ministry of Education. Themed 'Feeding the Future,' the event will unite over 180 countries in a collaborative effort to tackle global challenges through science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM).

The South Al Batinah Robotics Team is led by Abdullah al Abri, an Innovation and Scientific Olympiad Specialist, who shared that the team comprises six dedicated Grade 11 students from Al Amal Basic Education School.

These students were selected through a rigorous interview process conducted by a central committee. The team has already begun addressing some of the competition's challenges, including those related to social media and technology, which commenced virtually in June.

Fakhriya al Shaibani, a Senior Chemistry Teacher and assistant coach, underscored the competition's role in promoting STEAM education and its importance in solving real-world problems. She highlighted that the FIRST Global Challenge offers young Omanis a rare opportunity to develop essential skills, foster global communication and



The South Al Batinah team is set to showcase their talents for the 2024 FIRST Global Challenge in Greece

collaboration, and exchange knowledge and cultures with peers from around the world.

The team members have expressed their excitement and shared how profoundly the competition has impacted them. Layan al Hinai described the event as a 'fertile global community' where knowledge exchange and challenges go hand in hand. She explained how the team leveraged social media to connect with leaders in robotics and sustainable food, raising awareness on both local and global levels.

Jana al Balushi emphasised that the competition has significantly enhanced her English communication skills and deepened her understanding of scientific and environmental concepts. She also pointed out the cultural exchange aspect, with the team conducting 22 introductory sessions to showcase Oman traditions and values, including its rich heritage and the role of women in leadership.

The competition has also equipped the team with invaluable technical skills.

Sara al Siyabi shared how her participation has sharpened her abilities in robotics, artificial

intelligence, and design — skills that are crucial for future career paths. The experience also provided the opportunity to share their newly acquired knowledge with peers through STEAM workshops.

Renad al Riyami, a supporting team member, reflected on the team's interactions with participants from around the globe, noting how the competitive and collaborative environment honed their skills in time management, planning, and task organisation. Renad added that the technology challenge focused on pressing environmental issues like the migration of palm fields and pest infestations, which have serious implications for Oman's food security.

With support from local institutions, the team developed an innovative and sustainable solution to these challenges.

Oman's participation in the 2024 FIRST Global Challenge is a platform for young Omanis to contribute to a better future through innovation, collaboration, and cultural exchange. This effort reflects the nation's commitment to addressing global challenges with local ingenuity.

Desert Locust Pesticide Management System launched

MUSCAT: Oman hosted a regional workshop to launch the Desert Locust Pesticide Management System in the Central Region and Horn of Africa. The workshop aligns with the Commission's role to introduce new programmes and encourage the use of innovative technologies to enhance locust control strategies.

The primary goal is to mitigate the risks associated with pesticide use on human health and the environment. The event was held under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture. About 11 member countries from the Arab world and the

Horn of Africa are taking part in the workshop. The regional workshop, which concludes on September 5, aims at promoting the use of the Desert Locust Pesticide Management System, enhancing early response to the locust outbreak and mitigating the risks associated with pesticide use on both human health and the environment.

Dr Mamoon bin Khamis al Alawi, Executive Secretary of the Commission for Controlling Locust in the Central Region, in his speech said: "The Locust Pesticide Management System is a digital web-based application designed to collect, analyse, and report field data. It aims to establish a comprehensive database and equip countries



The regional workshop aligns with the Commission's role to encourage the use of innovative technologies to enhance locust control strategies.

with the necessary tools to manage pesticide stocks and the equipment used in locust surveys". Dr Al Alawi further explained that the system enables the national Locust Control Centre or units to record essential information about each pesticide storage facility,

conduct risk analysis, inventory usable and outdated products and equipment, and alert control centres about pesticide stock levels and expiration dates. It also tracks the movement of pesticides and equipment between stores and warehouses to prevent the accumulation of old stocks using

QR codes. By implementing this system, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) will be better equipped to manage pesticide distribution and prevent the accumulation of outdated inventory.

Dr Al Alawi continued: "The use of this new system will provide countries with a modern tool for effectively and efficiently managing their pesticide storage without relying on traditional office methods. It will also enable better monitoring of pesticide quality."

Eng Nasr bin Saif al Shamsi, Director of the Plant Protection Department, emphasised the importance of proper pesticide management, highlighting the need to adhere to the standards

and specifications set by FAO to ensure effective control measures.

Al Shamsi added the workshop was organised due to the significant threat posed by the desert locust and because chemical pesticides remain the primary means of controlling locust infestations. He emphasised the importance of ensuring these pesticides are managed safely and securely, with attention to security and safety, while also preserving their quality to ensure they are highly effective when needed for locust control.

The workshop will cover the latest version of the Desert Locust Pesticide Management System developed by FAO for countries affected by desert locusts.



Israeli raid continues in West Bank



A Palestinian man with a child cycle while carrying bread on a street torn up by bulldozers during an Israeli raid in the West Bank city of Jenin. – AFP

JENIN: The Palestinian health ministry announced that two more Palestinians were killed in an ongoing Israeli military raid in the Jenin area of the occupied West Bank. “The bodies of two people killed in the occupation’s (Israel) aggression in Kafar Dan were transported to Ibn Sina hospital in Jenin,” the ministry said in a statement, bringing the total number of Palestinians killed since Israeli forces began large-scale raids in the northern West Bank on Wednesday to 24. Israeli forces and Palestinian militants were battling in the West Bank on Sunday, five days into major coordinated raids and operations. A “shooting attack” near Tarqumiya checkpoint in the

Hebron area in the southern West Bank killed three people on Sunday, Israel’s emergency medical service said. The police said they were all members of the force. The military said several assailants may have been involved. In the northern West Bank, a photographer saw Israeli bulldozers in Jenin’s city centre, a day after a local official said soldiers had destroyed most of the streets and power and water had been cut off in the adjacent refugee camp. At least 22 Palestinians, including 14 claimed by groups members, have been killed by the Israeli military since the start on Wednesday of simultaneous raids across the northern West Bank. A

20-year-old soldier was killed on Saturday. The United Nations said on Wednesday that at least 637 Palestinians had been killed in the territory by Israeli troops or settlers since the Gaza war began. Twenty-three Israelis, including soldiers, have been killed in Palestinian attacks or during army operations over the same period, according to official figures. Meanwhile, in the besieged Gaza Strip, “humanitarian pauses” in the nearly 11-month war between Israel and Hamas were set to take place to facilitate a massive polio vaccination drive which a health official said had begun. Israel’s military said the

remains of six captives were recovered on Saturday “from an underground tunnel in the Rafah area” in southern Gaza and formally identified in Israel. US President Joe Biden said he was “devastated and outraged” by their deaths, but told reporters he was “still optimistic” a Gaza truce and captives release deal can be reached. “It’s time this war ended,” said Biden, whose administration has been involved in ceasefire mediation efforts along with Qatar and Egypt. EU top diplomat Josep Borrell said he was “horrified at the murder” of the captives, and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer expressed shock at their “senseless” killing. — AFP

Afghan, UN say committed to engagement after morality law

KABUL: A Taliban government spokesman has said the Afghan authorities were committed to engagement with the international community after a new morality law sparked tense exchanges over women’s rights. The United Nations and the European Union have warned that the law could damage prospects for engagement with foreign nations and international organisations. Deputy government spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat was responding to comments by a spokesman for the UN secretary-general assuring continued engagement with the Taliban authorities after Afghanistan’s morality ministry said it would no longer cooperate with the UN mission in the country, UNAMA, over criticism of the law. Fitrat said the authorities were “committed to positive interactions with all the countries and organisations in accordance with law”, in a voice message to journalists on Saturday. “Interaction is the only way to achieve solutions to problems and for the progression and expansion of relations,” he said,

urging nations and organisations to engage positively with the Taliban authorities. The spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, “We will continue to engage with all stakeholders in Afghanistan, including the Taliban”. “We have always done so following our mandate and I would say impartially and in good faith, always upholding the norms of the UN, pushing the messages of human rights and equality,” said Stephane Dujarric. “We would urge the de facto authorities to, in fact, open more avenues for diplomatic engagement,” he added. Earlier on Friday, the morality ministry had said it would no longer cooperate with UNAMA over its criticisms of the “Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice”, which was ratified last week. The law, which includes rules on many aspects of Afghans’ lives according to the Taliban’s strict interpretation of law, sparked concern among Afghans, various countries, human rights advocates, UN agencies and the EU. — AFP



Afghan men ride motorcycles along a road in Kandahar. – AFP file photo

African leaders eye mounting power ties in Beijing

BEIJING: African leaders descend on China’s capital this week, seeking funds for infrastructure projects as they eye great power competition over resources and influence on the continent. China has expanded ties with African nations in the past decade, offering them with billions in loans that have helped build infrastructure. China has sent hundreds of thousands of workers to Africa to build its megaprojects, while gaining partnership with the continent’s vast natural resources including copper, gold, lithium and rare earth minerals. Beijing has said this week’s China-Africa forum will be its

largest diplomatic event since the Covid-19 pandemic, with leaders of South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and other nations confirmed to attend and dozens of delegations expected. African countries were “looking to tap the opportunities in China for growth”, Ovigwe Eguegu said, a policy analyst at consultancy Development Reimagined. China is Africa’s largest trading partner, with bilateral trade hitting \$167.8 billion in the first half of this year, according to Chinese state media. Beijing’s loans to African nations last year were their highest in five years, research by the Chinese Loans to Africa



Chinese honour guards walk past the vip terminal after the arrival of Togo’s President Faure Gnassingbe at Beijing Capital International Airport. – AFP

Database found. China has also resisted offering debt relief, even as some African nations have struggled to repay their loans — in some cases being

forced to slash spending on vital public services. Since the last China-Africa forum six years ago, “the world experienced a lot of changes,

Beijing has said this week’s China-Africa forum will be its largest diplomatic event since the Covid-19 pandemic, with leaders of African nations confirmed to attend

including Covid, geopolitical tension and now these economic challenges”, Tang Xiaoyang of Beijing’s Tsinghua University said. The continent is a key node in Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative, a massive infrastructure project and central pillar of Xi Jinping’s bid to expand China’s clout

overseas. The BRI has channelled much-needed investment to African countries for projects like railways, ports and hydroelectric plants. Kenya’s President William Ruto last year asked China for a \$1 billion loan and the restructuring of existing debt to complete other stalled BRI projects. In light of such events, Vines and other analysts expect African leaders at this week’s forum to seek not only more Chinese investment but also more favourable loans. In central Africa, Western and Chinese firms are racing to secure access to rare minerals. — AFP

TEHRAN Probe finds Raisi helicopter crash caused by weather

Iran’s final investigation into the May helicopter crash that killed president Ebrahim Raisi has found it was caused by bad weather, the body investigating the case said. The helicopter carrying Raisi and his entourage came down on a fog-shrouded mountainside in northern Iran. The main cause of the helicopter crash was the “complex climatic and atmospheric conditions of the region in the spring”, the special board investigating the dimensions and causes of



the helicopter accident said. The report added that “the sudden emergence of a thick mass of dense and rising fog” caused the helicopter’s collision into the mountain. — AFP

BAGHDAD Iraq imposes curfew for first census in decades

Iraq will impose a two-day curfew in November for the country’s first census in 27 years, the authorities announced on Sunday. The “curfew will be imposed in all provinces of Iraq on November 20 and 21 to conduct a population census”, Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al Sudani said in a statement. Current estimates put today’s population at around 43 million. The authorities have partnered with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for the



upcoming census. The initiative “plays a crucial role in equipping Iraq with accurate demographic information and promoting inclusive growth,” the agency has said. — AFP

DUBAI Yemenis say they attacked ship off Aden

Yemenis said that they had attacked a merchant ship in the Gulf of Aden, as a multinational naval force said two missiles exploded near a Liberia-flagged vessel. “The Yemeni Armed Forces carried out a military operation targeting the ship (GROTON) in the Gulf of Aden,” spokesman Yahya Saree said in a televised statement. He said the ship had been hit and that it was the second time it had been attacked after a similar



incident on August 3. The Joint Maritime Information Centre (JMIC) reported that the Groton had been targeted it was 130 nautical miles east of Aden. — AFP



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7

In brief

NEW YORK



US HOTEL WORKERS STRIKE AS CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS STALL

Thousands of US hotel workers in several cities have launched a multi-day strike after contract talks with hotel operators Marriott International, Hilton Worldwide, and Hyatt Hotels reached an impasse, the Unite Here union said.

Unite Here, which represents workers in hotels and airports across the United States and Canada, said more than 4,000 workers are on strike. The strike comes as 40,000 Unite Here hotel workers across 20 cities face expiring contracts this year.

About 15,000 of workers have authorised strikes in 12 markets. Negotiations for new four-year contracts have been taking place since May. — **Reuters**

MOSCOW



17 BODIES FOUND AFTER KAMCHATKA HELICOPTER CRASH

Rescuers on Sunday said they had found 17 bodies after a helicopter crashed with 22 people aboard in Russia's Kamchatka peninsula in the far east. The helicopter went missing shortly after takeoff on Saturday carrying 19 tourists and 3 crew, regional authorities said. Rescuers spotted the remains of the helicopter on Sunday morning in a hilly area at a height of 900 metres.

Aerial video by Russia's emergency situations ministry showed helicopter debris lying on a slope close to the top of a large wooded hill.

The aircraft was found close to the location where it went off the radar. — **AFP**

KOUMAC



NEW CALEDONIA PARTY NAME JAILED LEADER AS CHIEF

An alliance of parties seeking independence for New Caledonia has nominated as chief a prominent opposition leader currently jailed in France over a wave of deadly rioting in the French Pacific territory.

Christian Tein, who considers himself a "political prisoner", was one of seven pro-independence activists transferred to mainland France, a move that sparked renewed violence.

His appointment to lead the Socialist Kanak National Liberation Front (FLNKS) risks complicating efforts to end the crisis, sparked in May by a Paris plan for voting reforms. — **AFP**

Ukraine launches mass drone attack on Russia

The fighting comes at a critical juncture in the two-and-a-half year conflict, with Russia pressing an offensive in eastern Ukraine while trying to expel Ukrainian forces

Telegram channel, in response to the Kharkiv attack that officials said involved at least 10 missiles and struck locations including a shopping mall.

"And all the necessary forces of the world must be brought in to stop this terror. This does not require extraordinary forces, but enough courage on the part of the leaders — courage to give Ukraine what it needs to defend itself"

In Kharkiv, rescue workers and volunteers carried injured civilians to ambulances after missiles struck the mall and an events hall. Shattered glass and debris were strewn across the ground and people fled to a metro station for safety.

Earlier, Russian officials said air defence units had destroyed 158 drones launched by Ukraine overnight, and that debris caused fires at the Moscow Oil Refinery and at the Konakovo Power Station in the neighbouring Tver region. Russia rarely discloses the full extent of damage inflicted by Ukraine's air attacks.

Zelensky said that last week alone Russia had used 160 missiles, 780 guided aerial bombs and 400 attack drones against cities and troops across Ukraine.

— **Reuters**



Firefighters work at a site of a Russian missile strike, in Kharkiv, Ukraine. — **Reuters**

German far right set for wins in key elections after attack

ERFURT: Voters in two former East German states began casting ballots on Sunday in elections expected to deal a blow to Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government and deliver big gains for the far-right AfD.

The contests in Thuringia and Saxony come just over a week after three people were killed in a knife attack, which has fuelled a bitter debate over immigration in Germany.

Opinion polls have the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD) ahead in Thuringia and a close second in Saxony, while also predicting a strong showing for the upstart far-left BSW.

An election victory for the AfD would be a landmark in Germany's post-war history and represent a rebuke for Scholz ahead of national elections in 2025.

In both states, Scholz's Social Democrats are polling at around six per cent, while their coalition partners, the Greens and the liberal FDP, lag even further behind.

But even if the AfD does come out on top in the elections, it is unlikely to come to power because other parties have ruled out working with the far right to form a government.

Created in 2013 as an anti-euro group before morphing into an anti-immigration party, the AfD has capitalised on the



Thuringia's State Premier and top candidate of the left-wing Die Linke party for regional elections Bodo Ramelow (R) and his wife Germana Alberti vom Hofe (L) gesture at a polling station in Erfurt, eastern Germany. — **AFP**

fractious three-way coalition in Berlin to rise in opinion polls.

In June's EU Parliament elections, the party scored a record 15.9 per cent overall and did especially well in eastern Germany, where it emerged as the biggest force.

In a post on social media platform X on Sunday, AfD co-leader Alice Weidel urged voters to choose the AfD to "not only change the future in Saxony and Thuringia, but also bring about a political turnaround throughout Germany".

Saxony is the most populous of the former East German states

and has been a conservative stronghold since reunification.

Thuringia meanwhile is more rural and the only state currently led by the far-left Die Linke, a successor of East Germany's ruling communist party.

A third former East German state, Brandenburg, is also due to hold an election later in September, where polls have the AfD ahead on around 24 per cent. Alongside the AfD, new party BSW has also found a receptive audience in the eastern states for its criticism of the government in Berlin and of military aid to Ukraine. — **AFP**

Poland marks 85 years since WWII outbreak

WARSAW: Poland on Sunday marked 85 years since the outbreak of World War II during annual commemoration ceremony held at dawn to remember Nazi Germany's first attacks that triggered the deadly conflict. Nearly six million Poles died in the conflict that killed more than 50 million people overall.

The remembrance ceremony on Sunday was traditionally held in Westerplatte, on Poland's Baltic coast, where a battleship had opened fire on a Polish fort 85 years ago to the day.

Speaking at Westerplatte, Prime Minister Donald Tusk said the lessons of World War II were "not an abstraction" and drew parallels with the war in neighbouring Ukraine. "This war is coming again from the east," he said.

He urged Nato member states to be "fully devoted to defence... against the aggression that we are witnessing today on

the battlefields of Ukraine".

Polish President Andrzej Duda took part in commemorations in the western Polish city of Wielun where Germany's first bombs fell 85 years ago.

Although it has been 85 years since the war started, there are still unresolved matters according to Poland.

Poland's current pro-EU government led by Tusk has urged Germany to provide financial compensation over losses the country sustained at the hands of troops.

It echoed an earlier similar push by the populist Law and Justice (PiS) party that lost power in October election.

During his visit to commemorate the anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, a doomed revolt against occupying forces, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier spoke of plans to establish a memorial to the Polish victims. — **AFP**



Polish honour guard soldiers stand guard during a ceremony marking the 85th anniversary of the start of World War II on the Westerplatte peninsula. — **AFP**

Public spaces provide many learning opportunities



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English and Translation, Sultan Qaboos University

WE often turn to textbooks for book knowledge. However, time and again, the burden of carrying textbooks on children's backs has been discussed and different suggestions made. Although there are many options, including digital devices, it is even more important to realise that learning can actually be done without books. For example, language is everywhere. Whether on road signs, billboards, shop and building names, there are sign posts all around us. Not only are all these examples of living languages which depict a society, they also provide powerful learning opportunities. Often, public signs give directions or instructions to be followed, or communicate messages. In a language project at Sultan Qaboos University, instructors have found a novel way of teaching English at the intermediate level. Teachers created a game in which pictures of different places within the university were shared in the class. Students then discussed what these signs meant, where they may have seen them before and what information they are providing.

Dr Tuzlukova, the principal investigator of this project, said that this was a unique way of attaining two outcomes — firstly, to make students appreciate the fact that language was a living and breathing entity that surrounds us and, secondly, that these signs and posters are all learning opportunities. In fact, the research of her team discovered more than 250 images in the university campus, all of which had a specific purpose, both outside in public spaces, or inside buildings. An interesting way to teach language, according to Dr Tuzlukova and her team, is in the form of a scavenger hunt. Students are asked to explore the building in which they are based and photograph any two signs. Later, in class, they share the photographs with other groups and discuss the meaning, purpose and role of a specific sign. They also discuss why that particular board was only in Arabic, only in English, or bilingual. Using this technique of discovering a language landscape has many advantages beyond textbook knowledge. It develops collaborative skills among learners, in addition to problem solving and critical thinking skills as learners learn to navigate between different

language contexts. It also introduces them to larger questions of how and why languages operate in specific ways. Of course, there are some challenges to teaching language using innovative methods such as these. To begin with, students are usually comfortable with established ways of teaching which consist of passive listening, targeted at a final exam. New teaching experiments may be received sceptically at first. However, research suggests that students appreciate different learning opportunities, especially when they are combined with group activities that look beyond the classroom. This is true for young learners at the beginner or intermediate level. For more advanced students, the role that language plays in a community is itself an important lesson. Learning a language does not have to be monotonous and repetitive. There are many interesting and fun strategies, particularly when they are easily accessible to learners' immediate vicinity. That we are surrounded by language and its learning potential is itself a valuable lesson for teachers and students alike.

ACCORDING TO A RESEARCH STUDENTS GREATLY APPRECIATE VARIED LEARNING EXPERIENCES WHEN COMBINED WITH GROUP ACTIVITIES THAT GO BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THE CLASSROOM

Cuba faces uphill battle as Oropouche virus spreads

CARLOS CARRILLO & ALIEN FERNANDEZ

Cuban health authorities launched small-scale fumigation efforts in Havana to fight the spread of the Oropouche virus, but a rainy Caribbean summer, fuel shortages and growing roadside trash heaps are complicating those efforts, workers and officials said. More than 500 cases of the virus have been registered since May when the disease was first detected in far-eastern Cuba, health officials said this week. The virus, also known as sloth fever, is transmitted by the bite of mosquitoes and midges and has spread quickly across all of the country's provinces and major cities, including the capital Havana. Patients complain of fever, body aches and nausea, though the disease is rarely fatal. Fumigation workers using hand-held, gas-powered blowers fired smoke into dark corners and alleyways in parts of Havana on Friday, though those efforts have been stymied, in part, by limited resources. "In the past, all the blocks were fumigated every week... but now, due to fuel (shortages), they focus on specific cases where (fever outbreaks) occur," said Havana fumigation worker Luis Aguilar. US health authorities earlier this week said 21 US citizens who had visited Cuba during the summer months returned home with cases of Oropouche. Cuba has reported relatively few cases compared to other countries, including Brazil, where the virus is also present, and no fatalities. But economic crisis and shortages of fuel, food and medicine have hampered efforts to control the spread of such mosquito-borne illnesses as Oropouche and Dengue fever, authorities have said. Frequent power outages mean many sleep with windows open during the hot Caribbean summer, and few Cubans have access to insect repellent. Trash heaps have grown in size on street corners, which, combined with summer rains, provide ample breeding grounds for biting insects, authorities said. There are no specific treatments or vaccines available for Oropouche. Meanwhile, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said last week that a total of 21 Oropouche virus disease cases among US travellers returning from Cuba have been reported as of August 16. — Reuters

Establishing the Oman International Institute for Peace Research



By Yahya Al Aoufi

The author is an Omani writer and translator

THE region we live in is experiencing increasing polarisation, turmoil, and conflict. This unrest is not only present in our neighbouring countries but also involves Western, American, Chinese and Iranian interests. The situation has become even more dangerous following the ongoing war in Gaza. Amidst this chaos, talking about peace may seem like a distant dream, especially when war and conflict dominate the scene. We see a loss of moral, religious and human values, not just in Gaza but across other Arab and foreign countries that receive less media attention. Even major countries are showing double standards, revealing their return to oppressive practices, particularly under the influence of the Zionist lobby. In the midst of this bloodshed, what could the establishment of the 'Oman International Institute for Peace Research' offer? I believe Oman needs to seriously consider creating such an institute for several important reasons. It would mark a historic shift in Oman's ongoing efforts to promote peace in the region, encourage dialogue and avoid military conflicts that have plagued this part of the world, rich in resources and history. With this institute, Oman would introduce a new culture, elevating its diplomatic and political efforts to a higher level. It would add a civilisational and scientific dimension to Oman's soft power in the 21st century, building on the country's established political philosophy of peace and constructive dialogue. The institute would provide a platform for discussing rationality, balance and civilised dialogue, aiming to reduce the flames of wars that continue to ignite new conflicts every day. This approach aligns with the path

set by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and is being continued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. Oman has always been a beacon of peace, wisdom and reason in the Arab world, especially during disputes or violent clashes. The Omani government has consistently worked to reduce tensions and has actively participated in mediation efforts across the region, which is often drenched in blood, hostility and unrest. THE PROPOSED INSTITUTE WILL ADD A CIVILISATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC DIMENSION TO OMAN'S SOFT POWER IN THE 21ST CENTURY, BUILDING ON THE COUNTRY'S ESTABLISHED POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF PEACE AND CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE The institute would offer a space for exchanging ideas, hosting thinkers, politicians, economists and security experts from the region. It would transform into a mature, balanced and independent platform for discussing peace and studying ways to address geopolitical conflicts. By doing so, it would send insightful messages from Muscat, the city of peace, to the world. The institute would also focus on publishing reports, research and analyses in various fields related to peace, contributing to building trust in the region. If the institute gains support from influential voices, it could become a significant regional and international platform, aligning with Oman's strong commitment to peace

and stability in the region. It would complement other Omani initiatives, such as the academic chairs established by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos in prestigious universities around the world, including Harvard University in the United States, the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom and the University of Tokyo in Japan. Looking at the example of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), there are many organisational and intellectual aspects that Oman can learn from. However, it is crucial that this centre reflects an Omani philosophy of peace, rooted in our country's rich legacy of peaceful dealings with global issues and conflicts. The establishment of the Oman International Institute for Peace Research would place Oman in an important position on the international stage. It would add a new beacon to the state's institutions, fitting for the 21st century. The institute would also help develop Omani researchers, specialists and elites in various fields such as diplomacy, academia, security, economy and military. Their ideas and visions would contribute to deepening Oman's peace project and philosophy, which has become a respected approach in the region. Oman is one of the few countries whose efforts to promote peace and stability are widely accepted and appreciated at both regional and international levels. In these times of war and violence, our region desperately needs every voice that calls for peace, wisdom, reason and dialogue to bring back some stability and calm. Translated by Badr Al Dhafari The original version was published in the print edition of Oman Arabic daily on September 1, 2024.

Resuming the future-building journey

Welcome back to school, dear students! It is time to bid farewell to summer vacation; the break is over, and school is back in session. While students might feel a mix of emotions, including some excitement, it is not just students who experience stress — parents often do too.

Students everywhere are gearing for the familiar yet exciting transition of going back to school. This time of the year marks a fresh beginning, filled with the promise of new opportunities and adventures. Whether they are stepping into a new grade, a new school, or a new set of challenges, the back-to-school season is a chance to embrace learning with renewed enthusiasm. It is an opportunity to reconnect with friends, meet new teachers, and set personal goals. With each new school year comes, the potential for growth and discovery, making it an ideal time to reflect on the different past achievements and look forward to the exciting experiences that come ahead.

The first day of school is often as exciting as celebrating a holiday for students. They get to wear new clothes, look forward to reuniting with friends, classmates, and teachers, and begin a new grade. After nearly a three-month break, students are generally eager to resume their school routines.

As school resumes, students pack their backpacks, don new uniforms, and head back to class. The sight of full classrooms, fresh textbooks, and sharpened pencils can be both encouraging and inspiring for parents, teachers, and the community. It's a reminder of the hope and renewal that education brings. However, some students might feel nervous or anxious on their first day, especially if they are starting grade one or moving to a new school. The unfamiliarity of new teachers, friends, and environments can be daunting. For some, this anxiety is compounded by the end of summer break or previous negative school experiences, which might lead to feelings of sadness, fear, or even depression.

Parents might misunderstand these feelings as a dislike for school, but it is crucial to support and encourage children as they adjust. These initial concerns



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BACK TO SCHOOL IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO RECONNECT WITH FRIENDS, MEET NEW TEACHERS, AND SET PERSONAL GOALS

typically subside as students become familiar with their new surroundings and routines. It is normal to feel nervous when transitioning to a new learning environment. Attending school is a significant challenge in a student's life. Transitioning from a relaxing summer to the demands of full-time education can be difficult, but it is a rewarding experience that lasts from early childhood through to higher education.

Despite the challenges of daily routines and tough lessons, receiving a good education and enjoying school is a blessing. As Aristotle said, "The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet." Hopefully, this transition fosters a lifelong love of learning.

On the other hand, the end of a long holiday brings added stress for parents, who must manage various back-to-school preparations, from outfits to stationery. However, these efforts are essential in supporting their children's future. Parents should closely monitor their child's emotional well-being, especially during the initial weeks of the school year. Providing psychological and educational support is key to helping students overcome their learning challenges.

Accordingly, parental support plays a crucial role in shaping students' academic and personal development. From the early years of education through to higher learning, parents' involvement can significantly influence a student's success and well-being. This support comes in various forms, whether through providing emotional encouragement, creating a motivating learning environment, or actively participating in school activities.

When parents engage with their child's education, they not only provide a sense of security and motivation, but also help build essential skills that are important for academic achievement and personal growth. As educators and researchers continue to explore the dynamics of effective parental involvement, it becomes increasingly clear that a collaborative partnership between parents and schools is fundamental to unlocking a student's full potential.

In celebration of the new school year, I wish all students and teachers a happy and successful year ahead.

WHERE TO GO?



Palestinians walk, as they evacuate their home during an Israeli raid in Jenin camp, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, on Sunday. – Reuters

The Trump threat to democracy has only grown

An overhauled Democratic ticket has re-energised the party and eliminated the widening polling lead that former US President Donald Trump had over his successor, Joe Biden. There is much to admire in Kamala Harris and Tim Walz's backgrounds, careers, and recent campaign speeches, which have focused on fighting poverty, improving the lot of working people, reclaiming patriotism from Republicans, and strengthening democracy. But even setting aside these virtues, there are good reasons to support the Democratic ticket. After all, the alternative is Trump, who poses such a serious threat to US institutions that any halfway decent candidate running against him would deserve strong support.

Trump threatens American democracy in part because US institutions were not designed to deal with an autocratic populist who is willing to break norms and even laws. As I pointed out in 2017, American voters and civil society are ultimately the only forces that can stop such a figure. Although American democracy withstood Trump's presidency in 2017-21, he exploited every institutional weakness he could find, deepened the divisions of an already polarised society, and tried to overturn the result of a free and fair election that he lost.

The Democrats successfully



DARON ACEMOGLU

The writer is Institute Professor of Economics at MIT, and is a co-author of Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty

DONALD TRUMP IS NOT THE FIRST ANTI-DEMOCRATIC DEMAGOGUE TO ATTRACT A STRONG FOLLOWING, AND HE WILL NOT BE THE LAST

reclaimed the White House in the 2020 election, despite Trump's coup attempt on January 6, 2021, because they had a major advantage: his own incompetence. Although long-standing political norms had been severely damaged, democracy survived.

Trump's incompetence as president had two dimensions. First, he was incapable of demonstrating any consistency. His only real agenda was to concentrate power in his own hands and elevate and enrich his family and cronies, but he lacked the discipline and focus to see it through. The terrifying implication, of course, is that somebody more disciplined could have done far more damage. Second, Trump failed to win the unconditional personal loyalty of many of his underlings, and that ultimately meant that most of his wildest schemes and decisions were exposed or blocked from within.

Unfortunately, Trump poses a far greater threat to American democracy today for five key reasons. First, he has grown only angrier, which means he will be more determined to concentrate power in his own hands and deploy it against his enemies (real and perceived). If he returns to the White House, he will be

not only more vicious but also potentially more consistent in pursuing his personal agenda.

Second, Trump and his ideological fellow travellers will have put much more thought and vetting into high- and mid-level appointees, as they have already done for his implicit governing agenda: the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025. Although Trump claims to renounce this comprehensive policy blueprint, it has already become a valuable tool for identifying potential administration personnel. Supporting the Heritage Foundation's dark vision is a litmus test, ensuring that no whistle-blowers or defenders of democracy can serve as the "adults in the room" this time around.

Third, the GOP is now Trump's personal cult, which means that



Trump's incompetence as president had two dimensions.

local Republican officials across the country will be willing to do whatever he commands. Some may go so far as attempting to rig elections and seize control of local law enforcement and public services. If Trump once again demands that local election officials "find" more votes in his favour, he might just get what he wants.

Fourth, owing to a variety of mistakes by intellectual elites and Democratic Party leaders — such as advocating extreme "woke" positions like open borders, defunding the police, and so forth — many right-leaning, moderate, and non-college voters have concluded that Democrats are left-wing extremists. Those who see the Democrats as lacking patriotism will be much less likely to break with Trump, even though Harris and Walz are

taking steps to appeal to them.

Fifth, for all these same reasons, effective civil-society action against Trump has become more difficult. After years in which the left has applied its own ideological purity tests and shamed anyone who falls short, fewer independent voters and moderate Republicans will be willing to join a big-tent anti-Trump coalition.

Progressive Democrats could end up standing alone against his unconstitutional or anti-democratic behaviour, and that would not be enough.

For all these reasons, Trump's threat to US institutions must be taken seriously. Once again, the only way to defend American democracy is to use democratic means to defeat him. Democracy thrives when it delivers real-world results and helps people fulfil their aspirations. In practice, that means promoting economic prosperity, security, fairness, competent governance, and stability. The latter is especially important for withstanding periodic shocks and challenges, including threats to democracy itself.

Trump is not the first anti-democratic demagogue to attract a strong following, and he will not be the last.

sport

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Oman U-17 team gears up for West Asian Championship opener

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

The Oman U-17 football team is in prime condition as they prepare to kick off their campaign in the 11th edition of the West Asian Championship, which begins today and runs until September 11.

Oman will face defending champions Yemen on Monday at Prince Mohammed Stadium in Amman, with the match scheduled to start at 5 pm Oman time. On the same day, hosts Jordan will clash with Lebanon at 8 pm Oman time.

The tournament features nine teams divided into three groups: Oman is placed in Group B alongside Yemen and Saudi Arabia, while Group A includes Jordan, Iraq and

Lebanon. Group C comprises Bahrain, Syria, and Palestine.

The national team arrived in Amman on Saturday and immediately began their training sessions.

Under the guidance of coach Anwar al Habsi and his assistant team, the players focused on tactical preparations ahead of their opening game against Yemen. The Omani squad is aiming for a victory to bolster their chances of advancing to the semifinals.

Oman previously faced Yemen in the last edition of the tournament, where Yemen emerged victorious. However, the Omani team enters this edition with renewed determination, aiming for an impressive performance.

In preparation for the West Asian Championship, the team held a successful overseas training camp in Turkiye. The junior Red Warriors played three friendly matches during the 10-day camp, winning all three.

In their first preparatory match, they secured a 5-0 victory against Qatar's Al Ahli FC, with Ahmed Al Omrani shining as he netted three goals, while Suleiman al Kharousi and Abdullah al Saadi added one each.

The second warm-up game saw Oman triumph 7-3 over FC Sher Bishkek, with goals from Osama Al Maamari (2), Ahmed al Omrani, Muath al Hinai, Firas al Saadi, Al Yazen al Balushi and Al Waleed al Rashdi. The team capped

off their camp with a 3-1 win against Fenerbahçe FC, thanks to goals from Ahmed al Omrani, Abdulaziz al Balushi, and Al Waleed al Rashdi.

Oman will play their second group match in the West Asian Championship against Saudi Arabia on September 4. The top team from each group, along with the best second-placed team among the three groups, will advance to the semifinals.

This tournament is particularly significant for the national junior team as they gear up for a major challenge at the 2025 AFC U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers in late October. Oman will compete in Group J against Tajikistan, Guam and host Singapore in their quest for qualification.

Al Shizawi elected Chairman of volleyball committee

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 1

The General Assembly of the Athletes' Committee at the Oman Volleyball Association has elected Majid al Shizawi as Chairman of the Committee, with Badr al Subhi as Vice Chairman and Mohammed al Qamshoui as Secretary.

Faisal al Subhi and Hussein al Balushi were also elected as members of the committee. The election took place during a meeting held on Saturday at the OOC headquarters, attended by several Board of Directors members from the Oman Volleyball Association, along with 16 of the 29 General Assembly members.

Upon his election as Chairman, Majid al Shizawi emphasised the committee's pivotal role in advancing volleyball in Oman. He highlighted the importance

of enhancing the game and improving player performance across all clubs and national teams.

Al Shizawi noted that many committee members are recently retired players, providing them with a unique perspective on the challenges players have faced and continue to encounter. This insight will enable the committee to devise effective and sustainable solutions to elevate the sport in the country.

Al Shizawi further explained that the committee will serve as a vital link between players and the Oman Volleyball Association, working closely to address player issues related to training conditions, financial resources, and psychological support. The committee is committed to meeting the players' needs, helping them excel in both local and international competitions.

He also acknowledged the



Majid al Shizawi elected Chairman of Oman Volleyball Athletes' Committee

committee's close connection to players and clubs, which gives them a comprehensive understanding of the primary challenges, such as limited financial support and interaction with high-calibre teams.

The committee aims to develop innovative solutions that benefit both players and clubs, ultimately enhancing the performance of Omani players at both the club and national levels.

This effort will bolster Oman's competitiveness in regional and international arenas, contributing to the nation's sporting achievements.

Additionally, the committee will prioritise strengthening communication with clubs and the broader sports community, ensuring that decisions are informed by accurate knowledge and real needs, leading to the sustainable development of volleyball in Oman.

Sublime Sinner secures safe passage at US Open



Italy's Jannik Sinner celebrates his victory over Australia's Christopher O'Connell.

— AFP

NEW YORK: Jannik Sinner avoided the fate of his top rivals, reaching the fourth round of the US Open while fellow top seed Iga Swiatek gained momentum in her quest for a sixth Grand Slam title after a pep talk from Serena Williams on Saturday.

With defending champion Novak Djokovic forced out by a shock loss to Alexei Popyrin in the third round on Friday and another title contender, Carlos Alcaraz, sent crashing by Botic van de Zandschulp in round two a day earlier, all eyes were on Sinner.

The Italian, who has managed the intense scrutiny following a doping controversy in the build-up to the tournament, thumped Christopher O'Connell 6-1 6-4 6-2 to underline his credentials as the outright favourite at the year's final major.

"This sport is unpredictable, no? Whenever you drop a little bit of your level, you know, if it's mental, if it's tennis-wise or physical, at the end it has a huge impact on the result," Sinner said about the exits of Djokovic and Alcaraz. "Both opponents who they lost against played incredible tennis. And it happens."

"So I just watch on my side what I have to do, you know, that I guess I've done, and then we'll see what I can do."

Up next for the Australian Open champion is Tommy Paul, who is among a group of players keen to end a 21-year American wait for a homegrown major winner, since Andy Roddick claimed the title in New York.

Paul, the 14th seed, recovered from a first-set wobble to overcome Canadian Gabriel Diallo 6-7(5) 6-3 6-1 7-6(3) and hoped to counter Sinner's "bang-bang tennis" when they clash.

"He's probably the best ball striker on tour and I'm not," Paul said. "I don't want to go toe to toe just banging on the baseline with him. I want to try and mix things up."

Paul's compatriot and sixth seed Jessica Pegula advanced in the women's draw with a 6-3 6-3 win over Jessica Bouzas Maneiro, but Ashlyn Krueger fell 6-1 6-1 to Liudmila Samsonova.

POSITIVE ENERGY

French Open champion Swiatek later swatted aside Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-4 6-2 with a near-flawless performance after a chat with 23-times major winner Williams, who returned to the US Open as a fan having stepped

away from tennis in 2022.

"It was really nice to see her. She has a lot of positive energy. It's nice that she came onsite and she was chatting with the players," a star-struck Swiatek said.

"It was nice that she approach me, because I wouldn't, for sure, find the courage to do that if it was the other way round. But, yeah, she's really nice and really positive."

"I'm happy she's following tennis and my game, because she told me she's cheering for me."

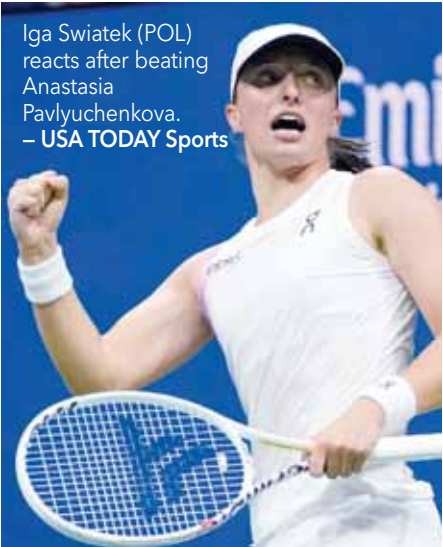
Roland Garros and Wimbledon runner-up Jasmine Paolini beat Yulia Putintseva 6-3 6-4 as the diminutive Italian continued to fly under the radar, but she could face a big hurdle with Czech Karolina Muchova up next.

Muchova, who is rediscovering her best form after 10 months out with a wrist injury, outclassed Anastasia Potapova 6-4 6-2.

Australian Alex de Minaur's injury problems are more recent, but the 10th seed shrugged off a frustrating hip issue that has dogged him since Wimbledon to outlast Briton Dan Evans 6-3 6-7 (4-7) 6-0 6-0.

Evans beat Karen Khachanov in the longest US Open match of the professional era on Tuesday at five hours and 35 minutes but finally ran out of gas.

Caroline Wozniacki showed she had plenty left in the tank since her comeback in 2023 after a three-year break following the births of her two



children as the 34-year-old Dane eased past Jessica Ponchet 6-3 6-2.

Briton Jack Draper, who is carrying the torch for his nation following the retirement of Andy Murray this summer, beat Van de Zandschulp 6-3 6-4 6-2.

Daniil Medvedev, the only former New York champion left in the men's draw, breezed past Flavio Cobolli 6-3 6-4 6-3 and set his sights on going all the way, as he did in 2021.

"It's the only Grand Slam where I have that chance," fifth seed Medvedev said. "I for sure didn't expect to have this in the fourth round when Novak and Carlos are here. It's a fun feeling from one side but from the other side it's a new tournament."

"I need to play my best to try to win it again."

— Reuters

2024 TOURNAMENT AT FLUSHING MEADOWS

MEN

JANNIK SINNER (ITA X1) BT CHRISTOPHER O'CONNELL (AUS) 6-1, 6-4, 6-2

TOMMY PAUL (USA X14) BT GABRIEL DIALLO (CAN) 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-1, 7-6 (7/3)

NUNO BORGES (POR) BT JAKUB MENSIK (CZE) 6-7 (5/7), 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-0

DANIIL MEDVEDEV (RUS X5) BT FLAVIO COBOLLI (ITA X31) 6-3, 6-4, 6-3

JACK DRAPER (GBR X25) BT BOTIC VAN DE ZANDSCHULP (NED) 6-3, 6-4, 6-2

TOMAS MACHAC (CZE) BT DAVID GOFFIN (BEL) 6-3, 6-1, 6-2

ALEX DE MINAUR (AUS X10) BT DANIEL EVANS (GBR) 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 6-0, 6-0

JORDAN THOMPSON (AUS) BT MATTEO ARNALDI (ITA X30) 7-5, 6-2, 7-6 (7/5)

WOMEN

Iga Swiatek (POL x1) bt Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (RUS x25) 6-4, 6-2

Liudmila Samsonova (RUS x16) bt Ashlyn Krueger (USA) 6-1, 6-1

Diana Shnaider (RUS x18) bt Sara Errani (ITA) 6-2, 6-2

Jessica Pegula (USA x6) bt Jessica Bouzas (ESP) 6-3, 6-3

Caroline Wozniacki (DEN) bt Jessika Ponchet (FRA) 6-3, 6-2

Beatriz Haddad Maia (BRA x22) bt Anna Kalinskaya (RUS x15) 6-3, 6-1

Karolina Muchova (CZE) bt Anastasia Potapova (RUS) 6-4, 6-2

Jasmine Paolini (ITA x5) bt Yulia Putintseva (KAZ x30) 6-3, 6-4

Ton-up Das helps Bangladesh thwart Pakistan in second Test

Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Liton Das hit a fighting hundred to lift Bangladesh from a precarious 26-6 to 262 all out on Sunday, in a remarkable turnaround that left the second Test in Rawalpindi within either team's grasp.

The 29-year-old hit 138 over the course of a marathon 333 minutes and brought Bangladesh back into the match with a fighting 165-run seventh-wicket stand alongside Mehidy Hasan Miraz, who scored a pugnacious 78.

At close on the third day, Bangladesh struck back to leave Pakistan on a sluggish 9-2, with opener Abdullah Shafique dismissed for three and nightwatchman Khurram Shahzad falling without scoring — both to pacer Hasan Mahmud.

Saim Ayub was not out on six as the home team lead by 21 runs, and Pakistan will need to bat smartly to clinch a series-levelling win after losing the first Test, also in Rawalpindi, by 10 wickets.

Bangladesh's win last week was their first in 14 attempts against



Bangladesh's Liton Das (R) and Mehidy Hasan Miraz run between the wickets.

— AFP

Pakistan.

The highlight of the day was Das and Mehidy's match-turning stand.

On top of that, Das added 69 with tail-ender Mahmud (13 not out) in a 24.5-over ninth wicket stand, equalling the partnership

record against Pakistan and leaving the home team frustrated.

Das, dropped on 90 by spinner Abrar Ahmed off his

own bowling, hit a late cut off the same bowler to reach his fourth Test hundred. He finally holed out to Agha Salman at long-on.

Das, who came to the crease with Bangladesh tottering at 26-5, cracked 13 boundaries and four sixes, adding a big 236 for the last four wickets.

Earlier, Pakistan were put in a strong position by pacer Shahzad's career-best 6-90 and Mir Hazma (2-50) in the morning session, but they were left wanting thereafter.

Das and Mehidy's solid stand took advantage of an eased-out Rawalpindi stadium pitch in the second session of the rain-affected Test, which saw Friday's first day washed out.

Shahzad, who had taken 4-15 in his first spell, had Mehidy caught and bowled off a miscued drive two overs before tea to end Pakistan's long and frustrating wait for the seventh wicket.

Das and Mehidy are the first pair in Tests to add 150 or more runs for the seventh or lower wicket from a team total under 50 runs.

Mehidy, who took 5-61 on Saturday, hit 12 boundaries and a six as he passed 50 for the eighth time in Tests.

Bangladesh resumed at the start of the day on 10-0, but Shahzad soon had opener Zakir Hasan caught by Abrar Ahmed at short midwicket for one in the fourth over.

Shahzad then bowled Shadman Islam (10) and skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto (four) in the space of four deliveries to reduce Bangladesh to 20-3.

At the other end, Hamza had Mominul Haque caught by Mohammad Ali at mid-on for one and then removed first Test centurion Mushfiqur Rahim for three, caught behind by Mohammad Rizwan from a beautiful outswinger.

Shahzad made it 26-6 by trapping Shakib Al Hasan lbw for two before Mehidy and Das dug in.

Shahzad's previous best figures were 3-45 in his debut Test against Australia at Perth last year.

— Reuters

CHELSEA HELD BY PALACE AS NEWCASTLE SINK SPURS

LONDON:
CHELSEA SUFFERED

fresh frustration after blowing the lead in a 1-1 draw against Crystal Palace, while Newcastle beat Tottenham 2-1 as Manchester United and Liverpool prepared for their Premier League showdown on Sunday.

Enzo Maresca's Chelsea have won only once in the first three league games of the Italian's reign after a chaotic close-season. Beaten by Manchester City on the opening weekend, Chelsea powered to a 6-2 win at Wolves last weekend before scraping into the UEFA Conference League group stage after a 2-1 loss at Servette on Thursday.

Former Leicester boss Maresca insists his expensive Chelsea rebuild, featuring a host of new signings, is ahead of schedule despite their inconsistent start. Jadon Sancho's loan move from Manchester United was the final piece in Chelsea's overhaul since last term and the winger was introduced to the crowd before taking his seat in the director's box next to Blues co-owner Behdad Eghbali.

But Sancho can't have been impressed by his new team as they failed to kill off Palace after Noni Madueke picked out Cole Palmer and his pass was slotted home by Nicolas Jackson in the 25th minute.

ISAK FIRES NEWCASTLE

Maresca was furious after Palace midfielder Will Hughes avoided a second yellow card for a foul on Palmer. Looking for their first point this season after defeats against Brentford and West Ham, Palace made the most of that escape to draw level in the 53rd minute.

England midfielder Eberechi Eze unfurled a superb curling finish that flashed past Chelsea keeper Robert Sanchez from 20 yards.

Eze's eye-catching goal and a late close-range miss by Jackson ended Chelsea's run of 14 successive wins against Palace in all competitions.

At St James' Park, Wilson Odobert, Pape Sarr and Pedro Porro all wasted good chances for Tottenham in the early stages.

Newcastle took the lead in spectacular fashion in the 37th minute when Lloyd Kelly pulled the ball back to Harvey Barnes, who unleashed a sublime volley into the far corner from 10 yards.

Tottenham equalised in the 56th minute as Newcastle defender Dan Burn accidentally diverted the ball into his own net while trying to clear after Brennan Johnson's cross eluded Nick Pope, who had weakly parried James Maddison's shot in the build-up to the goal.

Newcastle midfielder Sandro Tonali came on for his first Premier League appearance in over 10 months after his ban for breaching betting rules.

The Magpies went back in front in the 78th minute when Jacob Murphy ran onto Joelinton's defence-splitting pass and laid on a tap-in for Alexander Isak.

Unbeaten Newcastle's second win in three league games condemned Tottenham to a first defeat this term, with the north London derby against Arsenal next up after the international break.

Liverpool travel to Old Trafford in Sunday's late game as Reds boss Arne Slot gets his first taste of the bitter rivalry with United.

Hired from Feyenoord to succeed Jurgen Klopp in the close-season, Slot has overseen 2-0 wins against Ipswich and Brentford in his first two games.

Slot's fellow Dutchman Erik ten Hag is already under pressure at United after their 2-1 defeat at Brighton last weekend. — AFP

Newcastle United's Alexander Isak celebrates scoring their second goal.

– REUTERS



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OIA to consolidate key food and fisheries entities



The merger is part of OIA's broader strategy to optimise the food security sector's performance.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPTEMBER 1

The Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has initiated the process of merging the Oman Food Investment Holding Company (Nitaj) and the Oman Fisheries Development Company into a single, more robust entity.

This move is designed to elevate the sector's economic and commercial impact, aligning with Oman Vision 2040 by enhancing performance, product quality, and decision-making efficiency while reducing operating costs.

The Authority's statement underscored the merger as part of its broader strategy to optimise the food security sector's performance, aligning with its mandate under Royal Decree No 57/2021.

The consolidation is expected to maximise synergies between the two companies, particularly in value chain integration, procurement, logistics, and commercial operations.

THE CONSOLIDATION IS EXPECTED TO MAXIMISE SYNERGIES BETWEEN THE TWO COMPANIES, PARTICULARLY IN VALUE CHAIN INTEGRATION, PROCUREMENT, LOGISTICS AND COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS.

The merger will be executed according to a detailed plan and timeline, in collaboration with relevant government authorities. The project aims to ensure transparency and minimal disruption, particularly for employees.

The boards of the two companies will actively engage with employees, providing updates and holding open discussions to address their concerns.

Additionally, the Oman Investment Authority is assessing the legal and contractual obligations of both companies to ensure a seamless transition that does not affect ongoing projects or commitments with contractors and funding agencies. — ONA

Oman boosts oil and gas prospects with new exploration agreement

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPTEMBER 1

Mazoon Petrogas, a subsidiary of Petrogas E&P (PG), the Exploration and Production arm of the Mohammed al Barwani Group, along with its partner CNPC, has signed an agreement with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals for the exploration and production of oil and gas within the concession area Block 15.

The agreement was signed by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Dr Mohammed al Barwani, Chairman and Founder of MB Group, along with Zhang Yu, Vice-President of CNODC.

Through this new agreement, Petrogas aims to continue its successful collaboration with the government, demonstrating its commitment to the local economy and community.

Leveraging 25 years of experience and the unique talents of both Omani and international experts in the field of oil and gas, and supported by world-class infrastructure, Petrogas, through its joint venture Daleel petroleum as the operator, will explore Block 15 for potential Oil and Gas reserves. If successful, it will swiftly execute fit for purpose development plans to ensure efficient operations, optimising production and resource recovery.

The agreement also includes the continuation of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) through Petrogas's ongoing partnership with CNPC, a major Chinese oil and gas player.

This marks a significant milestone following previous successes in Block 5, operated



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi (centre), Minister of Energy and Minerals, flanked by Zhang Yu (left), Vice-President of CNODC, and Dr Mohammed al Barwani, Chairman and Founder of MB Group, at the agreement signing.

by Petrogas and CNPC's joint venture, Daleel Petroleum.

Petrogas has over the years achieved many successes in Egypt, the Netherlands, and the UK. It has also delivered exceptional value on behalf of Petroleum Development Oman in the Rima Small Satellite Fields, where Petrogas succeeded in consistently increasing production and reserve additions.

Commenting on the agreement, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, the Minister of Energy and Minerals, said: "This new agreement represents a significant investment in Oman, driving economic growth, job creation and the delivery of FDI through Petrogas' partners in this project. It aligns with our aims to empower local energy providers and reinforce their critical role in advancing Oman's economic prosperity."

Usama al Barwani, Vice Chairman MB group and Managing Director of Petrogas E&P, stated: "We deeply value the trust placed in us by the Omani government and cherish our long-standing partnership with CNPC.

This new agreement underscores our commitment to exploring further opportunities in Oman. We aspire to continue contributing significantly to the growth of Oman's energy sector through safe and efficient operations, as well as the positive impact we have on the local communities in which we operate."

Kingsuk Sen, CEO of Petrogas E&P, added: "We are thrilled with this award and remain steadfast in our commitment to swiftly deploy the latest technology and innovative approaches, to unlock the block's resource potential. We are grateful to the government for their continued trust and support.

With a proven track record of safe and efficient operations, along with significant investments in Oman that have consistently enhanced production and reserves, we remain committed to driving further value-added growth."

Investments in 28 new sectors limited exclusively to Omanis

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPTEMBER 1

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has issued Ministerial Decision No 435/2024, which adds 28 activities to the list of sectors reserved exclusively for Omani investors.

This amendment modifies the previous Ministerial Decision No. 209/2020 and brings the total number of activities off-limits to foreign investors to 123.

The decision aligns with Article 14 of the Foreign Capital Investment Law, established under Royal Decree No. 50/2019, which mandates the issuance of a list of activities prohibited



With the latest additions, investments in a total of 123 commercial activities are now off-limits to foreign investors.

for foreign investment by the Minister.

This strategic move aims to strike a balance between

attracting quality foreign investments and promoting Omani entrepreneurial ventures, particularly in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which are crucial for the national economy.

By expanding the list of restricted activities, the Ministry intends to create more opportunities for Omanis to establish their own businesses, thereby fostering job creation and economic growth.

The decision also emphasises the importance of preserving Omani heritage and national identity, ensuring that sectors related to these areas remain under local control.

Among the newly added activities are several traditional crafts, including the production of handicrafts using flowers, herbs, frankincense, leather, palm leaves, wood and metals.

Other activities now restricted to Omani investors include the retail of construction scrap materials, operation of mobile cafes, freshwater aquaculture, and management of LPG filling stations, among others.

According to Article 2 of the decision any provisions conflicting with this amendment are now nullified, while Article 3 specifies that the decision will take effect the day after its publication.

Existing foreign investments in the affected sectors will not

be impacted unless transferred, which would require approval from the Ministry.

Despite the restrictions, Oman remains an attractive destination for foreign investment, as evidenced by a 19.3-per cent growth in foreign direct investment (FDI) by the end of the first quarter of 2024, reaching RO 25.38 billion, compared to RO 21.27 billion in the same period in 2023.

The Foreign Capital Investment Law allows foreign ownership of up to 100 per cent in over 2,000 commercial and industrial activities, underscoring the country's commitment to creating a competitive and stable investment environment.

Spring into a season of celebrations with Kia

MUSCAT: Spring into the season of celebration with Kia and win incredible gifts, discover unbeatable savings and surprises with Kia's latest promotional offer. Head to your nearest Kia showroom to find the best of Kia's line-up.

Check out the amazing incentives such as 1st year free registration, insurance, service and upgrade your deal through Scratch & Win Coupons. It is all about winning at Kia. Get a chance to win 10-gramme 24-carat gold coins, the latest iPhone 15s and service upgrades of up to 200,000 km as assured scratch and win prizes, everybody at KIA is a winner.

Take advantage of Kia's promotional offer, valid for its dynamic sedans and SUVs range until the offer ends on October 23, 2024.

"Seeing you driving our vehicles brings us immense joy. But our main objective is to provide a unique, comfortable,



enjoyable and safe driving experience for people from all walks of life," commented a representative from Kia Oman. "We're offering a chance to upgrade the service benefits of up to 200,000 km, which means your vehicle will be under the expert care of Kia's team, without any additional cost or hidden

charges," he further shared. Kia's diverse SUV range includes the AWD Kia Telluride 3.8L and Sorento 3.5L V6 with 7 and 8-seater options. For five-seater options, customers can select Sportage 2.0/1.6L Turbo, Seltos 1.6L 5-seater, and Sonet 1.5L. Explore more with Kia's MPV

range: the new Carnival 3.5L in 8-seater, Carens 1.5L 7-seater, the PC segment Picanto 1.25L 4 Cyl, Pegas 1.4L, K3 1.6L 5-seater sedan, Cerato 1.6L/2.0L, K5 2.0/2.5L DOHC CVT Engine, and K8 3.5L GDL SPL. The all-electric range of EV6 and EV9 showcase its versatility and the enhanced ability to

satisfy customers' needs. Kia's strategy of blending technological innovation with a customer-centric approach has been a consistent focus for the brand. Abiding by their motto, Kia offers a ride for everyone. Venture out with friends for fun hangouts with our new Kia K3. The sedan becomes your everyday companion that makes city hustles easy. Powered by a 1.6-litre engine, it delivers 120 hp at 6300 rpm paired with 6-speed transmission. The K3 comes with a modern smart keyless entry system for easy access. For enhanced safety, it features the parking reverse warning camera (RVC). For those looking for a utilitarian drive — have a look at the all-new Kia Sorento. Power packed with a 3.5L V6 with 7 and 8 seater option, the AWD is an ideal family car. Step inside and feel welcomed with the spacious premium leather-fitted interiors, roomy leg and

headroom. Enhance the inside mood with multi-ambient lighting, curved display infotainment system integrated with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay and wireless charging trays for compatible smartphones. Kia strongly emphasises creating family bonds and delivering products that are reliable with enhanced utility functions. Get your Kia automobiles serviced by Kia to keep drives smooth and stress-free. The Kia team is always there to assist you. Reliable International Automotive (RIA), Kia's distributor in Oman, ensures a rewarding ownership experience with excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities. Recognised globally, RIA has received prestigious accolades, including the 'Good Partnership Award', the 'Family Like Care Service Award', and the 'Kia Distributor of Distinction Award'.

BMW M Team Redline wins team title at Esports World Cup

MUSCAT: BMW M Motorsport impressively stamped its mark on the climax of the virtual ESL R1 season. At the Esports World Cup (EWC) in Riyadh (KSA), all titles went to BMW M Team Redline. On Thursday, Kevin Sigg (SLO) triumphed in the drivers' championship, and on Sunday, the newly crowned champion, along with his team-mates Sebastian Job, Luke Bennett (both GBR), and Jeffrey Rietveld (NED), also secured first place in the team championship. While Sigg was rewarded with a prize of 25,000 euros, BMW M Team Redline received 140,000 euros for the overall victory. In total, the participants at the Esports World Cup competed for 500,000 euros. In the drivers' championship, BMW M drivers dominated the event. Behind Sigg, Job and Bennett finished second and fourth, respectively, with BMW M Team MOUZ driver Maximilian Benecke (GER), last year's season highlight winner, placing third. BMW M Team BS+COMPETITION also brought a driver into the top-ten with Caique Oliveira (BRA)



finishing tenth. Eight out of nine race victories went to BMW M drivers. In the team competition, the three BMW M representatives, with their virtual BMW M4 GT3s on the "Rennsport" simulation platform, also performed strongly, finishing the group stage in first (Redline), sixth (BS+COMPETITION), and ninth (MOUZ) places. On Saturday, in the "Second Chance" event, BMW M Team MOUZ secured its ticket to the final of the top six teams thanks to a solid team performance and three victories by Benecke. On Sunday, BMW M Team Redline took the reins again and celebrated three more individual victories. With 300 points, the quartet was unbeatable after the fifth race. The decisive victory was clinched by Job. BMW M Team MOUZ finished third in the final.

Sohar International launches 'Tap & Go' services across its ATM & CDM network

MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman's best bank, has reinforced its commitment to leading the banking sector in technological innovation with the launch of its 'Tap & Go' service, now available across its extensive network of ATMs and CDMs. This strategic move underscores the bank's dedication to enhancing customer experience through cutting-edge solutions, positioning Sohar International as a pioneer in delivering convenience and security in banking. The introduction of contactless functionality represents a significant advancement in the bank's digital transformation journey. With this feature, Sohar International and Sohar Islamic cardholders can now complete transactions at ATMs and CDMs with unprecedented speed and ease. By eliminating the need for physical card insertion, the 'Tap & Go' service reduces transaction times and enhances security, offering a seamless banking experience. Additionally, Samsung Pay users can leverage this functionality to conduct transactions effortlessly, further enriching the convenience



of mobile banking. Sajeel Bashiruddin, Chief Digital Officer at Sohar International, commented, "At Sohar International, our commitment to innovation is driven by our focus on customer satisfaction. We are committed to delivering new digital services and ensuring a secure and convenient customer journey, while maintaining all the necessary safety and security measures first and foremost. The introduction of 'Tap & Go' is a testament to our relentless pursuit of excellence in delivering secure and convenient banking

solutions. Sohar International continues to digitise and enhance its services to meet the evolving needs of customers. This is an exciting development in our service offerings, and we encourage everyone to experience the enhanced capabilities of our ATM and CDM network." This service is available for all Near-Field Communication (NFC) enabled cards, including debit, credit and prepaid cards from all banks, providing a broad reach to customers. By ensuring compatibility across a wide range of card types, Sohar International has made this innovation accessible to a diverse customer base, enhancing the overall utility of its ATM and CDM network. Security remains a cornerstone of this initiative. While the 'Tap & Go' feature simplifies the transaction process, stringent measures have been implemented to maintain the highest standards of security. Cardholders and Samsung Pay users are required to enter their PIN to authenticate transactions, ensuring that the service not only offers convenience, but also robust protection against unauthorised access.

MHD Automobiles celebrates one year as Oman's official distributor for Jeep, Dodge, RAM & Alfa Romeo

MUSCAT: MHD Automobiles LLC, Oman's leading automotive distributor, proudly marks its first anniversary as the official distributor for Jeep, Dodge, RAM, and Alfa Romeo. To commemorate this significant milestone, exclusive pricing is being introduced on some of the most sought-after models from these brands. A year of automotive excellence Since the launch of the state-of-the-art Stellantis showroom in Al Hail North last year, MHD Automobiles has been committed to providing an exceptional automotive experience. Over the past year, the company has established itself as the premier destination for luxury automotive brands, including Jeep, Dodge, RAM, Alfa Romeo, and the after-sales brand Mopar.

This anniversary highlights the dedication to delivering top-tier automotive innovation, style and service to Oman. 1st anniversary celebration pricing In appreciation of the continued support from customers, MHD Automobiles is presenting exclusive anniversary pricing on the following models: Jeep Grand Cherokee 18" Limited (MY24): Starting at RO 18,995, featuring 18" wheels, a 5-seat configuration, and more. Dodge Durango R/T V8 (MY23): Starting at RO 19,995, equipped with a powerful V8 engine, advanced technology and premium comfort. This is the last chance to get your hands on the legendary Dodge 5.7L HEMI V8 engine with 360HP and 390LB-FT of torque. Dodge Charger GT V6

(MY23): Starting at RO 17,695, with a sporty design, V6 engine and advanced safety features. Alfa Romeo Tonale Ti (MY24): Starting at RO 16,995, the compact SUV is an All-Wheel Drive featuring a powerful 2-Litre Turbo engine. It also comes with an industry-leading 5 years or 120,000 km service and 7 years or 200,000 km warranty (whichever is earlier). These exceptional prices provide an opportunity to acquire the renowned Jeep Grand Cherokee, the dynamic Dodge Durango, the powerful Dodge Charger, or the smart Alfa Romeo Tonale. These prices are available for a limited time and while stocks last. Reflecting on the successful year, Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD Automobiles, expressed his gratitude and vision



for the future: "Celebrating this milestone as Oman's official distributor for Jeep, Dodge, RAM, and Alfa Romeo is a significant achievement. "The past year has been characterised by dedication,

passion and growth. Our commitment to providing Oman with world-class automotive brands remains unwavering. "This anniversary is an opportunity to express gratitude to the customers for their support

and to present these exclusive pricing options as a token of appreciation. Our focus remains on continuing to serve the community with excellence and advancing automotive innovation in Oman."



In brief

■ SEOUL

**SOUTH KOREA EXPORTS
EXTEND GAINS TO 11TH
MONTH**

South Korea's exports rose for an 11th straight month in August, but the pace of growth was weaker than the previous month and market expectations as demand for computer chips slowed, while auto sales remained sluggish.

Overseas sales by Asia's fourth-largest economy rose 11.4% year-on-year to \$57.90 billion, trade data showed on Sunday, slowing from a gain of 13.9% in the previous month, which was the fastest in six months.

It was also weaker than a 13.0% increase tipped in a survey of economists. Growth in semiconductor exports slowed to a five-month low. — **Reuters**

■ NEW YORK

**CHINA'S SINOCHEN
PLANS TO EXIT US SHALE
JV WITH EXXON**

Chinese state-backed oil and chemicals company Sinochem is planning to sell its 40% stake in a US shale joint venture with oil major Exxon Mobil, valued upwards of \$2 billion, people familiar with the matter said.

Sinochem in recent weeks hired investment bankers at Barclays to advise it on the potential sale of its stake in the Wolfcamp joint venture. Exxon, majority owner and operator of the JV, has the right of first refusal in the sale, the source added.

The sources cautioned that the sale considerations are at an early stage and a deal with Exxon or other interested parties is not guaranteed. — **Reuters**

DEME progresses certification pilot at Hyport Duqm project in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, SEPT 1

Belgian-based offshore energy and marine infrastructure group DEME Concessions says it is advancing a key pilot aimed at securing the certification of green molecules from a green hydrogen and ammonia project, branded as Hyport Duqm, planned at the Special Economic Zone in Duqm on Oman's southeast coast.

The partnership of energy major BP (49 per cent), DEME Concessions (25.5 per cent) and OQ Group of the Sultanate of Oman (25.5 per cent) is currently in the early stages of developing Hyport Duqm – part of an array of giga-scale hydrogen schemes that seek to position Oman as a regional hub for green molecule production and export.

“DEME's Hyport Energy continues to advance, positioning itself to be amongst the first in the world to produce green molecules from renewable energy.

During the first half of 2024, the HYPORT Duqm project in Oman has embarked on a



Hyport Duqm is envisioned to evolve into a 'Green Hydrogen Hub & Economy' over future phases.

certification pilot project in accordance with EU regulation,” DEME stated in newly published results of the group's performance during the first half of 2024.

In July, DEME and OQ announced a strategic partnership with BP, one of the world's leading international energy companies. “In this partnership BP becomes an equity partner and operator of the

Hyport Duqm project, acquiring a 49 per cent stake while OQ and DEME each retain a 25.5 per cent share,” the Belgian-headquartered group noted.

The certification pilot follows the successful completion of a precertification study carried out on behalf of Hyport Duqm by HINICIO, a leading consultancy firm focused on sustainable energy, industry, and

transportation.

It paves the way for green ammonia output from Hyport Duqm to be certified as ‘Renewable Fuels of Non-Biological Origin’ (RFNBO) – a key criterion that ensures that its green molecules qualify for import into the EU and clients, while at the same time, are guaranteed to have been sustainably produced.

DEME'S HYPOT ENERGY CONTINUES TO ADVANCE, POSITIONING ITSELF TO BE AMONGST THE FIRST IN THE WORLD TO PRODUCE GREEN MOLECULES FROM RENEWABLE ENERGY.

DURING THE FIRST HALF OF 2024, THE HYPOT DUQM PROJECT IN OMAN HAS EMBARKED ON A CERTIFICATION PILOT PROJECT IN ACCORDANCE WITH EU REGULATION

In the first phase, Hyport Duqm is targeting 500 MW of electrolyser capacity to produce 60,000 tonnes per annum (tpa) of green hydrogen alongside 300,000 tpa of green hydrogen. At full capacity, output is projected to rise to 1 million tpa of green ammonia and 180,000 tpa of green hydrogen, powered by 1.5 gigawatts of electrolyser capacity. Starting with a commercial-scale demonstration project in Phase 1, Hyport Duqm is envisioned to evolve into a ‘Green Hydrogen Hub & Economy’ over future phases, according to DEME.

Oman's total electricity production increases

MUSCAT: The total electricity production of the Sultanate of Oman until the end of June 2024 recorded a 0.3% increase to reach 20,391.5 gigawatts per hour compared to 20,328.9 gigawatts per hour during the same period in 2023.

Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information showed that the governorates of Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South and Al Dhahirah recorded a total production of 11,947.5 gigawatts per hour, a decrease of 6.2% compared to the end of June 2023. The total production in Muscat Governorate increased by 82.9% to reach 308.8 gigawatts per hour,



while it increased in Dhofar Governorate by 17.4% to reach 2,886.2 gigawatts per hour.

Total production in Al Sharqiyah North and Al

Sharqiyah South governorates increased by 7.9 per cent to reach 4913.3 gigawatts per hour, while total production in Al Wusta Governorate decreased

by 30.6 per cent to reach 79 gigawatts per hour, and in Musandam Governorate, total production increased by 4.9 per cent to record 213.6 gigawatts per hour.

Statistics indicated that the net electricity production of the Sultanate of Oman until the end of June 2024 decreased by 1.3 per cent to reach 19424.5 gigawatts per hour.

On the other hand, statistics showed that the total amount of water produced in the Sultanate of Oman amounted to about 248,366 million cubic metres by the end of June 2024, compared to 255,848 million cubic metres in the same period in 2023.

— ONA

Iraq seeks US investment in gas

BAGHDAD: Iraq plans to offer 10 gas exploration blocks to US companies during an upcoming visit by Oil Minister Hayan Abdel-Ghani to the United States, he announced on Saturday.

The move is part of Baghdad's efforts to attract US investment into its energy sector, following previous licensing rounds where Chinese firms secured the majority of available fields. The 10 gas blocks, left unclaimed following six licensing rounds, will be presented in a new bidding process, Iraqi state media said, and comes as Iraq seeks to bolster its domestic gas production.

Abdel-Ghani also said Iraq will launch a new gas investment project by the end of the year at the Al Faihaa oil field in southern Iraq. The project, with a capacity of 125 million standard cubic feet (mscf), is a key component of Iraq's strategy to enhance its energy infrastructure. — **Reuters**

Bank Muscat launches Al Tharwa Fund for investors

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, SEPT 1

Bank Muscat, Oman's leading financial services provider, has introduced the Al Tharwa Fund, targeting both individual and institutional investors. This open-ended fund aims to deliver stable returns through regular dividends and capital growth by investing in a diversified portfolio of equities and fixed income securities.

The fund, regulated by Oman's Financial Services Authority, is the first of its kind in the Sultanate, offering a balanced investment approach across GCC regional and international markets.

The Initial Public Offering (IPO) for the fund is open from September 1 to September 12, 2024, with an initial offer price of 101 baisa per unit. Investors can participate with a minimum investment of RO 50, and there is



no maximum limit.

The fund offers daily liquidity with no minimum holding period, allowing investors flexibility in managing their investments. The Net Asset Value (NAV) will be published daily on the Bank Muscat and

Muscat Stock Exchange websites, providing transparency for investors.

The investment strategy of Bank Muscat Al Tharwa Fund is to maintain an optimal mix of equities and fixed income securities based on the prevailing

Khalifa bin Abdullah al Hatmi
Deputy General Manager, Investment Banking and Capital Markets

market conditions and offer twin advantage of regular dividends as well as capital gains to investors.

In addition, the design of the fund enables regular rebalancing of the allocation to equities and fixed income securities, to provide an inbuilt advantage of diversification for investors during changing market conditions and better manage the volatility.

Accordingly, the Fund offers

a comprehensive solution for investment as it allows an opportunity to minimize the volatility in investment portfolio while receiving regular dividends as well as capital appreciation by reaping the benefits of an optimal asset allocation.

Khalifa bin Abdullah al Hatmi, Deputy General Manager, Investment Banking and Capital Markets, Bank Muscat, said: “We are extremely delighted to introduce the Bank Muscat Al Tharwa Fund to the market. This launch of the Fund is a testament to our commitment to offering innovative and unique investment solutions that cater to the evolving needs of our investors.

With the Fund's objective and focus on generating stable returns and capital appreciation through investing in equities and fixed-income instruments in the GCC and international markets, we are confident that it will offer

individuals and institutions alike a compelling investment opportunity to generate income and capital appreciation.

Al Hatmi added: “Bank Muscat Al Tharwa Fund offers an attractive and innovative investment option for investors to benefit from the investment expertise of Bank Muscat's Asset Management team and a dynamic allocation to both equity and fixed income to benefit from various market opportunities.”

The primary objective of the Fund is to generate regular income and capital appreciation by investing in a diversified portfolio of equity and fixed income instruments in the GCC and international markets. Bank Muscat's Asset Management team will be the Investment Manager of the Fund, being the largest asset manager in the Sultanate and one of the most experienced asset managers in the GCC region.

UK's housing mess requires costly fix



YAWEN CHEN

The author focuses on European energy companies, commodity markets, and real estate as a columnist for Reuters Breakingviews in London.

Fixing the UK's housing mess will require some government firepower. Prime Minister Keir Starmer has pledged to boost the supply of cheap homes and shake up planning laws. But relying on private housebuilders may only go so far, and the sector's share prices are not pricing in a boom. Starmer will also need to use public funds. The UK's housing crisis appears to be getting worse by the day. House prices in London, for example, have nearly doubled from 7 times median income in 2002 to 13 times last year. The Centre for Economic Performance found that in the 30 years from 1989, 3 million fewer houses were built than in the previous three decades despite rising demand from a growing population. Starmer wants to catch up by building 1.5 million new homes during his parliamentary term, equivalent to an annual target of 300,000. The Conservative government led by Rishi Sunak

only delivered 226,000 in its final year of office. Starmer is already tackling one of the biggest problems. Planning applications are under the control of regional authorities, allowing local vested interests to stymie development. The government is therefore proposing to employ more planning officers, force local authorities to abide by strict housing targets and broaden the scope of land that can be built on. But a housing boom will still need developers to play ball. Private housebuilders will only build more if they expect higher demand and profits. But with building and labour costs elevated, and demand soft due to high mortgage costs, they are unlikely to rapidly ramp up construction. Developers may even be wary that a surge in building could depress prices, and so prefer to sit on unused land. The top 10 UK housebuilders have some 700,000 plots of undeveloped land according to

one 2023 estimate. Investors in housebuilders are not expecting anything like the boom Starmer is promising. While housebuilder stocks have risen since Labour's election win in July, most are still trading below their level in December 2021, when the Bank of England started raising rates. Analysts are equally sceptical. Take Persimmon which is a likely beneficiary of Starmer's plan given its focus on cheaper homes. The group delivered just around 9,900 homes in 2023, about a third lower than the previous year. Analysts expect that to rise to just over 14,000 new homes by 2029 according to Visible Alpha forecasts, which would still be below the number sold in 2022. Barratt Developments is expected to deliver just below 17,000 new homes in 2029, less than the roughly 18,000 it built in 2022. He's promised to build 1.5 million new homes during his term and shake up the planning system to get there.

Starmer could seek to encourage more private building through schemes like the Conservative Party's "help-to-buy" programme, which lowered downpayments for first-time buyers and handed them interest-free loans for five years. But that scheme, which ended in 2022, was not very successful: it pushed up house prices, but did relatively little to help new housing starts. What Starmer really needs is to boost the number of cheaper homes. Developers must build a certain percentage of affordable homes, which are often then sold to local councils and non-profit housing associations and rented out, usually with government support for tenants. But such properties accounted for just 13% of the UK's new home supply in 2023. It doesn't help that local authorities have faced significant reductions in funding grants from central government, which have fallen by 46% in real terms

since 2010 according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Housing associations, meanwhile, are struggling with higher maintenance costs for existing homes, limiting their ability to buy new ones. That's why Starmer needs to step up. Chancellor Rachel Reeves is likely to raise rents for affordable homes, which are often paid with government subsidies, by more than inflation for the next 10 years. That would bring in more cash for local housing associations and councils, helping them invest in more properties. The government could also increase direct support to them with grants. One industry player reckons Starmer may announce a new housing fund worth several billion pounds in October's budget. That would be expensive at a time when the country is already facing a 22 billion pound spending hole this year. But if Starmer wants to solve the UK's housing problem, he will need to be bold. — Reuters

The rise and coming fall of Chinese manufacturing



YI FUXIAN

The author is a senior scientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, spear-headed the movement against China's one-child policy and is the author of *Big Country with an Empty Nest*.



A man works on a production line manufacturing bicycle steel rim at a factory in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China. — Reuters

As a result, Chinese household disposable income dropped from 62% of GDP in 1983 to 44% of GDP today, with household consumption falling from 53% of GDP to 37% of GDP. In Japan, by contrast, household consumption equals 56% of GDP. One can look at it this way: if wages would normally amount to US\$60-70, Chinese workers receive only US\$44 and have just US\$37 of spending power, whereas Japanese workers have US\$56 of spending power. China's government, however, has plenty of financial resources, which it uses to support industrial subsidies and investment in manufacturing. Moreover, because China's manufacturing sector offers high returns, international investors are willing to channel capital toward it. Add to that a surplus of about 100 million workers, and excess capacity is difficult to avoid. Given insufficient demand at home, China's only option for reducing its excess capacity and creating enough jobs for its population is to maintain a large current-account surplus. That is where the US comes in: the share of Chinese goods

in US imports rose from 1% in 1985 to 22% in 2017. In 2001-18, the US accounted for three-quarters of China's trade surplus. China's giant surplus is the mirror image of America's deficit, and while the rise of Chinese manufacturing is hardly the only reason for the decline of US manufacturing, it is a big one. America's share of world manufacturing exports remained stable, at 13%, between 1971 and 2000, but fell sharply after China joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001, and stood at just 6% in 2022. America's share of manufacturing value-added likewise plummeted, from 25% in 2000 to 16% in 2021. As these trends decimated America's Rust Belt, which stretches from Wisconsin to eastern Pennsylvania, popular frustration with globalisation, and with the "political elites" who had encouraged it, grew steadily. In 2016, Donald Trump rode their frustration into the White House, vowing to revive US manufacturing and force China to change its trading practices. And Trump hopes to do the same this November.

In this sense, China's one-child policy indirectly but profoundly reshaped the American political landscape. And now American politics are reshaping China's economy. The US backlash against China, which began with Trump's tariffs in 2018 and has intensified under President Joe Biden, has caused the share of Chinese goods in US imports to drop to just 12.7% in the first half of 2024. Beyond losing the American market, China is losing some of its own manufacturing companies, which are shifting part of their production to countries such as Vietnam and Mexico, to avoid US tariffs. This partial transfer augurs a wider withdrawal, much like that faced by Japan's manufacturing sector as it fell into decline. China is looking increasingly like Japan for two other reasons. First, its workforce is rapidly shrinking and ageing. According to the government, annual births have plummeted from 23.4 million, on average, in 1962-90 to just nine million last year, and even that figure is probably grossly exaggerated. Within a few years, China will probably record just six million

births per year. Meanwhile, the median age of migrant workers, who make up 80% of China's manufacturing workforce, has risen from 34 in 2008 to 43 last year, with the share of people over 50 rising from 11% to 31%. Some manufacturing plants are already closing for lack of workers. Second, China's services sector is set to squeeze manufacturing. As China's government seeks to increase the GDP share of household disposable income, Chinese demand for US goods will rise, and some manufacturing workers will shift to services, which is also where China's rapidly growing pool of college graduates will find employment. The decline of manufacturing might not happen as fast as it did in Japan, because China has a larger domestic market and a more complete industrial ecosystem, and because it is investing heavily in artificial intelligence and robotics, which could deliver productivity gains. But decline is both inevitable and irreversible. Unfortunately for the US, however, this will not necessarily bring about a revival of domestic manufacturing. © Project Syndicate, 2024

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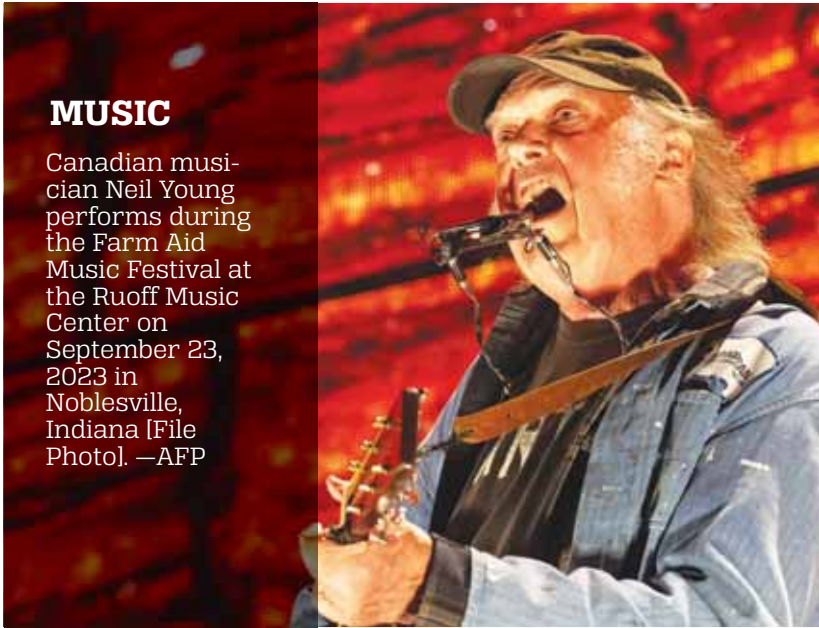
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ENTERTAINMENT

Dancers perform during the first international representation of his ballet "Gigenis, the generation of earth" at the theatre of Aix en Provence, southern France. — AFP



MUSIC

Canadian musician Neil Young performs during the Farm Aid Music Festival at the Ruoff Music Center on September 23, 2023 in Noblesville, Indiana [File Photo]. —AFP



FESTIVAL

A masked youth participates in the "Fireball Festival" in Nejapa, El Salvador. The traditional festival, dating from 1922, is held in honour of Saint Jeronimo and recalls the 1658 eruption of the San Salvador volcano that destroyed Nejapa. — AFP



FASHION

Top 10 finalist, Paula Ezendu, representing Anambra, poses in her gown at the Miss Universe Nigeria 2024 held at the Eko Hotel Convention Centre. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A woman wearing a period outfit poses for photograph outside the Art Deco-styled Midland Hotel as she attends the Vintage By The Sea festival in Morecambe, north-west England. — AFP

art & life

MONDAY | SEPTEMBER 2, 2024 | SAFAR 28, 1446 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om

FILMING THE FLOOD: THE TERRIFYING YET AWE-INSPIRING SIDE OF OMAN’S NATURE

While this story recounts the challenges and experiences of filming a flood in Oman in March 2016, it's become more relevant. Despite heavy rains and difficult terrain, the team successfully captured dramatic footage of a flash flood in Wadi Tiwi, highlighting the power of nature and the importance of caution when exploring such environments... P20



ENTERTAINMENT

Stop using our songs, ABBA tells Trump

THE RECORD LABEL for iconic Swedish pop group ABBA said on Thursday it has demanded that US presidential hopeful Donald Trump stop playing its music at his campaign rallies. Universal Music in Sweden said videos had surfaced of ABBA's music being played at at least one Trump event. "We have demanded that (the material) be taken down and removed," Universal Music AB said in an e-mail. "Universal Music Publishing AB and (record company) Polar Music International AB have not received any request (to use the music), so no per-

mission or licence has been given to Trump," it said. Swedish daily Svenska Dagbladet said its reporter had in July attended a Trump rally in Minnesota — known for its strong Swedish community — where "The Winner Takes it All" was played. The reporter said the song was followed by a 10-minute video clip, projected on a big screen, of ABBA in its heyday playing some of its biggest hits, including "Money, Money, Money" and "Dancing Queen". With their catchy melodies and glittering costumes, Agnetha, Bjorn, Benny and Anni-Frid — whose initials make up the name of the group — personified disco around the globe until they stopped performing in 1982. The group is the latest in a slew of artists who have asked the US Republican presidential candidate to refrain from using their music at rallies and events, including Bruce Springsteen, Neil Young, Celine Dion and the Rolling Stones. — AFP

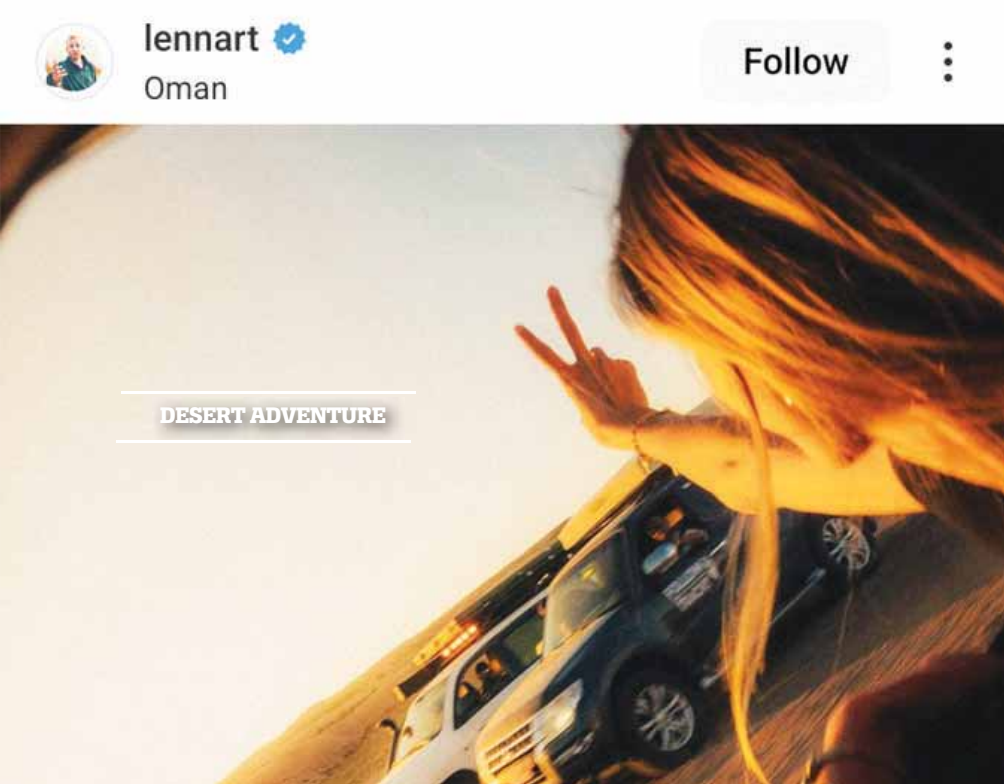
Adele bids emotional farewell to Munich after 10 sold-out shows

BRITISH POP STAR Adele wrapped up her series of 10 concerts in Munich after four weeks, with over 70,000 fans cheering her during her final performance on Saturday evening. The 36-year-old singer put on an incredible show at a custom-built outdoor arena in Munich, with great music, entertainment and strong emotions. "Thank you, Munich. This is absolutely magical, I have goosebumps," Adele said.

Adele, known for hits like "Rolling in the Deep" and "Hello," performed two shows per week at the Adele Arena on the city's trade fair grounds. The temporary venue, which was customised to her specifications and featured a 93-metre-long catwalk, can hold up to 74,000 people. It also featured a colossal screen, reportedly the world's largest at over 4,159 square metres, showcasing the singer and videos of her songs. Fans from all over the world travelled to Munich to experience her performances. Organisers reported selling 730,000 tickets for all 10 concerts, despite their high prices. Adele shared with the audience that she would be flying back home in a few hours as she plans to "take her child to school" on Monday. Following the Munich concerts, Adele said that she will be performing in Las Vegas at the end of October before taking a long break. Adele — who is notoriously reluctant to go on tour — last performed in mainland Europe in 2016. — dpa



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Scientists in the UK explore impact of offshore wind farms on seabed

SCIENTISTS HAVE collected samples from the seabed at one of the UK's oldest active offshore wind farms.

The project, led by the University of Essex, will explore the environmental impact of the turbines on the seabed amid plans to build thousands more to reach net-zero by 2050.

The samples, taken from as close as 50 metre to the turbines and as far as one mile (1.6 kilometres) away, are now being analysed, with findings to follow.

Researchers chartered a private survey vessel to carry out their expedition to the site off the coast of Cumbria.

The active wind farm, which has been operational for more than 15 years and is one of the oldest offshore sites in the UK, is run by Danish energy firm Orsted.

Natalie Hicks, of the University of Essex's school of life sciences, said the research was "hugely important."

"There are not enough specialist scientific vessels to gather the evidence in time, so collaborating with industry is key to gathering data," she said.

"We know our demand for net-zero energy targets means we have seen an increase in offshore wind farms, so understanding any environmental effects of these wind farms is urgent.

"We hope this research will feed directly into policy decision-making around offshore wind consenting.

"We know we are going to see an increase in offshore wind, so timely and evidence-based decisions are going to need to be made by policymakers.

"This science will hopefully underpin their decision-making, and impact on government policy."

The team took samples from the sea floor and hope to discover how the turbines may affect biodiversity, carbon storage and seabed composition.

Research is being carried out with Orsted, the University of St Andrews and the government's marine experts, the Centre of Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS).

A CEFAS spokesman said it was "critical to scientifically understand offshore structures and their effects and impacts on the environment".

"Too often we make

"By taking a science-led approach, we can ensure that renewable energy, such as offshore wind, continues to be deployed sensitively and sustainably."

— Orsted Spokesman

assumptions about what is occurring in our marine environment when considering human activities, we need the type of research activity highlighted here to determine whether our assumptions are correct and to provide more confidence in our understanding," the spokesman said.

"Such improved confidence is a vital element of the integrated scientific understanding needed for informed decision-making towards ensuring the long-term future of our marine environment."

Marine scientists will also compare the effects of decommissioned oil platforms to get a snapshot of how fossil fuel and renewable energy assets vary in their impacts.

David Paterson, of the University of St Andrews, said: "It's important we take learnings from the oil and gas industry on the environmental effects of oil and gas operations and decommissioning and effectively apply these to the offshore wind industry as projects mature towards later life phases."

A spokesman for Orsted said: "Developing renewable energy in harmony with nature is both possible and necessary to address the twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.

"Through collaboration with academic bodies and other stakeholders, our aim is to help develop wider scientific understanding of the potential ecological benefits and impacts of developing critical green energy projects.

"By taking a science-led approach, we can ensure that renewable energy, such as offshore wind, continues to be deployed sensitively and sustainably." — PA Media/dpa

TRAVEL



Paris zinc roofers seek elusive Unesco heritage status

THE ZINC COVERING the roofs of central Paris has given the French capital's skyline its distinctive grey hue for almost two centuries.

Now the roofs and the workers who create and care for them are aiming to enter a select heritage club to showcase a profession adapting to the challenges of climate change.

The French culture ministry has chosen the zinc roofers as the country's entry for the Unesco list of Intangible Cultural Heritage to be decided at the UN body's session in Paraguayan capital Asuncion in December.

The craftsmanship of roofers and other ornamentalists who have sculpted the capital's skyline will be among 67 candidacies vying to join other iconic heritage sites such as India's Taj Mahal.

According to the city's urbanism agency Apur, Paris has 128,000 roofs covering a surface area of 32 million square metres, of which 21.4 million are of the traditional zinc-covered variety.

"Paris seen from above, it's obvious you're not in another city," said an enthused Delphine Burkli, mayor of the capital's ninth district.

Burkli helped initiate the French bid and first proposed in 2014 to add the roofs to Unesco's heritage list.

But the plan has since changed as it is "very complicated", said Gilles Mermet, coordinator of the bid. The campaign to etch the roofs into the prestigious books of world heritage stumbled when Paris town hall withdrew its support.

Mermet said it was "afraid" of "no longer being able to build in Paris without the agreement of Unesco".

"In the end, it was more interesting to showcase the profession itself" — which struggles to recruit — more than the roofs as such, to protect the beauty of the urban landscape, he added.

FEELING THE HEAT

Every morning, Paris faces a shortage of about 500 roofers to complete the work needed, according to Meriadec Aulanier of the trade union bringing together companies in the plumbing and climate engineering industries.

The French candidacy aims to encourage thinking about the future of the city and a craft forced to adapt in the face of climate change, adds Burkli.

The zinc the covers almost 80 per cent of Parisian roofs has come under criticism for its role in overheating buildings.

Darker roofs absorb more energy from sunrays — and that is bad news when summer heatwaves are becoming longer, more frequent and more intense as the planet warms up.

An Apur study in 2022 found that 42 per cent of roofs in Paris had a weak reflection capacity, meaning they absorbed more heat.

These insulate poorly and "contribute to the rise in temperatures in homes", according to an assessment carried out by the Council of Paris in 2022 titled "Paris at 50C".

LACK OF INSULATION

Roofscapes, a French start-up launched at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, put zinc under the spotlight in a test during the summer of 2023.

The experiment used an eight-storey building covered in zinc with a technical void in the attic that acted as a thermic buffer zone. The study showed that a zinc roof heated the surrounding air during the day, up to 10 degrees Celsius above the home's temperature and 7C warmer than the day's weather.

Nightfall brought little relief: the homes under the roofs heated 6C more than the temperatures on the lower floors.

"At night, the zinc at the surface cools down. On the other hand, the heat continues to penetrate inside and that's where there's overheating in the homes," explained Eytan Levi, an architect and co-founder of Roofscapes. But Mermet is adamant that the zinc itself is not the problem, rather the absence of insulation in old buildings.

Training schools now teach budding roofers to pose the insulation, and the old zinc is recycled, he said.

The "Paris at 50C" study raised the possibility of repainting the existing zinc roofs with a lighter-coloured paint to reflect the heat without harming their heritage value.

Mermet, though, was unimpressed. Such an idea has "no interest" for him because "it will increase the price of restoring the roofs".

"With the rain, your paint will end up burning and going to the sea." —AFP



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FILMING THE FLOOD: THE TERRIFYING YET AWE-INSPIRING SIDE OF OMAN’S NATURE

BY KHALED ABDUL MALAK

In March 2016, Pierre Petit and his team returned from France to Oman to complete the filming of a documentary I produced, with the support of the Ministry of Information, showcasing the natural beauty of Oman.

Pierre, along with Jérôme and Aude, had previously visited Muscat a few months earlier, but heavy rains had prevented us from completing the project, as the tracks leading to our filming sites were washed away.

On March 19, the weather forecast predicted heavy rains in the Eastern Hajar, starting at 4 pm. We planned to reach Umq Bir early in the afternoon to capture the flood on film.

We departed Muscat early in the morning. After three hours, we arrived near Qalhat, where we left the coastal highway and drove another two hours to reach Al Wiljah, the last accessible village by car and the starting point of Wadi Tiwi.

The road between Al Wiljah and Umq Bir had been destroyed by heavy rains a few months earlier, so we enlisted the help of our friend Mohamed from Al Wiljah. He assisted us in transporting our filming equipment, camping gear and supplies on the backs of two donkeys.

Our group consisted of eight people: Pierre, the director; his assistant Aude; Jérôme, the drone cameraman; my wife Marta; my children Mona and Kevin; Mohammed; and myself.

We began our trek at noon. The sky was overcast, and I estimated we would reach Umq Bir around 3 pm.

Mona, Kevin and Jérôme maintained a steady pace alongside Mohammed, who guided the donkeys, while the rest of us followed, occasionally stopping to take photographs along the way.

At 2:30 pm, about 15 minutes from our destination, we heard thunder, and soon after, the rain began to pour. We had to rush to reach the village before the floodwaters rose, or we would have been trapped on the opposite side of the wadi, forced to wait hours for the water to recede before crossing.

The rain was unlike anything I had seen in my 20 years in Oman.

We managed to cross the wadi before it began to flow and rejoined the rest of our group safely. We sought shelter under a massive boulder, waiting for the rain to stop so we could set up camp.

Twenty minutes later, the rain ceased, and Mohammed called out urgently, “Khaled, come quickly!”

We hurried to the right bank of the wadi where Mohammed was standing. There, we witnessed a powerful surge of brown water roaring down the wadi bed with a deafening noise. It was a terrifying yet awe-inspiring sight.

Everyone quickly began filming and taking photographs of this extraordinary moment.

In less than five minutes,



IN LESS THAN FIVE MINUTES, THE WATER LEVEL IN THE WADI, WHICH WAS ABOUT 20 METRES WIDE, ROSE FROM ZERO TO APPROXIMATELY TWO METRES. UMQ BIR WAS SOON ENCIRCLED BY NUMEROUS WATERFALLS, SOME PLUNGING FROM HEIGHTS OF 400 METRES OR MORE.

the water level in the wadi, which was about 20 metres wide, rose from zero to approximately two metres.

Umq Bir was soon encircled by numerous waterfalls, some plunging from heights of 400 metres or more.

After this extraordinary display of nature's power, we set up camp and gathered enough dry wood to start a fire, grilling “mishkak” (Omani goat skewers) and Lebanese kafta (minced meat with onions and parsley).

Experiencing such a powerful natural event underscores how rapidly a dry canyon can transform into a raging torrent capable of sweeping away everything in its path.

After enjoying a delicious dinner prepared by Marta, our family’s “cordon bleu,” we retired for the night.

The following morning, the wadi’s water had receded to a gentle flow, allowing Pierre to film Umq Bir in its post-flood state.

By midday, we had completed our filming and returned to Al Wiljah. We reached our vehicles around 4 pm and returned to Muscat, pleased to have captured the footage of the flood that was essential for our documentary.

If you plan to visit a wadi, always check the weather forecast in advance and avoid going if the conditions are unstable. Follow the Royal Oman Police’s advice. Taking unnecessary risks can endanger not only your life, but also the lives of rescuers.