

P12

MADRID WIN AS MBAPPE MAKES BERNABEU BOW



P15

RO 117 MILLION CONTRACT FOR WATER NETWORKS IN AL DHAHIRAH



P20

BACK-TO-SCHOOL FRENZY MADE BETTER WITH TEACHER PREPARATIONS AND SCHOOL SUPPLY PROMOS



MUSCAT

OMAN AND IRAN REVIEW RELATIONS

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, had a telephone call with Dr Seyyed Abbas Araghchi, the new Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Sayyid Badr wished the Iranian foreign minister success stressing the historical and friendly relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran looking forward to further strengthening cooperation relations between the two countries in various fields and joint work to achieve security and stability in the region. On his part, the Iranian foreign minister stressed the importance of continuing coordination and consultation between the two countries to serve common interests and bolster cooperation.

END OF PEAK SUMMER!

Skies of the Sultanate of Oman and the Arabian Peninsula are witnessing the appearance of the 'Suhail' star, which is considered an indicator of the end of the intense heat and the beginning of moderate weather. Although there is a discrepancy in the timing of its appearance between the north and south of the island, the generally accepted date for its appearance is August 24. The 'Suhail' star is far away, 313 light years from the Earth, according to the Oman Astronomical Society. Speaking to the *Observer*, Salim bin Saif al Siyabi of the OSA, confirmed that the appearance of this southern star marks the end of the summer.

DETAILS ON P2

HM GREETINGS CONVEYED TO MONGOLIA PRESIDENT



Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh, President of Mongolia, on Monday, received Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, at the parliament's headquarters in the Mongolian capital city of Ulaanbaatar. During the meeting, Sayyid Badr conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his best wishes for continuous growth and prosperity to the President and people of Mongolia. His Majesty also wished bilateral relations further development. On his turn, the Mongolian President asked the Foreign Minister to convey his heartfelt sentiments to His Majesty the Sultan. The president also expressed his best wishes to His Majesty and the Omani people, wishing the bilateral relations further development and growth. – ONA

OMAN SET TO MAP FLOOD-RISK ZONES

TO HELP IN REDUCING DAMAGE TO LIFE AND PROPERTY

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 26

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) has assigned a specialised company to implement the consultancy services project to prepare flood risk maps and management and emergency plans for flood risks in the Sultanate of Oman during the period between 2024 and 2026.

The project aims to update previous maps and prepare new ones that include flood plains, their degree of danger, and their areas of spread to the main and secondary wadis, which will help geographically identify the affected areas at different levels, including areas of maximum, medium, and minimum danger.

During different climatic conditions, these maps will help facilitate the operations of the National Emergency Management Committee, thereby saving lives and property in areas adjoining valleys. The maps also include urban planning requirements which must be considered when allocating sites for residences or other structures.

The project consists of three main stages, the first of which is related to the analysis of rainfall and surface runoff data, which lasts for 12 months and includes evaluation and analysis of the available hydrological data for rain stations and valleys in all governorates.

It seeks to prepare tables and curves of the recurrence periods of rainfall intensity (IDF) for each governorate, as



It will cover analysis of rainfall and surface runoff data.

During different climatic conditions, these maps will help facilitate the operations of the National Emergency Management Committee, thereby saving lives and property in areas adjoining valleys

well as the preparation of a flood design guide (FDM) for each governorate, to achieve a sound hydrological understanding of the nature of the relationship between rainfall and surface runoff for each watershed. The second phase of the project is the flood mapping phase in flood plains and flood-risk areas, which extends

for seven months and includes mapping flood risks and assessing their severity through hydrological analysis using modern programmes and technologies, and identifying the main channels of valleys and their areas of spread during low, medium and large floods. The final phase, which will last for five months, will include preparing plans to manage flood risks and emergency plans in areas expected to be exposed to flood risks, preparing the necessary scenarios and procedures to be followed to control floods in the event of their occurrence based on approved flood risk maps, developing scenarios and proposals for waterway demarcations, and recommendations related to emergency plans to be followed during exceptional climatic conditions.

UN aid operations in Gaza halted

UNITED NATIONS: United Nations humanitarian aid operations in Gaza ground to a halt on Monday after Israel issued new evacuation orders for Deir Al Balah in the central Gaza Strip late on Sunday, a senior UN official said.

"We're unable to deliver today with the conditions that we're in," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity. "As of this morning, we're not operating in Gaza."

"We're not leaving (Gaza)



Mourners react during the funeral of Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes in Khan Younis on Monday. – Reuters

because the people need us there," the official said. "We're trying to balance the need of the population with the need for

safety and security of the UN personnel."

The official said UN staff on the ground had been directed to try and find a way to keep operating. He said UN operations had not been formally suspended.

The official said the United Nations had relocated its main command operations for the Gaza Strip and most UN personnel to Deir Al Balah after Israel ordered the evacuation of Rafah in the south of Gaza.

SEE ALSO P6

Groundbreaking for RO 47m strategic fuel reserve project in Dhofar

SALALAH: OQ, the global integrated energy group, on Monday celebrated the groundbreaking ceremony for the strategic fuel reserve project in the Dhofar Governorate, marking an investment of over RO 47 million (equivalent to \$124 million). The ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, and attended by various officials and dignitaries from the governorate.

The strategic fuel storage facility aims to enhance the local fuel supply in Dhofar and ensure preparedness for emergency situations by storing

'Saib' project opens

OQ Gas Networks SAOG (OQGN) celebrated the inauguration of 'Saib' project, an additional gas pipeline in Dhofar Governorate with a length of 208 km to the tune of RO 76 million. The inauguration ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, along with government officials. 'Saib' project aligns with OQGN's strategic goals to expand the gas network's capacity in response to rising population, urban development, and economic growth.

key petroleum derivatives, including MOGAS-91, MOGAS-95, Gas Oil and jet fuel.

Speaking on this occasion, HH Sayyid Marwan praised the project, stating, "This project is a culmination of the efforts made by various entities in the Sultanate of Oman, led by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and OQ Group, aimed at enhancing the infrastructure for sustainable energy in the Dhofar Governorate in particular and the Sultanate of Oman in general. It ensures the growing demand for petroleum derivatives is met".

DETAILS ON P13



Dignitaries at the groundbreaking ceremony.



SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES PAKISTANI MILITARY OFFICIAL

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa, on Monday, General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The meeting reviewed the advanced relations between Oman and Pakistan. The two sides also discussed a set of topics of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces. — ONA

OMAN, MONGOLIA REVIEW MEANS OF BOOSTING COOPERATION

ULAANBAATAR: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held a bilateral meeting with Batmunkh Battsetseg, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia in the city of Ulaanbaatar.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and means of enhancing them in various fields, particularly augmenting economic, trade and investment cooperation.

Further, the two sides highlighted regional and international developments of mutual interest. They also reiterated the importance of jointly working on achieving security and stability in the region and the world at large.

Moreover, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the foreign



A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the foreign ministries of Oman and Mongolia. — ONA

ministries of Oman and Mongolia. The MoU deals with bilateral consultations. The meeting was attended by Nasser bin Mohammed al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the People's

Republic of China and Mongolia. It was also attended by Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Hosni, Head of the Asia and Pacific Department at the Foreign Ministry and officials from both sides. — ONA

End of peak summer as Suhail Star spotted in Oman

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Skies of the Sultanate of Oman and the Arabian Peninsula are witnessing the appearance of the Suhail star, which is considered an indicator of the end of the intense heat and the beginning of moderate weather.

Although there is a discrepancy in the timing of its appearance between the north and south of

the island, the generally accepted date for its appearance is August 24.

The Suhail Star is far away, 313 light years from Earth, according to the Oman Astronomical Society.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Salim bin Saif al Siyabi of the Oman Astronomical Society (OSA), confirmed that the appearance of this southern star marks the end of the summer.



OBSERVATION TIPS

A southern star is visible in the north only at short periods and low altitudes, depending on the latitude of the observer

A navigational guide used by the ancients on land and sea to determine directions, as it points towards the south

It occupies a prominent position in the sky as the brightest star of the night after Sirius

The season of Suhail lasts 53 days.

Historically, Arabs have eagerly awaited the appearance of the Suhail star (called Canopus in English) as they consider it a sign of the end of the extreme heat and the arrival of moderate weather.

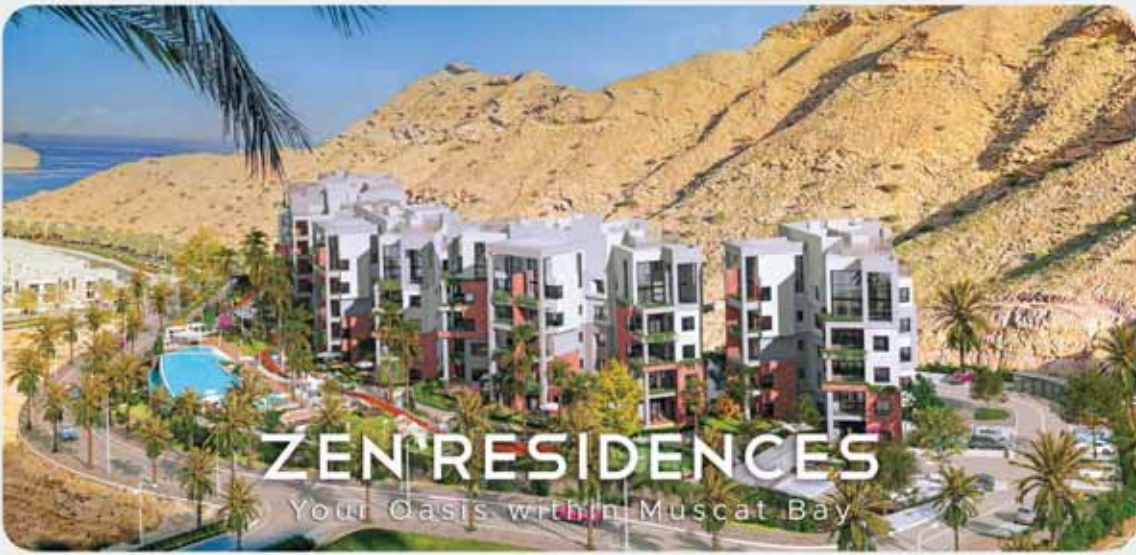
According to experts, the Suhail Star goes through four phases of 13 days each.

During the first phase, the

weather becomes pleasant at night but remains hot during the day while in the second phase, the weather becomes cooler at night and moderate during the day.

In the third phase, nights become colder, whereas the fourth phase marks the end of the hot days. The rise of the Suhail Star coincides with a decrease in the angle at which the sun's rays hit the Earth's surface.

Zen Development and Investment Breaks Ground on Zen Residences at Muscat Bay, Marking a New Era of Harmonious Living



Zen Development and Investment LLC is pleased to announce that the construction of its much-anticipated project, Zen Residences has started. This pivotal moment follows the appointment of Al Adrak Trading & Contracting Co LLC as the primary contractor, heralding the start of a transformative development poised to redefine harmonious living in Oman.

Zen Residences will encompass five cutting-edge buildings offering a range of living options from contemporary studios to expansive 1-bedroom, 2-bedroom, and 3-bedroom apartments, as well as uniquely designed lofts. Each residence is meticulously designed to integrate seamlessly with the natural beauty of Muscat Bay, ensuring an unparalleled living experience.

"The official breaking ground of Zen Residences represents a major milestone in our commitment to creating sophisticated, innovative, and high-quality living environments," stated Mohammad Assaf, Director of Operations at Zen Development and Investment LLC. "Our goal is to uphold the highest standards of quality and craftsmanship, delivering a living experience and lifestyle in harmony with nature."

Assaf added, "Oman presents a distinctive investment opportunity with its rich cultural heritage and stunning landscapes. At Zen Residences, we have leveraged these elements to craft a gated community within Muscat Bay that stands out. We offer more than just homes;

we provide a lifestyle that harmonizes with the natural environment, complete with amenities designed to foster community engagement and personal well-being. This unique approach makes Zen Residences a valuable and exceptional investment."

Residents of this exclusive development will enjoy an enriched lifestyle with features such as a serene Infinity Pool, a social Outdoor BBQ Area, and a well-equipped Outdoor Gym. Additional amenities include a dedicated Kids Play Area, a scenic Running Track, and a peaceful Zen Garden for relaxation and contemplation. Beyond the comfort of home, residents will have access to the distinctive attractions of Muscat Bay.

For further details on Zen Residences and Zen Development and Investment, please contact our sales team on +968 90996888.

About Zen Development and Investment :

Zen Development and Investment stands as a prominent figure in Oman's real estate sector, specializing in the creation of distinctive residential and commercial properties. Their approach is anchored in innovation, environmental responsibility, and a harmonious blend of modern living with natural landscapes. Committed to sustainability, cultural heritage, and transformative designs, they create spaces that not only inspire tranquility and well-being but also foster a sense of community and belonging. For more information about Zen Development and Investment, please visit : <https://zenddevelopment.com>

Oman, Brunei Darussalam celebrate 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and Brunei Darussalam, on Monday, celebrated the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between them.

The event, held at the Foreign Ministry, saw the launch of a commemorative logo symbolising the depth of the two countries' diplomatic relations.

Speaking at the event, Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, said, "The Sultanate of Oman and Brunei Darussalam share deep-rooted relations characterised by constant communication and successful achievements in various economic, cultural and political fields."

Al Harthy added that "many projects and investment opportunities are in the offing in



The event saw the launch of a commemorative logo symbolising the depth of the two countries' diplomatic relations. — ONA

the fields of fish farming, health and education."

For her part, Noralizan Abdula Momin, Ambassador of Brunei Darussalam to the Sultanate of Oman, said: "The two countries share fraternal bonds in various areas of common interest since 1984.

Their relations have ever-since

seen steady growth." Noralizan pointed out that relations between Oman and Brunei Darussalam are set to witness more progress in many areas of cooperation, the outcome of which would be the consolidation of partnerships in the fields of education, culture, defence, economic investment, energy and food security. — ONA

RAFO AIRLIFTS BODIES OF SIX ACCIDENT VICTIMS



MUSCAT: The Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) transported the bodies of six citizens who died in a traffic accident in Dhofar Governorate. An official statement said that their relatives were also transported from the Salalah Air Base to Seeb Air Base. The airlift was done in cooperation with various departments of the Ministry of Defence to citizens and residents. According to sources, the accident happened in Rasyut area, Dhofar Governorate.



OMAN, BELARUS EXPLORE MEANS OF BOOSTING TRADE EXCHANGE

MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, on Monday received Bogdanov Alexei, Minister of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade in the Republic of Belarus. The meeting, held at Invest Oman lounge, reviewed the bilateral cooperation. It also highlighted indicators of inter-trade growth and means of augmenting trade and investment exchange.

– ONA



Surface storage dams bolster water management in Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 26

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources continues its dedicated efforts to enhance water resource management in Dhofar Governorate. The ministry oversees 13 surface water storage dams distributed along the mountain ranges and foothills. These dams experience a significant rise in water levels during the monsoon season, which serves as the primary source of replenishment.

The primary goals of constructing these surface storage dams include harnessing rainfall to develop water resources that meet the needs of villages and communities, particularly in water-scarce areas. Some of the most notable dams are: Ba'al Haqan Dam (200,000 m3) and Shakhu Dam (6,000 m3) in the Wilayat of Rakhyout; Wadi Ka' Dam (2,016 m3) and Qadqoud Dam (2,142 m3) in the Wilayat of Mirbat; and Haizam Dam (9,000 m3) in the Wilayat of Taqah.

The ministry is committed to managing and assessing both surface and groundwater resources, maintaining water springs, and constructing groundwater recharge and flood protection dams. Additionally, the ministry supervises a network of



Part of the Wadi Adawnib Dam project under construction in Salalah

hydrometric monitoring stations to track the water situation.

As part of the efforts to protect Dhofar Governorate from the risks of flooding, the ministry is implementing a protection system in the Wilayat of Salalah. This system includes the construction of two main flood protection dams. The first is Wadi Adawnib Dam, with a storage capacity exceeding 83 million m3, placing it only second to Wadi Dayqah Dam in Muscat Governorate, which is the largest dam in Oman presently. Total investment in Wadi Adawnib Dam, slated for completion in the second half of this year, is around RO 24 million.

The other important flood protection dam spans Wadi Annar. Featuring a storage

capacity of 16 million m3, the RO 23 million project was completed last year.

In addition to the dams, the protection projects for Salalah Port include the construction of a concrete wall extending 1.610 kilometres, with a height ranging between 2 and 4 metres, to protect the port from floodwaters and direct them to the sea.

These projects aim to enhance the protection of the Wilayat of Salalah from flood risks and reduce sedimentation entering Salalah Port. Through these initiatives, the ministry seeks to safeguard the governorate from the human and material losses caused by seasonal floods.

The protective dams built around Salalah Port, such as the Wadi Adawnib and Wadi Annar dams, are primarily designed to protect the port and its surrounding areas from the risks of seasonal floods.

Importantly, these protective structures can help reduce insurance premiums associated with commercial activities at Salalah Port. The increased protection against natural risks like flooding reduces the likelihood of severe material damage. This, in turn, improves risk assessments by insurance companies, which may result in lower insurance rates for facilities and goods traded through the port.

Al Shorouk Services Centre opens in Salalah



The ISC seeks to provide support and information to investors and beneficiaries of the government land grants system. – ONA

SALALAH: An Integrated Services Centre (ISC) was opened on Monday in the Wilayat of Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar, to receive bookings for residential units in Al Shorouk neighbourhood project in Sahalnout area.

The project constitutes part of the “National Initiative for Integrated Residential Neighbourhoods”.

The ISC programme's launch ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

The ISC seeks to provide support and information to investors and beneficiaries of the “Government Residential Land Grants System”. It reflects the efforts being made by Al Dhahab Real Estate Services Company, acting in cooperation with Al Dhahab Construction Foundation and operating under the supervision of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

The minister and the attendees were briefed about the designs and envisaged facilities of Al Shorouk neighbourhood model and the project's implementation stages.

The event also saw the signing of partnership agreements with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that will contribute to the project works.

Al Shorouk neighbourhood is the first of its kind in Salalah. The project comprises villas of different sizes, apartments, service and entertainment centres and other amenities. The neighbourhood contains more than 558 residential units designed in accordance with the highest specifications. It covers an area of 324,000 square metres, including 40,000 sqm for green spaces.

A cooperation agreement was also signed with Oman Housing Bank (OHB) to provide financing to those eligible for the grants and those wishing to own property in Al Shorouk neighbourhood. — ONA



DUQM WITNESSES INCREASE IN STUDENT ENROLMENT

DUQM: The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) has recorded a growth in the number of students enrolled in general and basic education, coinciding with an increase in investments in the area. This growth is also due to many Omani and foreign families relocating to Duqm, encouraged by the availability of various services and facilities that promote a stable living environment.

Over the past five years, the SEZAD has seen an increase in the number of students attending both public and private schools. In the 2023/2024 academic year, student enrolment rose to over 1,740, compared to 1,181 in the 2018/2019 academic year, marking a growth of 47.3 per cent. This growth coincided with the opening of A'Soud Global School (AGS) in 2021.

Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, Acting CEO of the SEZAD, said that the Zone is poised for further investments in the education sector, reflecting the growth of projects being implemented in the area.

He added in a press statement, “The Zone's administration is working to



Ahmed bin Ali Akaak

attract more investments that support the stability of both local and foreign workforces and is implementing numerous projects that make Duqm a preferred destination for living, residing and working.” There is a total of 8 schools in Duqm, including 6 public schools and 2 private schools, AGS and the Indian School Duqm. In addition, there are several kindergartens that cater to students in the pre-school phase.

Amandine Guofart, Principal at AGS, said that the school has experienced significant growth since its establishment. It began as an elementary school only but now offers education from kindergarten through to Grade 12, following the globally recognised British curriculum accredited by the University of Cambridge.

She noted that AGS focuses on developing students and preparing them to become future leaders. In this context, she highlighted that the school recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the Middle East College to foster collaboration between students and teachers, allowing them access to shared teaching facilities to enhance their experience and overall development. She praised the support the school receives from the SEZAD's administration, saying, “The development of Duqm and the exceptional support from the Zone's team over the past few years have contributed to this significant growth in a short period.” — ONA

Registrations to avail monthly allowance for students to start soon

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 26

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation is working with the National Subsidy System (NSS) to provide a monthly allowance to private higher education institutions as per the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The scholarships will start from the academic year 2024/2025. The ministry is

currently planning to have an electronic link on the National Subsidy System website to receive applications from internal scholarship students studying in private higher education institutions.

The eligibility is based on the family income level applied to qualify for electricity subsidy, which is the income level of RO 1,250 per month according to the number of family members.

The value of the monthly allocation for students who meet the eligibility condition

will be determined according to the distance between the headquarters of the educational institution in which they are studying and the current residence of the registered students.

It will be RO 45 for those residing less than 50 kilometres from the educational institution and RO 90 for those residing more than 50 kilometres away. The ministry said it will soon announce the date for submitting applications on the NSS website.



MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

INTERNATIONAL TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee at Ministry of Information announces its Tender for the following work:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
6/2024 (323/2024) at E-Tendering	AI Utilization Project for Ayn Platform	International Excellent First	7/9/2024	22/10/2024	25/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

2. Companies and institutions are exempted from providing a temporary insurance of 1% when submitting their bid, provided that they sign a document committing themselves to the submitted bid for a period determined when the bidding strategy is approved in accordance with the document attached to the Isnad platform. As for international companies that do not have a headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman, they are required to provide temporary insurance of 1%.

(For more information, please see the original circular issued by the Tender Board on the Isnad platform.)

Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am. Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically.

You are requested to provide 2 hard copies for your offer after the submission in Projects Department at Ministry of Information.

3. The Ministry has the right to:

- 1) Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.
- 2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone: 24943785, 24943177, Email: (Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om)



PREVENT FOOD SPOILAGE

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 26

PROPER food storage at home is crucial to maintain the quality and safety of food over time. Improper storage practices can lead to faster food spoilage, resulting in wasted financial and food resources and increasing the risk of foodborne illnesses. Research shows that incorrect storage methods are a significant factor in food spoilage at home, as these habits accelerate decay and reduce nutritional value.

Food spoilage occurs when it is exposed to factors such as humidity, heat and light. Different foods have varying sensitivities to these elements; for example, some require very low temperatures to stay fresh, while others deteriorate quickly in high humidity or when exposed to air.

Nutritionist Fatima al Qasimi highlights a common issue: “People often overlook how improper storage can lead to rapid food spoilage. For instance, fruits and vegetables stored in the refrigerator without being covered, or in a humid environment, can rot quickly. Similarly, storing dry foods like flour or grains in a moist place can encourage mould growth or insect infestation.”

Dr Salim al Harthy, a food microbiologist, adds, “Many bacteria and fungi responsible for spoilage thrive at specific temperatures. Failing to refrigerate perishable foods such as meat and dairy products promptly can lead to microbial growth, resulting in spoilage and potential food poisoning.” Studies suggest that poor storage practices are widespread among many households.

Mohammed al Salmi, a community member, recounts, “We used to store fruits and vegetables in the lower drawers of the refrigerator without any cover, assuming this would keep them fresh. However, they spoiled faster. After consulting a nutritionist, I realised that fruits and vegetables need to be properly packaged to avoid exposure to high humidity inside

the refrigerator.” Sarah al Balushi, a housewife, shared her experience: “I used to refrigerate everything, including foods that don’t require cold storage, like potatoes and onions. Over time, I noticed a change in their flavour. After some research, I found that these items spoil faster in the refrigerator and should be kept in a dry, dark place.” To minimise food spoilage and extend shelf life, following certain basic storage guidelines is essential.

Dr Salim al Harthy suggested some tips for better storage. Perishable foods like meat and dairy products should be kept in the refrigerator at 4°C or lower. Items that won’t be consumed soon should be frozen at -18°C.

Wrapping foods in airtight bags or containers before refrigerating or freezing can help prevent moisture loss and slow down spoilage.

Arrange foods so that older items are at the front to be consumed first, reducing the risk of long-stored food expiring.

Items like potatoes, onions and garlic should not be refrigerated but stored in a dry, dark place to maintain their flavour and freshness.

Monitor food regularly to ensure it’s still good, and discard any items showing signs of spoilage, such as mould or foul odours.

Food spoilage at home is a global issue, leading to significant food waste annually. By improving home storage practices, this waste can be drastically reduced, conserving resources and lowering carbon emissions associated with food production and waste.

Proper home storage is vital for preserving food quality and safety. By adopting correct storage techniques, households can significantly decrease food spoilage, promoting better health and reducing waste. Ongoing awareness and education are key to improving daily food storage habits, ultimately safeguarding food and resources.

TIPS TO PREVENT FOOD SPOILAGE

Refrigerate meats/dairy products for the proper amount of time

Organising refrigerators and pantries by their expiration date

Planning and purchase carefully to avoid over-buying

Storing all food items in a clean, dry location



JOINT COMMAND-STAFF COLLEGE BEGINS 38TH OFFICERS COURSE

MUSCAT: The Joint Command and Staff College at the Academy of Strategic and Defence Studies, on Monday marked the opening of the 38th training course for student officers. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Brigadier Saif bin Hamad al Yousufi, Commandant of the Joint Command and Staff College. The course brings together officers from the Ministry of Defence, the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and other military and security units, in addition to officers from armed forces of the GCC states, Arab and foreign countries. — ONA



AI driven research to boost Arabic reading among students

BY SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, AUGUST 21

The Sultanate of Oman has launched a strategic national research project that aims to revolutionise Arabic reading proficiency among students by integrating advanced technology and artificial intelligence (AI).

Funded by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, this project marks a significant milestone in Oman's vision to leverage cutting-edge technologies to enhance educational outcomes.

This pioneering research project is the first in the Arab world to employ eye-tracking technology to improve Arabic reading skills. The project is led by Dr Hilal al Maqbali, Deputy Assistant Vice-Chancellor for Electronic Systems and Student Services at UTAS Sohar. It focuses on the early stages of education — specifically grades 1 to 4 — here foundational literacy skills are established. By analysing students' visual behaviours and cognitive processes, the research aims to identify challenges in reading proficiency and develop targeted interventions.

As Oman accelerates its efforts to integrate AI across various sectors, including education, this research is timely and critical. Strong reading skills are not only essential for academic success but are also foundational for developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy—key competencies outlined in Oman's national framework for future skills.

The use of eye-tracking technology in this study allows for an unprecedented level of precision in understanding how students engage with text. This data-driven approach provides invaluable insights into the cognitive efforts



The use of eye-tracking technology in this study allows for an unprecedented level of precision in understanding how students engage with text

DR HILAL AL MAQBALI

Deputy Assistant Vice-Chancellor



The use of eye-tracking technology in this study allows for an unprecedented level of precision in understanding how students engage with text

involved in reading, offering a clear path to refining educational strategies and policies.

The government's financial backing of this research underscores Oman's commitment to innovation through strategic investment in scientific research.

With a budget of RO 22,600, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation have ensured that the project is well-resourced.

The funding supports the acquisition of essential hardware and software and enables a multidisciplinary research team from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences and the Ministry of Education.

Dr Al Maqbali's expertise in IT is complemented by the contributions of Dr Badr al Sinani and Dr Ali al Riyami, specialists in Arabic language studies, and Dr Ruqaya al Shezawi, an education expert from the Ministry of Education.

This collaboration between technology and educational specialists exemplifies Oman's holistic approach to applying AI in educational research.

The study has revealed significant disparities in visual behaviours between effective readers, struggling readers, and non-readers.

Effective readers demonstrated longer fixation durations and higher saccade peak velocities, indicating more efficient reading patterns. In contrast, struggling readers and non-readers exhibited shorter fixations and lower velocities, underscoring the need for targeted interventions.

Additionally, the research highlighted a strong correlation between students' reading abilities and their home environments.

Effective readers, who showed more efficient visual patterns, often came from households with active parental involvement in education. Conversely, struggling readers were more likely to come

from homes with less consistent parental engagement. These findings emphasise the vital role of family support in early literacy development.

The study also found that preschool education significantly impacts reading abilities in the early years. However, by the fourth year, the influence of preschool diminishes, with parental support, student effort, and school support becoming the dominant factors in reading development.

The insights gained from the study will be shared through workshops and publications, providing actionable recommendations for educators, policymakers, and parents. As Oman continues to prioritise AI and technology in education, the final results of this research, expected in early 2025, are anticipated to drive further innovations and elevate Oman's educational system, setting a precedent for the broader Arab world.

SAF Chief of Staff receives Pakistani military official



During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views about matters of common interest. — ONA

MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received on Monday General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The meeting took place at SAF Chief of Staff's office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa.

An official reception ceremony was held in honour of the Pakistani official upon his arrival at Muaskar Al Murtafaa, where the Guard of Honour gave the military salute to the accompaniment of a military music. Then, the guest inspected the guard of honour.

Vice Admiral Abdullah al Raisi welcomed the guest. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views about matters of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Brigadier Badr bin Nasser al

Kharousi, Director General of the Joint Military Intelligence and Preventive Security at COSAF. It was also attended by the Military Attaché at the Pakistani Embassy in Muscat.

Meanwhile, General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and his accompanying delegation on Monday visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC).

The delegation was greeted upon their arrival at the MSC by the Head of the Centre.

Members of the visiting delegation were briefed on the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre in the safety of the maritime environment.

They also toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies used in carrying out its national duties. — ONA



AI cyber attacks surge, deepfakes threaten security

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The world is witnessing a surge in AI-based cyber attacks as cybercriminals increasingly develop sophisticated AI-driven hacking tools to exploit the growing use of artificial intelligence in enterprises, according to a recent report by Trend Micro.

The study reveals that cybercriminals of all skill levels are now more equipped than ever to launch large-scale attacks aimed at extortion, identity theft, fraud, and misinformation. These developments highlight the urgent

need for organisations to bolster their defences against data theft and financial loss.

"Generative AI is revolutionising innovation in the Sultanate of Oman and across the region by automating tasks, enhancing customer experiences, and aiding in critical decision-making processes. However, this same technology has also given rise to new Deepfake tools that make it alarmingly easy for cybercriminals to execute damaging scams, social engineering attacks, and security breaches," said Dr Moataz bin Ali, Regional Vice President and Managing Director, MMEA, Trend Micro.



Dr Moataz bin Ali

Globally, Deepfakes pose a significant threat to both enterprises and individuals.

A survey by PwC found that

over 50 per cent of regional respondents believe this technology could lead to cyber attacks within the next year. The report warns that undetected Deepfakes can result in severe consequences, including financial losses, job terminations, legal issues, reputational damage, identity theft, and potential harm to mental or physical well-being.

Recognising the severity of these threats, Omani authorities and cybersecurity experts in the region are intensifying efforts to raise awareness and educate the public about the risks associated with Deepfakes and AI-based

cyber attacks.

"Beyond traditional methods like image noise analysis and colour detection, we focus on analysing user behavioural patterns to provide a more robust approach to detecting and stopping Deepfakes. Once detected, our system immediately alerts enterprise security teams, enabling them to take proactive measures to prevent future attacks. This technology is not only being exploited to bypass human verification but also biometric security measures like facial recognition," added Dr Moataz.

He further emphasised that tools for protecting against data theft and financial loss are now more affordable and accessible than ever. Tools like 'Deepfake Inspector' can verify whether a participant in a live video conversation is using Deepfake technology, alerting users to potential impostors.

As AI continues to shape the future, it is crucial for organisations and individuals alike to stay vigilant and adopt advanced security measures to protect themselves from the evolving landscape of cyber threats.

Gazans flee after new Israeli evacuation orders

GAZA: Israel issued new evacuation orders for Deir Al Balah in the central Gaza Strip, forcing more families to flee, saying its forces intended to act against Palestinian group Hamas and others operating in the area.

In recent days, Israel has issued several evacuation orders across Gaza, the most since the beginning of the 10-month war, prompting an outcry from Palestinians, the United Nations and relief officials over the reduction of humanitarian zones and the absence of safe areas.

The Deir Al Balah municipality says Israeli evacuation orders have so far displaced 250,000 people. In a statement posted on X, the Israeli military urged residents in certain zones to move immediately to the west, as the area they are in is “considered a dangerous combat zone”.

Israeli military strikes killed at least seven Palestinians on Monday, medics said. Two were killed in Deir Al Balah, where around a million people were sheltering, two at a school in Al Nuseirat camp and three in the southern city of Rafah, near the border with Egypt.

Seven others were killed in two separate Israeli strikes, five in a car in Khan Yunis and two people at a school in Gaza City, medics said. Later on Monday, an Israeli strike on a tent on the coast in Gaza City killed six Palestinians and wounded several other people, medics said.

The new orders forced many families and patients to leave Al Aqsa Hospital, the main medical facility in Deir Al Balah, where hundreds of thousands of residents and displaced people had taken shelter, for fear of bombardments. The hospital is close to the area covered by the evacuation notice.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said on Sunday night that an explosion approximately 250 metres away from the MSF-supported Al Aqsa Hospital triggered panic.

“As a result, MSF is considering whether to suspend wound care for the time being, while trying to maintain life-saving treatment.”

From around 650 patients,

Israel has issued several evacuation orders across Gaza prompting an international outcry over the reduction of humanitarian zones and the absence of safe areas

only 100 remain in the hospital, with seven in the intensive care unit, it said, citing Gaza’s health ministry.

The Israeli military said it killed dozens of Palestinian gunmen in the area of Khan Yunis and the outskirts of Deir Al Balah in the past 24 hours and located large quantities of weapons.

Gaza’s Ministry of Health called for the 100 patients inside the hospital, and the medical teams who had remained to care for them, to be protected. In a separate statement, it said Israeli military strikes have killed at least 30 Palestinians and wounded 66 others across the enclave in the past 24 hours. — **Reuters**



Displaced Palestinian children haul water to their tent in a makeshift camp in the perimeter of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. – AFP

More than 60 dead in Pakistan’s attacks

QUETTA: Separatist attacks on police stations, railway lines and highways in Pakistan’s restive province of Balochistan, coupled with retaliatory operations by security forces, killed more than 60 people, officials said on Monday.

The most widespread assault by insurgents in years forms part of a decades-long effort to win secession of the resource-rich southwestern province, home to major projects such as a strategic port and a gold and copper mine.

“These attacks are a well thought out plan to create anarchy in Pakistan,” Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi said in a statement, adding that security forces had killed 12 militants in operations after the attacks on Sunday and Monday.

Pakistan’s military said 14 soldiers and police, and 21 militants, were killed in fighting after the largest of the attacks, which targeted vehicles from buses to goods trucks on a major highway. It was not immediately clear whether that included the 12 militants the interior ministry confirmed dead. Local officials said at least 23 passengers were killed in the attack, with 35 vehicles set ablaze.

Rail traffic with Quetta was suspended following blasts on a rail bridge linking the



Security personnel stand near the charred vehicles at the shooting site on the national highway in Musakhail district. – AFP

Rail traffic with Quetta was suspended following blasts on a rail bridge linking the provincial capital to the rest of Pakistan, as well as on a rail link to neighbouring Iran

provincial capital to the rest of Pakistan, as well as on a rail link to neighbouring Iran, railways official Muhammad Kashif said. Police said they had found six as

yet unidentified bodies near the site of the attack on the railway bridge.

Officials said militants also targeted police and security stations in Balochistan, which is Pakistan’s largest province by area, killing at least 10 people in one attack.

Militant group the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) took responsibility in a statement to journalists that claimed many more attacks, including one on a major paramilitary base, though Pakistani authorities have yet to confirm these.

The BLA is the biggest of several insurgent groups that have battled the central government for decades, saying it unfairly exploits Balochistan’s gas and mineral resources.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif vowed that security forces would retaliate and bring those responsible to justice.

On Sunday night, armed men blocked a highway in Balochistan, marched passengers off vehicles, and shot them after checking their identity cards, a senior superintendent of police, Ayub Achakzai said. — **Reuters**

GHANA PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDERS PROMISE TO EASE HARDSHIP

ACCRA: The two main contenders in Ghana’s presidential election have launched duelling manifestos promising fiscal stability, jobs and a path out of the country’s worst economic downturn in a generation.

Voters will head to the polls on December 7 to elect a successor to President Nana Akufo-Addo, who is stepping down at the end of the two terms he is allowed to serve as head of the West African gold, oil and cocoa-producing nation.

The election will pit ex-president John Dramani Mahama of the main opposition National Democratic Congress party against Vice-President Mahamudu Bawumia, an economist and former central banker, from Akufo-Addo’s ruling New Patriotic Party.

Frustrations about economic hardship have tainted Akufo-Addo’s presidency. Ghana defaulted on most of its \$30 billion external debt in 2022

- the culmination of years of overstretched borrowing compounded by the COVID pandemic, the knock-on impacts of the war in Ukraine and a rise in global interest rates.

Both Mahama and Bawumia laid out their policy promises over the weekend ahead of a vote analysts predict to be tight two-man contest, even though others are running.

Mahama, 65, vowed to scrap first-year university fees to boost tertiary education and reduce taxes during his first three months in office. “I will lead a ruthless war against corruption” and recover misappropriated assets, he told supporters in the south central city of Winneba on Saturday.

Mahama invested heavily in infrastructure during his 2013-17 presidency but drew criticism over power shortages, economic instability and alleged state corruption. — **Reuters**



Former Ghana president and presidential candidate for the National Democratic Congress (NDC) John Dramani Mahama speaks during the party’s manifesto’s launch, in Winneba, Ghana. – AFP

TOKYO

Japan’s space agency ends Moon probe operation

SLIM.

The touchdown of the unmanned lander in January was a success, but it landed at a wonky angle that left its solar panels fishing the wrong way. — AFP

BANGKOK

Thailand flash floods after heavy rains kill 22

sible flash floods until Thursday.

“The department has ordered local authorities to monitor the weather closely... and put teams and equipment on standby,” a statement said. — AFP

HANOI

Vietnam approves new deputy prime ministers

Vietnam announced on Monday three new deputy prime ministers, the latest political changes during a turbulent period for the ruling Communist Party.

President To Lam was named as general secretary following the death of his predecessor, Nguyen Phu Trong.

Vietnam’s four-pillar leadership structure includes the general secretary, president, prime minister and head of the National Assembly.

The parliament met at its eighth “extraordinary” session in Hanoi on Monday and announced a new chief judge and chief prosecutor, three new deputy prime ministers and two new ministers. — AFP



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In brief

■ MADRID



SANCHEZ VISITS W AFRICA AIMING TO STEM MIGRATION SURGE

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez started his second visit this year to West Africa, aiming to curb migration to the Canary Islands. The West African migration route has seen a 154 per cent surge this year, with 21,620 people crossing to the Canary Islands in the first seven months

Spanish authorities fear that 150,000 more migrants from Africa may be set to make the perilous crossing in the coming months. Sanchez is focusing on strengthening relations with Mauritania, Senegal, and Gambia, the main departure points for migrant boats. Spain will sign circular migration agreements. — Reuters

■ SOFIA



BULGARIA TO HOLD ANOTHER SNAP PARLIAMENTARY POLLS

Bulgaria will hold a snap parliamentary election, its seventh in just three years, on Oct. 27, President Rumen Radev said, following the failure of its political parties to agree a coalition government. Radev said a caretaker government led by Dimitar Glavchev would be sworn in Bulgaria's parliament to steer the Black Sea nation until the election.

"Tomorrow I will also issue a decree about holding early parliamentary elections on October 27," Radev said. Bulgaria has been plagued by revolving-door governments since protests in 2020 unseated a coalition led by the centre-right GERB party. — Reuters

■ GENEVA



WHO SAYS NEW MPOX OUTBREAKS 'CAN BE STOPPED'

Outbreaks of mpox in Central Africa "can be stopped", the World Health Organization said on Monday, but \$135 million of funding may be needed to tackle the disease's spread.

"The mpox outbreaks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and neighbouring countries can be controlled, and can be stopped," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus is quoted.

Launched on Monday, the WHO's Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan covers the period from September 2024 to February 2025, predicting a \$135 million funding need to carry it out. — AFP

Russia fires heavily at Ukraine's power grid



People take shelter in the Teatralna metro station during a Russian air attack, in Kyiv. — AFP

KYIV: Russia launched about 200 missiles and drones at Ukraine on Monday, killing five people and striking energy facilities nationwide, Kyiv said, while neighbouring Nato member Poland reported a drone had probably entered its airspace.

Power cuts and water supply outages were reported in many areas, including parts of Kyiv, as officials said the attack - 2-1/2 years into Russia's full-scale attack- targeted power or other critical infrastructure in at least 10 regions.

Russia dramatically stepped up its strikes on the Ukrainian power grid in March in what Kyiv has said looked like a concerted effort to degrade the system ahead of next winter when people need electricity and heating most.

Monday's missile and drone salvo was Russia's most intense in weeks, coming as Ukraine is claiming new ground in a major cross-border incursion into Russia's southern Kursk region

while Russian forces steadily inch forward in Ukraine's east, closing in on the transport hub of Pokrovsk.

"It was one of the biggest combined strikes. More than a hundred missiles of various types and about a hundred drones. And like most previous Russian strikes, this one is just as sneaky, targeting critical civilian infrastructure," President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Telegram.

Poland said an "object" had entered its airspace, that it may have landed on Polish territory and that searches were underway.

"Most likely it was a drone and we assume so, because the trajectory of the flight and the speed indicate that it was definitely not a missile," Jacek Goryszewsky said, spokesperson for the Polish army's operational command.

According to Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, 15 Ukrainian regions sustained damage from the missile and drone barrage.

Zelensky said the energy sector had suffered "a lot of damage".

The regions reporting strikes on power or critical infrastructure included Rivne and Volyn in the northwest, Khmelnytsk in the southwest, Zhytomyr in the north, Lviv in the west, Dnipropetrovsk, Kirovohrad and Vinnytsia in central Ukraine, Zaporizhzhia in the southeast and Odesa in the south. Neighbouring Moldova, whose grid is linked to that of Ukraine, reported small disruptions to its power network.

Ukraine's foreign ministry said a hydropower plant in the Kyiv region had been targeted too. A video posted on social media and verified by Reuters showed a damaged dam and a fire after an apparent strike at a hydropower plant. A separate clip, also verified, showed a missile hitting a water reservoir. The Kyiv region governor Ruslan Kravchenko said in televised comments there was no critical damage to the dam. — Reuters

Scholz promises new weapons controls

SOLINGEN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Monday the government would tighten weapons controls and speed up deportations after a suspected knife attack in the western city of Solingen.

Friday night's deadly stabbing at a street festival has reignited a debate over immigration in the country and put extra pressure on Scholz ahead of key regional elections set for Sunday.

"This was terrorism, terrorism against us all," Scholz said on a visit to Solingen, where he laid flowers at a memorial to the victims.

A 26-year-old Syrian with suspected links to the IS group is alleged to have carried out the attack, which left three people dead and eight more wounded.

"We will now have to tighten up the weapons regulations... in particular with regard to the use of knives," Scholz said. Stronger weapons controls would come "very quickly", Scholz said.

Germany would also have to "do everything we can to ensure that those who cannot and must not stay here in Germany are repatriated and deported," Scholz said.

The IS group on Saturday said one of its members had carried out the attack in an

act of "revenge". The group subsequently published a video via the Amaq news agency purporting to show the Solingen attack, in which the veiled man said he intended to carry out reprisals for "massacres" in the Middle East and beyond.

The suspected attacker has raised concerns in Germany for the seeming ease with which he avoided authorities' attempts to remove him.

According to the Bild and Spiegel news outlets, the suspect arrived in Germany in December 2022 and had a protected immigration status often given to those fleeing war-torn Syria.

The suspect was not known to German security services as a dangerous extremist, according to officials.

The attack spurred a new debate around immigration in the EU's most populous country ahead of regional elections next weekend in Saxony and Thuringia, where the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is set to make gains.

The attack would strengthen the perception that the government was "overwhelmed", said Ursula Muench, the director of the Academy for Political Education. — AFP



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz addresses media after his visit at the site of the attack in Solingen, western Germany. — AFP

Macron meets Le Pen to name new PM

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron hosted far-right figurehead Marine Le Pen for rare talks on Monday, as pressure mounts for him to finally name a prime minister after July's inconclusive parliamentary poll.

The three-time National Rally (RN) presidential candidate called after the meeting for an extraordinary session of parliament so MPs would be able to immediately depose any new government in a confidence vote.

"I don't want a prime minister to have a month to implement by decree a toxic policy that would be dangerous for the French people," Le Pen said.

Snap elections called by centrist Macron failed last month to extricate France from the hung-parliament deadlock that had seen his camp run a minority government since 2022. Instead, the National Assembly (lower house) is largely divided among three blocs: the New Popular Front (NFP) alliance of



French far-right leader Marine Le Pen, member of parliament of the Rassemblement National (National Rally - RN) party and the party's President Jordan Bardella arrive at the Elysee Palace, in Paris. — Reuters

left-wing parties with over 190 seats, followed by the president's supporters at around 160 and the far-right National Rally on 140.

Since the second-round polls closed on July 7, the left has pushed for Macron to name one of their own as prime minister, saying the position falls to them as the largest power. They

have named largely unknown 37-year-old economist and civil servant Lucie Castets as their prospective candidate for head of government.

Macron has for his part delayed installing a new PM, leaving a caretaker government in place for an unprecedented period as he seeks a figure with

broad support who would not immediately be toppled in a confidence vote.

The pressure is now on, with the deadline to present a draft 2025 budget for the heavily-indebted government looming just over a month away.

Since Friday, Macron has invited party leaders for talks at

Snap elections called by centrist Macron failed last month to extricate France from the hung-parliament deadlock that had seen his camp run a minority government

the Elysee in hopes of finding the elusive consensus candidate.

All have stuck to their guns, with the NFP alliance of Socialists, Communists, Greens and hard-left France Unbowed (LFI) insisting they have won the right to implement their big-spending programme.

Top Macron allies, conservatives and the RN still vow to vote no confidence in any left-wing government, shifting their fire since Melenchon's offer to the NFP's big-spending manifesto rather than its personnel. — AFP

Back to school... The new academic journey begins



As the summer break comes to an end, the Sultanate of Oman is gearing up for the start of the new academic year 2024/2025. The return to school marks a significant moment for students, teachers, and other staff alike.

This year, schools across Oman will welcome over 750,000 students, with classes commencing from September 1, 2024. This academic year, Oman will have over 60,000 teachers in government schools alone.

Additionally, there are over 10,000 administrators and technicians, with a staggering 99 per cent Omanisation rate, indicating a strong reliance on Omani nationals in these roles.

Special education also sees dedicated staff (220 teachers and 52 administrators), maintaining high Omanisation rates of 93 per cent and 83 per cent, respectively.

On the infrastructure side, the Ministry of Education has opened 16 new school buildings, and has initiated construction on an additional 15 buildings, while plans are under way for another 20 schools.

These developments are aimed at providing a conducive learning environment for students, and meets modern educational standards around the world.

Moreover, improvements extend beyond just

physical structures; there are ongoing projects to upgrade existing facilities and enhance educational resources such as science laboratories and sports fields.

The commitment of the government to improve educational environment is evident from the allocation of funds for air conditioning units and safe transportation for students.

Sixteen school buildings have been added to the existing ones this new academic year. Construction of 15 school buildings has also begun, in addition to tenders for 20 new school buildings, which will take the education sector to greater heights.

In a significant move, the Ministry of Education has taken steps to address the growing concern over heavy school bags, particularly for children from Grades 1 to 4. The initiative is part of the ministry's ongoing efforts to ensure the health and well-being of students, recognising the potential long-term consequences of carrying excessively heavy bags.

A recent directive limiting to just two notebooks of 80 sheets each – one for each main subject for students in the specified grades, is welcomed by one and all.

Additionally, the use of extra booklets or external binders has been prohibited, with students required to stick to the books provided by the ministry.

Lockers have been installed in schools to allow students to keep their books, taking away the need

IN A SIGNIFICANT MOVE, THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION HAS TAKEN STEPS TO ADDRESS THE GROWING CONCERN OVER HEAVY SCHOOL BAGS, PARTICULARLY FOR LITTLE CHILDREN FROM GRADES 1 TO 4

to carry these home daily. The ministry is also encouraging the use of electronic books available on the educational portal, which can further lighten the load for students.

In preparation for the new school year, significant investments have been made in school infrastructure.

The ministry has been keen to provide the operational requirements for the educational process according to the latest technical and scientific specifications to ensure the provision of a suitable atmosphere for the school environment; as it is one of the most important aspects supporting the teaching and learning processes.

The various steps taken by the ministry to provide safe transport for children include the approval of budget to provide 800 new school transportation vehicles, contracts for more than 20,000 school transportation vehicles, and signing an agreement between Karwa Motors Company and the Oman Development Bank to replace old school transportation vehicles under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Finance, is a welcome move.

Nearly 5,000 means of transportation for students will be replaced for a period of five years, provided that 1,000 school transportation vehicles are replaced every year starting from 2024/2025, distributed across various governorates of Oman according to actual need.

UK cancer patients' wait times surge

Waiting times for cancer patients to start treatment increased across the UK over the past 12 years, with a dramatic rise after the Covid-19 pandemic, latest analysis of health service data showed.

While cancer wait times have been “broadly stable” in the last two years, there has been a general upward trend since 2012, with a sharp rise in 2022 after the pandemic, according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

Nearly half of all cancer patients in Wales and a third in England had to wait longer than the recommended 62-day standard time between the disease being detected and the start of treatment in the second quarter of 2024.

In Northern Ireland, the figure was as high as 66 per cent in the latest available data from the third quarter of 2023.

Scotland, where healthcare is devolved to the Scottish government, had the lowest rate among UK nations with just below 30 per cent of patients waiting longer than 62 days.

Even so, the proportion of patients waiting had increased from 5.2 per cent in 2012.

Britain's National Health Service (NHS) is struggling to clear a backlog built up during the pandemic and worsened by staff shortages and strikes over pay.

Several studies show that delays in cancer diagnosis and treatment can worsen survival outcomes.

Earlier this year, the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) released a statement on the importance of minimising delays in cancer care.

Two studies led by University College London (UCL) from February looking at four countries showed that UK patients faced the longest wait times for cancer treatment, above Australia, Canada and Norway.

Earlier this week, experts wrote in the *Lancet Oncology* journal that cancer waiting lists in the UK are “still the worst they have ever been” and that a new cancer plan should be a “key priority” for the new Labour government, which took power in July.

In the article, academics warned that there are “over one in three people waiting more than 62 days for their vital cancer treatment, meaning that there is an increased risk of dying unnecessarily of this disease”. — AFP

Feasibility of nutrition grading system



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The feasibility of implementing a nutritional rating system- aimed at simplifying the communication of a food's nutritional value through a ranking or rating system, as opposed to traditional nutrition facts labels, represents a cutting-edge approach to food labelling and consumer health enhancement.

The Nutri-Grade, a front-of-pack nutritional labelling system, rates products from A to D or E based on their nutritional quality, seeks to provide consumers with clear, accessible nutritional information, promote healthier food choices and align with global health standards.

Globally, various nutrient labelling systems, such as the UK's Traffic Light system, France's NutriScore, the Scandinavian Keyhole, the Australian Health Star Rating and Chile's Warning Labels, have been adopted to advance nutritional awareness. These systems, certifications and logos are intended to guide consumers towards healthier dietary choices and motivate manufacturers to improve their products.

Nutri-Grade has been implemented in several countries across Europe, the USA and Asia, demonstrating promising results by increasing consumer awareness and promoting better dietary choices, thereby contributing to improved overall health.

In the Sultanate of Oman, adopting such a system would support public health initiatives aimed at combating Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and obesity. The National Nutrition Strategy and Work Framework 2020-2030, introduced by the Ministry of Health, is a comprehensive multi-sectoral initiative designed to enhance the nation's nutritional status by 2030.

This strategy emphasises a commitment to an active lifestyle and balanced diet through three main areas: Health and Nutrition; Food and Nutrition Security; and Physical Fitness through Active Living.

It aligns with Oman Vision 2040 and supports WHO Regional Nutrition

objectives, contributing directly to NCD prevention.

A National Nutrition Survey in 2017 revealed that 66.2 per cent of adults in Oman are overweight or obese, with the rate of overweight or obese children under five increasing from 2.4 per cent to 4.2 per cent between 2009 and 2017. In response, the government introduced reforms in 2019, including sugar taxes on soft drinks (50 per cent) and energy drinks (100 per cent), to reduce sugar content in food and beverages. This measure aims to address the link between high sugar and fat consumption and the increased

NUTRI-GRADE HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES ACROSS EUROPE, THE USA AND ASIA, DEMONSTRATING PROMISING RESULTS BY INCREASING CONSUMER AWARENESS AND PROMOTING BETTER DIETARY CHOICES, THEREBY CONTRIBUTING TO IMPROVED OVERALL HEALTH

risks of obesity and diabetes.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends reducing sugar consumption, advising that both adults and children limit their daily intake of free sugars to less than 10 per cent of their total energy intake, with further benefits at less than 5 per cent — approximately 25 grammes (6 teaspoons) per day.

Diabetes mellitus and obesity are rapidly growing global health challenges, with significant implications for chronic diseases in the 21st century.

The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) projects that the number of adults living with diabetes worldwide will rise from 463 million in 2019 to 700 million by 2045.

The Middle East and North Africa

(MENA) region is expected to have the highest prevalence of diabetes, with rates projected to reach 15.7 per cent by 2045.

In Oman, with a population of 4.95 million in 2020, diabetes mellitus is a significant health issue, affecting a substantial portion of the population. The prevalence of diabetes is ranked eighth among MENA countries, and type 2 diabetes is expected to escalate, potentially consuming a significant portion of national health expenditure. Reducing risk factors for NCDs should be a national priority to manage and alleviate the burden on the population. Expanding public awareness campaigns and interventions, strengthening the implementation of Oman's National Policy for Diet, Physical Activity and Health, and introducing new food and beverage legislation are essential.

Implementing transparent food labelling including a “Nutrition Label” should be enforced in Oman, with a grace period for manufacturers and retailers to adjust.

Singapore's experience with a similar system can serve as a useful benchmark. Nutri-Grade which rates beverages from A (dark green) to D (red) based on sugar and saturated fat content per 100 ml could be adopted in Oman.

For instance, a beverage with less than 1 gramme of sugar and no more than 0.7 grammes of saturated fat per 100 ml receives an A rating, while a product with over 10 grammes of sugar and 2.8 grammes of saturated fat per 100 ml is rated D. Restaurants and drink stalls would also be required to label their menus accordingly.

The Nutri-Grade system helps consumers easily identify less healthy beverages with high sugar and fat content, making food choices simpler and more informed.

Adopting this system in Oman would significantly improve public health, promote healthier eating habits and increase transparency in the food market, aligning with global health standards and enhancing the overall well-being of the population.

Notebooks and class boards

With schools all set to open in Oman, the teachers are gearing up to receive students.

The main duty of a teacher is to impart knowledge and light the career path of students.

While accountants deal with numbers that have fixed characteristics, engineers deal with machinery or materials, teachers deal with young minds.

The students' life experience is just beginning and interestingly teachers become part of their important life lessons. Teachers are going to leave strong impressions as they are part of their childhood memories.

Some teachers like us and some get irritated at the very sight of us. That is what we think.

Teachers have to deal with young minds that are curious, sensitive, emotional, vulnerable, at times adamant, overconfident, unsecured, shy and nervous. Even the human resources department can prepare teachers for this because the young minds are unpredictable. So it is a relief for them when they come across a student who willingly cooperates and shows interest in the class.

We see teachers in the classroom but we often do not think of them in their homes. They multitask and prepare for the lessons. They also would have their emotional baggage and challenges beyond the classroom, but we only associate teachers with our life as a student.

So a teacher's job is beyond taking lessons although it is well known that teachers spend time at home working on projects and lessons for the next day. They remember students by their names as well as their interests and characteristics. On top of all that they become important advisors in our life.

Even after years of career when we sit down quietly, the faces of teachers appear in our mind - their voices and words. We continue to reflect on the classes and subjects that went over our heads and the ones that left us



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The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

THE LIFE EXPERIENCE OF A STUDENT IS JUST THE BEGINNING AND INTERESTINGLY TEACHERS BECOME PART OF THEIR IMPORTANT LIFE LESSONS

spell bound.

As a student chemistry formula and the periodic table was a Herculean task but seeing the copper sulphate blue in the lab made all sense.

That's the thing - students are made up differently and they bloom in different ways. Just like butterflies cannot be forced to come out of the pupae, students have to find their own pace and struggles.

But for sure the teachers we remember, no matter what subjects they were teaching, are the ones who talked to us recognising the person in us - no matter whether we were a top scorer or not.

Each child in the classroom is beginning to write the chapters of their lives, and the parents, teachers and mentors can provide the guidance, inspiration and motivation.

Words of wisdom might not be digested well until life teaches you. Experience is one of the best teachers and time determines how quickly we learn our lessons. Sometimes lessons learnt are too late, but then again it is never too late.

For that matter, we never stop being students because learning is a continuous process and we have to be diligent just like students preparing for their research. And teachers' efforts continue each academic year - same subjects, but new faces, with fresh pages and clean boards.

A classroom needs both - notebooks and boards just like the need for teachers and students. Together they form a room of knowledge - the classroom filled with silence during exams, giggles and chatter during breaks, greetings and teachings as well as questions and answers.

Out of all those young minds, we cannot judge who would become what, because that only the time can tell. Patience is what is needed in addition to discipline and hard work.

Wishing the best to teachers and students for the new academic year. It is the togetherness that matters the most.

AGE IS JUST A NUMBER!



Manette Baillie, a 102-year-old British woman, skydives, over Beccles, Britain, on Monday, in this screengrab taken from a handout video. – Reuters

Harris puts housing at centre of economic pitch

DEMOCRATIC presidential nominee Kamala Harris is promising to build more housing as the centrepiece of an effort to tackle rising costs that have stressed US households and left home ownership beyond the reach of many Americans.

While Harris has deliberately steered clear of some policy specifics in her month-old presidential bid, she has laid out detailed plans to spur new construction and reduce costs for renters and homebuyers, largely through tax incentives.

“We will end America's housing shortage,” she said as she accepted the Democratic presidential nomination last week.

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump's campaign has also promised to reduce costs through tax breaks and reduced regulations. But on the campaign trail, he has defended local housing restrictions that prevent many types of affordable housing from being built.

Voters rate housing costs as their second-most important economic worry, after fears of rising prices and stagnating income, a Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll found in May.

Housing construction collapsed during the 2007-2009 financial crisis and has been slow to recover in the years since, leaving the United States short 2.9 million units, according to Moody's Analytics.

Pandemic-driven shortages of



Andy Sullivan

The writer is a Washington correspondent for Reuters

KAMALA HARRIS HAS LAID OUT DETAILED PLANS TO SPUR NEW CONSTRUCTION AND REDUCE COSTS FOR RENTERS AND HOMEBUYERS, LARGELY THROUGH TAX INCENTIVES

construction materials pushed up the price of new housing while rising interest rates made mortgages more expensive.

US home prices have risen 50 per cent in the last five years and rents have risen 35 per cent, according to real estate firm Zillow.

Harris' housing plan could help her win over voters in an election where economic concerns are paramount, said Alyssa Cass, a Democratic strategist who says the issue is a top concern in focus groups.

“Anything that would reduce the cost of housing is music to voters' ears,” she said.

At an August 16 campaign stop in North Carolina, Harris called for building 3 million more housing units in four years, on top of the 1 million or so built annually by the private sector, through a new tax credit for developers who build homes aimed at first-time homebuyers and a \$25,000 tax credit for those buyers.

She also proposed a \$40 billion fund to encourage local governments to build more affordable housing, streamlining regulations and expanding rental aid, among other steps.

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a nonpartisan watchdog group, estimates those policies would

cost at least \$200 billion over 10 years.

If elected president, Harris might have trouble enacting those policies into law as similar proposals from President Joe Biden have failed to clear Congress.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Trump's position is less clear. The Republican Party's platform calls for boosting home ownership through tax breaks and eliminating regulations, though it does not outline specifics. However, Trump also has spoken against proposals to loosen local zoning restrictions that prevent



Democratic presidential nominee and US Vice-President Kamala Harris takes the stage of the Democratic National Convention (DNC) at the United Centre in Chicago, Illinois. – Reuters

apartments, duplexes and other forms of affordable housing from being built in neighbourhoods reserved for single family houses.

“I keep hearing about the suburban woman doesn't like Trump,” he said at a campaign event in Howell, Michigan last week. “I keep the suburbs safe. I stopped low-income towers from rising right alongside of their house, and I'm keeping the illegal aliens away from the suburbs.”

Trump's running mate, US Senator J D Vance, has blamed immigrants for the housing shortage.

Jenny Schuetz, a housing expert at the nonpartisan

Brookings Institution, said that comment amounted to a “not very subtle dog whistle” that recalled the racially charged housing fights of the 1970s, when white residents resisted efforts to integrate suburban areas.

“Trying to frame housing affordability as a social issue, rather than an economic one, isn't helpful to actually addressing the problem,” she said.

During Trump's 2017-2021 presidency, his housing secretary Ben Carson proposed easing zoning rules but did not take action. More recently, he called for opposing any efforts to weaken single-family zoning in Project 2025, a conservative policy plan that has been disavowed by the Trump campaign.

Harris has not said whether she would push local governments to loosen zoning regulations, but she has been involved in a broader Biden administration effort to encourage development.

In June, she announced \$85 million in grants to 21 local governments to remove “barriers to affordable housing,” including reforming land-use policies in some areas. The Biden administration plans to distribute another \$100 million later this year.

sport

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SEEB, AL NAHDA CLAIM NARROW WINS TO KEEP UP PACE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 26

Seeb achieved a valuable 1-0 victory over Sur in the third round match of the Omantel League to keep their lead at Seeb Sports Stadium on Sunday.

The match started with offensive momentum from Sur team, as their players pressed hard on Seeb goal during the first minutes, using the movements of the wings. However, Seeb defence, and the brilliance of goalkeeper Bilal al Balushi, prevented Sur from scoring the lead goal.

As time passed, Seeb reorganised and began launching dangerous attacks. Some of these nearly found the back of Sur's net, if not for the brilliance of their goalkeeper Salim al Dawoodi and their well-organised defence, leaving the first half to end in a goalless draw.

In the second half, and after an equal start, Seeb succeeded in snatching the winning goal from a quick attack that came after a long pass from the defence line. The team took advantage of Sur players' advance and Abdulaziz al Muqbali succeeded in scoring the only goal in the 47th minute after he was alone with the goalkeeper and shot a powerful ball that settled in the net.

After scoring the goal, the

pace of the match increased, as Sur tried for an equaliser by launching repeated attacks, but Seeb's defence was on the lookout. The Seeb coach made some substitutions to strengthen the midfield and defence, which contributed to securing the result. In contrast, Sur intensified their attacks in search of a draw, benefiting from the offensive activity of their substitute elements, but Seeb's defence —led by Mohammed al Musalmi and Ahmed al Khamisi and goalkeeper Bilal al Balushi —was able to confront all attempts until the end of the match. So Seeb maintained their lead and came out with a difficult and valuable victory.

With this victory, Seeb continued to lead the league with full points, achieving nine points from three matches. Sur remained without points after suffering their second consecutive loss.

AL NAHDA EDGE AL SHABAB
Al Nahda defeated Al Shabab 1-0 in a close match held at Al Buraimi Sports Complex.

The match started with high tactics from both teams, as it witnessed an exchange of attacks between them. Al Nahda team had the advantage in controlling the game, as they tried to reach Al Shabab's goal through the flanks and penetrations from



depth. In contrast, Al Shabab relied on counterattacks and long balls that did not pose a great threat to Al Nahda goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini's goal.

From an organised attack that started from the middle of the field, Bilal Bin Saha was able to

shoot a powerful ball that settled in Al Shabab's net, scoring the only goal in the match in the 38th minute. After the goal, Al Nahda retreated to defend, which gave Al Shabab a chance to press, but to no avail, and the half ended with Al Nahda leading by a clean

goal. In the second half, Al Shabab tried to return to the match, but Al Nahda's defence was solid, and Bilal Bin Saha almost added a second goal if it were not for the intervention of Al Shabab's defence. The match ended with

Al Nahda winning by a single goal, achieving 9 points from 3 matches. It is worth noting that Al Nahda is the only team in the Omantel League that has kept a clean sheet during the past two rounds.

Tributes pour in as ‘true gentleman’ Eriksson dies at 76

LONDON: Prince William hailed Sven-Goran Eriksson as a “true gentleman” as tributes poured in following the former England manager's death on Monday. Eriksson passed away surrounded by his family after revealing in January he had “at best” a year to live after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. The 76-year-old Swede was the first foreign manager of England, taking them to the World Cup quarter-finals in 2002 and 2006 while reaching the same stage at Euro 2004. As well as his colourful five-year spell with England, Eriksson managed several of the world's top clubs and countries during 42 years in the dugout. In his role as president of the English Football Association, Prince William met Eriksson on many occasions. “Sad to hear about the passing of Sven-Goran Eriksson. I met him several times as England manager and was always struck by his charisma and passion for the game,” he wrote on X.

“My thoughts are with his family and friends. A true gentleman of the game.” Although Eriksson was unable to end England's wait for a first major trophy since the 1966 World Cup, his teams produced several memorable performances, including a 5-1 rout of Germany in a World Cup qualifier in 2001. “This is a very sad day. He gave all England fans such special memories. No one can ever forget the 5-1 victory in Munich against Germany under Sven's guidance,” FA CEO Mark Bullingham said. Bullingham added: “Sven will be rightly recognised and forever remembered for his significant work with the England team, and for his wider contribution to the game. “He will be much missed, and we will pay tribute to him when we play Finland at Wembley next month.”

A BELOVED FIGURE
England's ‘golden generation’ may have



England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson in the file photo. – Reuters

underachieved in the Eriksson era but he was fondly regarded by his players. Former Liverpool striker Michael Owen said: “Rest In Peace Sven-Goran Eriksson. One of the very best and a man who will be sadly missed by everyone in the world of football.” Eriksson's England reign featured tabloid newspaper scandals surrounding his relationships with television personality Ulrika Jonsson and FA secretary Faria Alam. Tasked with helping Eriksson navigate those issues, former FA executive Adrian Bevington grew close to the Swede. “Sven was a wonderful person. I owe him a lot and he will be greatly missed by so many. Sven, you lived a great life and were such a positive person to be around. Despite a crisis or two we always smiled. RIP” Bevington said. After stepping down from the England job in 2006, Eriksson managed Manchester City in the 2007-08 season and the Premier League club joined the

tributes to their former boss. “We would like to express our sincere condolences to the family and friends of Sven-Goran Eriksson, who has passed away at the age of 76. Rest in peace, Sven,” City said. Liverpool provided Eriksson with an emotional final football memory in March when they allowed the Swede to fulfil a life-long dream by managing them in a charity match at Anfield. “Rest in peace, Sven-Goran Eriksson. The thoughts of everyone at the club are with Sven's family and friends at this extremely sad time,” Liverpool said. Eriksson's charismatic personality was a significant part of his appeal, as Denmark and Celtic ‘keeper Kasper Schmeichel — given his Premier debut by the Swede at Manchester City — can testify. “We have lost an incredible man to whom I owe a great deal. Sven was the first manager to call me world-class and he made me feel 10 feet tall. What a life!” Schmeichel said. — AFP

Shepherd stars as SA collapse to defeat against West Indies



Romario Shepherd (L) of West Indies celebrates the dismissal of Reeza Hendricks of South Africa during the second T20I match between West Indies and South Africa at Brian Lara Cricket Academy in Tarouba, Trinidad and Tobago. – AFP

TAROUBA, Trinidad and Tobago: South Africa collapsed from a winning position to lose by 30 runs to West Indies in their T20 international on Sunday, with the Caribbean side taking an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

West Indies made 179 for six but the South Africans were well on their way to victory, reaching 129 for 3 with more than six overs remaining. The Proteas then proceeded

to lose their last seven wickets for just 20 runs in 35 balls, finally ending up bowled out for 149.

Reeza Hendricks made 44 off 18 balls in a positive start to the run chase, but it was a day to remember for West Indies' seamers at the Brian Lara Cricket Academy Stadium.

Romario Shepherd took 3-15 from his four overs, claiming the key wickets of Hendricks and skipper Aiden Markram on

19 runs. Fellow pacer Shamar Joseph took 3-31 as he did the damage to the lower order.

Shai Hope had set the home side on their way to a good total with his 41 from 22 balls while skipper Rovman Powell's 35 and Sherfane Rutherford's 29 saw them through the final overs.

Powell was pleased with the way his team had turned the game around after the strong start from the tourists.

"We put the pressure after the powerplay. Wickets would bring us back in the game. T20 cricket can change very fast," he said.

Markram said his experimental and youthful team would learn from the loss and seek to put it right in Tuesday's final game.

"It's tough to put a finger on the learnings right now but one thing guaranteed with us is a never-say-die attitude," he said. — AFP



Election for the Athletes Committee of the Oman Handball Association in progress at the Oman Olympic Committee. – Hussain al Muqbali

Nasr al Hasani elected chairman of Handball Athletes Committee

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 26

Nasr bin Hamed al Hasani was elected as Chairman of the Athletes Committee of the Oman Handball Association (OHA), and was appointed as a member of the OHA's Board of Directors for the electoral period 2024-2028, while Ameer bin Saif al Dighaishi was chosen as Vice-Chairman. The appointments also included Adel bin Hamed al Hasani as secretary and Arif bin Ghulam al Balushi and Mousa bin Ali al Dighaishi as members.

The elections were held on Monday at the headquarters of the Oman Olympic Committee, Khalfan bin Hamed al Zeedi, President of Nizwa Club, headed the Elections Committee, in the presence of Adil bin Abdullah al Farsi, President of Saham Club, Chairman of the Electoral Appeals and Appeals Committee, and a number of members of the OHA's Board of Directors, in addition to 14 out of 19 members of the General Assembly of the Athletes Committee. After the legal quorum was completed, the committee was elected from among 7 candidates.

The electoral process concluded with 60 votes, with Nasr al Hasani receiving 12 votes, while Younis bin Said al Azan and Yaqoub bin Yousef al Qasimi received zero votes, and Arif al Balushi, Mousa al Dighaishi, Ameer al Dighaishi and Adel al Hasani received 12 votes each.

Following his victory as the Chairman of the Athletes Committee, Nasr al Hasani

expressed his deep gratitude to his fellow voters for the trust they have placed in him. He pointed out that his election to this position reflects the members' belief in his leadership role and his ability to provide the required contribution, whether through assuming the chairmanship of the Athletes Committee or through his membership in the Oman Handball Association.

Al Hasani added that the establishment of the Athletes Committee comes as a historic step in the association's journey, as this committee is the first of its kind to be established to support and enhance the association's efforts to develop handball in Oman. He explained that the committee will work on formulating strategic plans aimed at supporting the association in organising sports competitions and providing technical and administrative support to athletes. The committee will also contribute to improving the level of sports performance and enhancing the game's infrastructure, which will contribute to the advancement of Omani handball at the local and international levels.

He also pointed out that the committee will seek to activate the role of athletes within the OHA by presenting new proposals and ideas that will push the wheel of development forward, in cooperation with all concerned parties. Al Hasani also stressed the importance of working in a team spirit to achieve common goals that serve the interests of Omani sports and handball.

Hundreds take part in 'Rally For Relief' badminton tourney

MUSCAT: In a heartfelt effort to support the victims of the recent natural disaster in South Indian state Kerala's Wayanad, the Oasis Badminton Academy in Oman, in collaboration with Team Azaiba, organised a badminton tournament. The event, held last Friday at the academy in Ghala, witnessed the participation of hundreds of people who came together to contribute to the noble cause.

The tournament featured competitions in several categories, including Men's Doubles 'A', Men's Doubles 'B', Premier Men's Doubles, Women's Doubles, Mixed Doubles, and Veteran Doubles. In the Premier Men's Doubles category, the pair of Antika Syaputra and Nisar Mohammed emerged as the winners. The Men's Doubles 'A' category was won by Anisulal Rubilal and



Pramod Balan, while Faisal P and Thaha Mohammed secured victory in Men's Doubles 'B'. The Women's Doubles category saw Bith Mansoori and Elnaaz Sherdel take the top spot, while Bala and Lakshmi Iyer won in the Mixed Doubles category. The Veteran Doubles category was clinched by Chandrasekhar

and Jinesh.

The winners were awarded cash prizes and trophies by prominent figures, including Nasser al Harthy, Chairman of Shaay Oman & EcoKleen; Nihal P, Global Head of Operations, Shaay Global; Yogendra Katiyar, Chairman of Oasis Badminton Academy;

Madhu Nambiar, member of Morning Star Badminton Club; Anu Chandran, Secretary of Malayalam Mission Oman Chapter and Bijoy Parat from Team Azaiba.

The official inauguration ceremony was presided over by Bipin Parat, President of Team Azaiba, and attended by

Sunil Kumar KK, President of Malayalam Mission Oman Chapter; social activist Riyas Ambalavan; Yogendra Katiyar, Chairman of Oasis Badminton Academy; and Mohammed, Chairman of Muscat Badminton Club. Jagadeesh Keeri, Secretary of Team Azaiba, delivered the welcome address.

The tournament's entry fee was set at RO 5, with additional contributions raised through donations from spectators and raffle tickets. All proceeds from the event were donated to support the landslide victims in Wayanad. Participants and spectators alike expressed their wholehearted support for the sincere efforts made by Oasis Badminton Academy and Team Azaiba to aid those affected by the disaster in Wayanad.

The organisers expressed their deep gratitude to everyone who contributed to the success of the tournament, including players, spectators, and the technical team from Morning Star Badminton Club. The tournament was sponsored by Layali Ghala Restaurant, EcoKleen, and Shaay Oman, with Kosmos Sports providing gifts for the raffle winners.

Madrid win as Mbappe makes Bernabeu bow

GRIEZMANN ON TARGET AS ATLETICO EASE PAST GIRONA

MADRID: Spanish champions Real Madrid earned a 3-0 win over Real Valladolid in La Liga on Sunday as Kylian Mbappe made his Santiago Bernabeu bow without finding the net.

Atletico Madrid comfortably beat last season's surprise package Girona by the same scoreline later on in the capital.

Madrid's French striker Mbappe played at home for the first time in a Los Blancos shirt but was largely frustrated by Valladolid's defence.

Madrid midfielder Fede Valverde opened the scoring after 50 minutes and substitutes Brahim Diaz and debutant Endrick struck late on.

Without the injured Jude Bellingham Madrid created little in the first half but did enough after the break to earn their first win of the season, following an opening draw at Real Mallorca.

Still lacking fluency in attack, Carlo Ancelotti's side stayed two points behind rivals Barcelona, who beat Athletic Bilbao on Saturday.

"We were too slow in the first half, the second half we were much more active, there was more movement, much faster with the ball," said Ancelotti.

Real Valladolid set out to frustrate the champions in the summer heat and succeeded for 45 minutes.

Madrid came out with more bite in the second half and Valverde smashed home a vicious low free-kick with the help of a deflection to break the deadlock.

ENDRICK ARRIVES

Mbappe blew a golden opportunity to get off the mark when Vinicius cut



Real Madrid's Endrick celebrates scoring their third goal against Real Valladolid during the La Liga match at Santiago Bernabeu, Madrid, Spain. — Reuters

the ball across to him, but Estonian goalkeeper Karl Hein saved well.

The France captain had another chance on the counter-attack but fired wide before being replaced by 18-year-old Brazilian forward Endrick. Mbappe scored on his debut in a Uefa Super Cup triumph but in La Liga, has failed to score in his opening two matches.

"In this position, he will score like he always scores, I don't think he needs to play from the left, in the centre in the end he will score goals," said Ancelotti.

Diaz secured Madrid's win with a neat lobbed finish and then teed up Endrick, who drilled home at the near post to celebrate his first appearance for the club in style. "(Endrick) has got a lot

of potential and for his goal he showed his quality," added Ancelotti. "He's a centre-forward who plays in the box, in small spaces he's very dangerous."

Madrid signed Endrick from Palmeiras in 2022 but he arrived this summer, once old enough to move.

ATLETICO ON SONG

Antoine Griezmann, Marcos Llorente and Koke's strikes helped Diego Simeone's Atletico claim their first win of the campaign against Girona.

Julian Alvarez started for the Rojiblancos at their Metropolitano stadium while new arrival Conor Gallagher made his debut as a substitute after joining from Chelsea. — AFP

SPANISH LA LIGA RESULTS
On Sunday
Real Madrid 3 (Valverde 50, Diaz 88, Endrick 90+6) Real Valladolid 0
Leganes 2 (Cruz 71, Franquesa 85)
Las Palmas 1 (Ramirez 90+3)
Alaves 0 Real Betis 0
Atletico Madrid 3 (Griezmann 39, Llorente 48, Koke 90+4) Girona 0
On Saturday
Osasuna 1 (Garcia 55) Real Mallorca 0
Barcelona 2 (Yamal 24, Lewandowski 75) Athletic Bilbao 1 (Sancet 42-pen)
Espanyol 0 Real Sociedad 1 (Kubo 80)
Getafe 0 Rayo Vallecano 0
On Friday
Celta Vigo 3 (Mingueza 23, Iago Aspas 28, Beltran 60)Valencia 1 (Diego Lopez 14)
Sevilla 1 (Lukebakio 45+6)
Villarreal 2 (Danjuma 2, Ayoze Perez 90+5)



Atletico Madrid's Spanish midfielder #14 Marcos Llorente celebrates scoring his team's second goal during the Spanish league match between Club Atletico de Madrid and Girona FC at the Metropolitano stadium in Madrid. — AFP

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OQ breaks ground for RO 47 million strategic fuel reserve project in Dhofar Governorate

BUSINESS REPORTER
SALALAH, AUGUST 26

OQ, the global integrated energy group, celebrated the ground-breaking ceremony of the strategic fuel reserve project in the Dhofar Governorate, marking an investment of over RO 47 million (equivalent to \$124 million). The ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, and attended by various officials and dignitaries from the governorate.

The strategic fuel storage facility aims to enhance the local fuel supply in Dhofar and ensure preparedness for emergency situations by storing key petroleum derivatives, including MOGAS-91, MOGAS-95, gas oil and jet fuel. With a storage capacity exceeding 110,000 cubic metres, the facility is designed to secure a 30-day fuel supply for Dhofar, thereby enhancing the governorate's resilience to potential energy crises.

This initiative is part of OQ's broader efforts to meet the nation's demand for petroleum products, aligning with the growing population and the surge in commercial and investment activities.

On this occasion, HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, praised the project, stating, "This project is a culmination of the efforts made by various entities in the Sultanate of Oman, led by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and OQ



Dignitaries at the groundbreaking ceremony of the strategic fuel reserve project.

Group, aimed at enhancing the infrastructure for sustainable energy in the Dhofar Governorate in particular and the Sultanate of Oman in general. It ensures the growing demand for petroleum derivatives is met. We are confident that this investment will significantly contribute to supporting sustainable economic development in the governorate and securing various needs, including during emergencies." Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, emphasised that: "The groundbreaking of the strategic

fuel reserve project in Dhofar is a significant step in reinforcing Oman's strategic fuel reserves, ensuring the availability of essential products and securing supplies during emergencies. This development is crucial in guaranteeing our petroleum product needs are met." Al Aufi further highlighted that a similar strategic fuel reserve project is scheduled to commence soon in Musandam Governorate, with a planned capacity of 14,536 cubic metres. Upon completion, this initiative will elevate the nation's total fuel storage capacity to over

350,000 cubic metres, encompassing key facilities such as the 160,000-cubic-metre Jifnain station in Muscat Governorate, the 19,700-cubic-metre Suhar station in Al Batinah North Governorate, and the 37,000-cubic-metre Raysut station.

ANOTHER MILESTONE

In a speech delivered at the ceremony, Ashraf bin Hamed al Maamari, Group CEO of OQ, stated: "The strategic fuel storage facility, with a capacity of 110,000 cubic metres, is another milestone in OQ's investments

in Dhofar Governorate, complementing our existing projects such as the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), ammonia, methanol plants and gas pipelines." He explained: "The strategic fuel reserve project in Dhofar has been initiated under the directive of the government, represented by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, which places great importance on ensuring the supply of petroleum products across all governorates in Oman."

He noted that all aspects related to the project's commencement, such as engineer-

ing contracts and land usufruct agreements in the Salalah Free Zone, have been finalised. Al Maamari further emphasised that OQ is committed to securing the supply of petroleum derivatives for Oman, with a total refining capacity of 530,000 barrels per day. This includes the production capacity of the Duqm Refinery at 230,000 barrels per day, the Mina Al Fahal Refinery at 116,000 barrels per day, and the Suhar Refinery at 198,000 barrels per day.

The project consists of three key components: a fuel reserve facility within the free zone, a pipeline connecting the pumping station at Salalah Port to the fuel storage tanks in the free zone, and the expansion of the existing pumps at Salalah Port. Additionally, the new Salalah station will be connected to the existing Raysut station.

The reserve facility will be built on an area of 150,000 square metres, with the construction phase set to span 36 months, encompassing engineering works, procurement and construction activities, culminating in the initial operation.

The facility will feature tanks, a warehouse, a control room, an administration building, a maintenance workshop, a pump area, a tanker loading zone, firefighting and safety facilities and other complementary components. Provisions for future expansion and increased storage capacity have also been considered.

100 young Omanis vie for prizes in new AI competition

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 26

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology kicked off yesterday, Monday, August 26, the "Engineer It With AI" competition, under the auspices of Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy.

Also in attendance were Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport.

In a statement, Head of Development and Studies at the National Space and



100 participants will participate in the 'Engineer It With AI' competition for a chance to win prizes valued at over RO 10,000.

Advanced Technologies Centre and Artificial Intelligence at the Ministry, Toua al Dawood, highlighted the significance of building AI.

"AI can only develop through building capacities and supporting talents in this promising field.

"This can be achieved by providing an enabling

environment, offering necessary support to innovators and developers, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship, and enhancing cooperation between the public and private sectors to maximise the benefits of AI applications in various domains." She added: "The competition comes at a time when the world is witnessing

rapid developments in this field. "The competition aims to discover and develop local skills, urging participants to make the most of this opportunity to showcase their abilities and creativity."

The "Engineer It With AI" competition, conducted in collaboration with Code Academy, promotes the use

of generative AI to produce technical solutions for various sectors.

A total of 100 individuals are participating, divided into 25 teams, who will compete for prizes worth over RO 10,000 over a course of 40 days.

According to the ministry, the competition will go through three main phases including

an intransitive training camp, followed by the development of technical solutions using generative AI, and a final evaluation and the conclusion of the competition.

The event included an introductory workshop detailing the competition's timeline, informational sessions, along with an introduction to the Learning Management System (LMS) workshop, and team communication activities.

The competition is part of the ministry's efforts and the government's wider effort of boosting the contribution of the digital economy to the local GDP.

Earlier this year, the Under-Secretary of Communications and Information Technology at the Ministry, unveiled that the volume of investments within the Artificial Intelligence (AI) sector in Oman is expected to reach \$250 million.

Malabar Gold and Diamonds wins Responsible Jewellery House Award at India Gold Conference

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 355 showrooms across 13 countries, has been honoured with the prestigious India Gold Conference (IGC) Responsible Jewellery House Award for 2023-24. This accolade, one of the most esteemed in the Indian jewellery sector, recognises Malabar Gold & Diamonds for its unwavering commitment to ethical sourcing and sustainability.

The award acknowledges Malabar Gold & Diamonds' dedication to procuring responsibly mined gold and diamonds from legitimate sources, ensuring that every piece of jewellery is crafted with the highest standards of purity and integrity. O Asher, Managing Director of India Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds received the award from Dr Sundaravalli Narayanswamy, Chairperson of the India Gold Policy Centre, at a function held at Bangalore, India. Also in attendance were Sitaraman Varadarajan, Business Development Head at Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Dileep Narayanan, Bullion Head at Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Sunil Kashyap Director of Finmet PTE Ltd, Praveen Baijnath, CEO of Rand Refinery, and Filsor Babu, Karnataka Regional Head at Malabar Gold & Diamonds. Speaking on the occasion, Malabar Group Chairman, M P Ahammed, expressed



The Responsible Jewellery House Award acknowledges Malabar Gold & Diamonds' dedication to procuring responsibly mined gold and diamonds from legitimate sources.

his gratitude and reaffirmed the company's commitment to ethical practices. "We are deeply honoured to receive the Responsible Jewellery House Award from IGC. Gold and diamonds are treasured gifts, often exchanged during life's most joyful moments, such as weddings and birthdays. We are committed to ensuring that these precious materials are sourced ethically, from legitimate origins, free from exploitation. Only then can these gifts truly embody the sanctity, purity, and brilliance they symbolise. We uphold this commitment from the moment gold is mined to the final product reaching our customers."

"The tenets of ethical and responsible business practices are something we have strongly adhered to here at Malabar Gold & Diamonds since our inception. From using only the most sustainably sourced raw materials in our jewellery to incorporating numerous environment-friendly features across our showrooms and offices, we have strived to be a model organisation that embodies the spirit of a responsible brand", commented Shamlal Ahamed, Managing Director of International Operations at Malabar Gold & Diamonds. Malabar Gold & Diamonds currently operates over 355

showrooms across 13 countries, employing around 21,000 people from 26 different nationalities. With more than 15 million satisfied customers from over 100 countries, the company offers world-class facilities in all its showrooms. O Asher, Managing Director of Malabar Gold & Diamonds India Operations, said, "We ensure that the gold bars we buy and sell are responsible and fully legal. We use London Bullion Market Association (LBMA) quality certified London Good Delivery Bars (LGDB), Dubai Good Delivery Bars (DGDB) and HUID Hallmarked Indian Good Delivery Bars. Malabar Gold and

Diamonds has already become a trusted jewellery brand in the world", O. Asher said. "Throughout all of the 13 countries that Malabar Gold & Diamonds currently operates in, we have taken great care to ensure that the entirety of our operations is in strict compliance to the rule of land. The policies we have enacted in the avenues of Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) have enabled us to position ourselves as a brand that is an integral part of society. These policies are routinely strengthened to remain a socially conscious and responsible organisation", commented Abdul Salam K P, Vice-Chairman of Malabar Group.

ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) initiative has been the primary commitment of Malabar Group since its inception in 1993, with 5 per cent of net profits set aside towards such initiatives in each country of operations. The key focus is in the areas of Health, Hunger Free World, Housing, Education, Women Empowerment & Environment. The ESG goals of the organisation are periodically strengthened to remain a socially conscious and responsible organisation.

EDITOR'S NOTE Malabar Gold & Diamonds was established in 1993 and is the flagship company of Malabar Group, a leading diversified

Indian business conglomerate. With an annual turnover of \$6.2 billion, the company currently ranks as the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally and today has a strong retail network of over 355 outlets spread across 13 countries in addition to multiple offices, design centres, wholesale units, and factories spread across India, Middle East, Far East, the USA, the UK, Canada & Australia. The group, owned by more than 4,000 shareholders, has more than 21,000 professionals from over 26 countries working towards its continued success. Malabar Gold & Diamonds also features an online store www.malabargoldanddiamonds.com providing customers the opportunity to purchase their favourite jewellery at any time and on any day from the comfort of their homes.

ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) has been the primary commitment of the group since its inception. The key ESG focus areas of Malabar Group are Health, Housing, Hunger Free World, Education, Environment and Women empowerment. Integrating the principles of responsibility and sustainability into its core business, Malabar Group periodically strengthens its ESG goals to remain a socially conscious and responsible organisation. The group contributes 5 per cent of its profit to such initiatives in the same country of operation.

Ominvest takes part in a forum on psychological safety and mental health at work



The forum aimed to raise awareness about enhancing mental health and psychological safety in the workplace.

MUSCAT: Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest) recently participated in the form of "psychological safety and mental health in the work environment kicked off in Salalah," held under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. This participation aligns with Ominvest's commitment to fostering sustainable development and creating a motivating work environment for its employees. Organised by the Ministry of Labour in collaboration with the Omani Society for Human Resources Management (OSHRM), the forum aimed to raise awareness about enhancing mental health and psychological safety in the workplace. It provided a platform for exchanging knowledge and best practices, equipping participants with practical tools and strategies to support employees facing

psychological challenges at work. The event also encouraged the adoption of policies and programmes that prioritise psychological safety, ultimately contributing to the overall well-being and productivity of employees. Waleed bin Nasser al Yaarubi, Chief People, Corporate Communication, and Sustainability Officer at Ominvest, emphasised that the Company's participation in the forum underscores its dedication to employee well-being. "Ominvest is committed to creating a conducive environment for its employees, one that supports their career growth, skill development, and overall aspirations. We implement various initiatives aimed at improving working conditions, fostering a sense of belonging, and enhancing job satisfaction — all of which are crucial for maintaining mental health in the workplace."

He also pointed out that in a rapidly changing global landscape, companies must prioritise employees' mental health to help them navigate challenges successfully. At Ominvest, promoting mental health in the workplace is viewed as a key strategy for achieving sustainability, boosting productivity, and driving organisational success. Six employees from Ominvest participated in the forum, gaining insights into modern methods and effective practices for enhancing psychological safety and mental health at work. They also explored strategies for achieving a balance between professional and personal life, as well as the critical role of Human Resources Management in supporting employees' mental well-being. The Ominvest team actively contributed to the discussions throughout the forum, sharing their perspectives and experiences.

Al Amerat Club unveils new kit for 2024-2025 season, proudly sponsored by MG Motor

MUSCAT: Al Amerat Club has officially unveiled its new kit for the 2024-2025 season, with MG Motor proudly continuing its role as the official sponsor. This collaboration highlights MG Motor's commitment to supporting local sports and fostering community engagement throughout Oman.

The new kit is more than just a jersey; it symbolises unity, pride, and the team's relentless pursuit of excellence. Designed with both tradition and modernity in mind, it embodies the spirit of Al Amerat Club and their dedication to success on and off the field. As the official sponsor, MG Motor is deeply invested in the success of Al Amerat Club. This partnership goes beyond brand visibility; it represents our commitment to nurturing local talent, empowering youth, and promoting a healthy, active lifestyle in Oman. The unveiling of the new kit comes on the heels of several remarkable achievements by Al Amerat Club. They demonstrated their dominance in the Khareef Dhofar Bowling Championship by taking both 1st and 2nd place. The team secured a Bronze Medal at the Moscow International Beach Soccer Cup 2024. Additionally, they earned



MG Motor is deeply invested in the success of Al Amerat Club.

a Bronze Medal at the Oman Clubs Badminton Championship and achieved an impressive haul at the 2024 Oman Athletics Federation Shield Championship, with 11 Gold, 8 Silver, and 4 Bronze medals. These accomplishments underscore the club's commitment to excellence, making MG Motor's partnership with Al Amerat Club even more significant. Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, remarked, "We are incredibly proud to continue our partnership with Al Amerat Club as they unveil their new kit for the 2024-2025 season. This collaboration reflects our dedication to nurturing local

talent and promoting a strong sense of community through sports. At MG Motor, we believe in the transformative power of sports to inspire, unite, and elevate. The new kit embodies the spirit of Al Amerat Club—a spirit of resilience, pride, and relentless pursuit of excellence. We look forward to supporting the club in their journey and witnessing their success this season." The launch of the new kit marks a significant milestone in our journey with Al Amerat Club. MG Motor remains committed to supporting the club, not just as a sponsor, but as a partner in their mission to elevate the standards of sports in the region.

OQ powers Oman with 89 million barrels of annual oil production

The Sultanate of Oman's global integrated energy group – OQ — showcased its pivotal role in driving national development through strategic energy production and infrastructure. From the exploration and extraction of crude oil to advanced refining and distribution, OQ is not just meeting current energy demands, but also paving the way for a sustainable future.

In 2023, OQ achieved significant production milestones, with a daily production rate of 246,000 barrels of oil equivalent, culminating in an impressive annual output of 89 million barrels. Of these, 81 million barrels were processed, underscoring OQ's robust refining capabilities.

The company's total refining capacity stands at over 530,000 barrels per day, distributed among its key facilities: 198,000



Last year, 81 million barrels were processed, underscoring OQ's robust refining capabilities.

bpd at the Sohar Refinery, 116,000 bpd at the Minal Al Fahal Refinery, and 230,000 bpd at the Duqm Refinery, a joint venture with OQ8.

OQ's refineries are producing a wide array of petroleum products essential for both domestic use and international markets. The production portfolio includes over 15.7 million barrels of 91 octane gasoline and 11 million barrels

of 95 octane gasoline, catering to diverse consumer needs.

Diesel production reached a noteworthy 32.4 million barrels, while LPG and jet fuel outputs were 7.9 million and 9.9 million barrels, respectively. These figures highlight OQ's comprehensive approach to meeting various energy demands.

To support its extensive production and distribution

network, OQ has developed substantial fuel storage capacities totalling 216,700 cubic metres. Key storage facilities are strategically located with capacities of 19,700 cubic metres in Suhar, 160,000 cubic metres in Jifnain, and 37,000 cubic metres in Raysut.

This infrastructure ensures efficient supply chain management and enhances Oman's energy security.

OQ's achievements reflect its commitment to innovation and leadership in the energy sector. By integrating cutting-edge technologies and sustainable practices, the company is not only enhancing operational efficiency, but also contributing to Oman's long-term economic growth and environmental goals. OQ's efforts align with national objectives to diversify the economy and reduce carbon footprints, setting benchmarks for industry best practices.

RO 117 million contract for water networks in Al Dhahirah

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 26

Galfar Engineering and Contracting, a leading infrastructure company in Oman, has been awarded a major contract by Nama Water Services (NAMA) to construct water distribution networks in the wilayats of Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank in Al Dhahirah Governorate. Valued at RO 117 million, this project represents a significant advancement for both the company and the governorate.

This tender, awarded under the "Design and Build Package 1," underscores the strategic priority of enhancing water infrastructure in Al Dhahirah, a governorate marked by its expanding population and industrial activities. The project's primary goal is to improve the efficiency of water distribution, ensuring reliable access to water resources for both residential and industrial purposes across the governorate.

The project, formally accepted on August 26, 2024, is set to be completed within 44 months from the commencement date. This timeline reflects the project's scale and the detailed planning required for such an essential infrastructure development. This new project is



Under the contract, Galfar will construct water distribution networks in the wilayats of Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

anticipated to further strengthen Galfar's standing in the water sector, expanding its portfolio and maintaining its significant market share within this critical industry.

In addition to this major contract, Galfar Engineering & Contracting SAOG has recently secured two other significant contracts in Oman, totalling RO 53.5 million. The first, valued at RO 18.5 million, was awarded by Occidental Oman Inc for civil works on the B53 and B72 projects. The second, valued at RO 35 million, was awarded by Nama Dhofar Services Company for the expansion of the Raysut Water Reclamation Plants. These contracts further solidify Galfar's position as a leading infrastructure and energy contractor in Oman.

MADAYN LAUNCHES INDUSTRIAL INNOVATION PROGRAMME IN DHOFAR

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 26

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), represented by the Industrial Innovation Academy, has launched the "Industrial Innovation Specialist" programme in Raysut Industrial City under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

This programme, which targets entrepreneurs and owners of SMEs in the Food and Beverage (F&B) industry in Dhofar Governorate, is part of ongoing efforts to enhance national competencies in the knowledge economy through a series of training courses developed by the academy in collaboration with various global organisations including the World Packaging Organisation, National Registry of Food Safety Professionals, and the Global Innovation Management Institute in the United States.

Speaking at the launch event, Eng Abdulqadir al Balushi, Director-General of Raysut Industrial City, emphasised that this programme aligns with Madayn's efforts to support the local community and empower youth and entrepreneurs in Dhofar Governorate. "This programme is designed to



Eng Abdulqadir al Balushi, Director General of Raysut Industrial City, addressing the launch event.

develop innovative ideas and transform them into viable products that benefit the industrial sector in particular and economic sectors in general. At Madayn, we recognise that human resources and knowledge economy are key pillars of the industrial economy amidst global evolutions," he pointed out.

To keep pace with these evolving changes and boost the contribution of the SMEs to the national economy, the 'Industrial Innovation Specialist' programme in the F&B sector aims to elevate the competencies of the youth and entrepreneurs in Dhofar especially given the governorate's abundance of agricultural and animal products. The programme

features 30 participants who will receive comprehensive guidance from international experts, equipping them with specialised skills in innovation, packaging, manufacturing, brand identity and digital marketing, to effectively bring their food products to market.

The programme aims at equipping participants with an understanding of innovation and its application, developing their innovations and initial products and promoting these products through available marketing tools.

Upon completion, the participants will receive an 'Industrial Innovation Specialist' certificate, a Level-1

Innovation Certificate from the Global Innovation Management Institute in the United States, a certification from the World Packaging Organisation, and a certification from the National Registry of Food Safety Professionals. The programme is aimed at entrepreneurs, innovators, SMEs, and home-based F&B projects in Dhofar.

Eng Al Balushi concluded by noting that Raysut Industrial City has successfully localised eight projects in the first half of 2024, with a total investment exceeding RO 43 million.

The city's strategic plans aim to secure further expansions to attract additional investments, enhance the economic standing of Dhofar Governorate and create job opportunities for Omanis in Dhofar.

Currently, the Omanisation rate in Raysut Industrial City exceeds 38 per cent. Additionally, there is a cooperation programme between the Ministry of Labour and Madayn, through the Industrial Innovation Academy, focused on Omanising mid-level and senior level positions within companies and factories in the industrial cities.

This initiative aims to create 1,000 jobs annually over three years by qualifying and training national talents.

Asyad Express the premier gateway to the GCC and MENA region for international partners

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 26

Asyad Express, a member of Asyad Group, is driving forward Oman's vision of establishing itself as a leading logistics hub in the region. As the premier gateway to the GCC and MENA region for international partners, the company's expansive network is designed to provide seamless connectivity, ensuring that goods are delivered quickly and

efficiently to their destinations.

Holding a strategic location at the crossroads of the Middle East, Africa and Asia; Oman offers unparalleled connectivity and integrated logistics solutions to businesses looking to expand their presence in the region.

Today, Asyad Express boasts a network that spans across the GCC and MENA region, with a strong presence in key markets such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain,

Qatar and Egypt, delivering to over 220 destinations.

Asyad Express's competitive advantage lies in its ability to offer a 'one-stop-shop' solution for logistics and express delivery needs. The company's in-house customs clearance, which significantly reduces transit times and costs for its partners, combined with its robust alliance with Oman Air to provide a comprehensive air freight solution, makes it an ideal

partner for businesses looking to streamline their logistics operations in the GCC and MENA region. Employing state-of-the-art warehouse operations, Asyad Express guarantees efficient inventory management and faster order processing. The company's e-fulfilment centres leverage advanced technology for parcel security, precise labelling and temperature control, ensuring accuracy and efficiency in e-commerce logistics.

Phase 2 of Al Sharqiyah Expressway project to feature multiple bridges

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 26

AZ Engineers & Partners (AZEP) Oman, a leading construction firm specialising in the delivery of concrete structures for roads and other civil projects, has been tapped to build a number of wadi bridges, arched bridges and underpasses as part of Phase 2 (Part 2) of the Al Sharqiyah Expressway project.

AZEP is undertaking the construction of these key components of the strategically vital road project as a subcontractor to Al Tasnim Projects which, in February this year, was named the main contractor for Al Sharqiyah Expressway Phase 2 (Part 2) development.

The client is the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology which retendered the Phase 2 (Part 2) section, covering a 52km stretch from Al Kamil W'al Wafi to Sur, to allow for the expeditious completion of the project.

As the subcontractor for all the concrete works envisioned for the implementation on this stretch, AZEP will be responsible for the construction of a total of four wadi bridges, 3 arch bridges, four underpasses, around 25 culverts and a number of retaining walls. The value of its subcontract is



Wadi bridge under construction on the Al Kamil W'al Wafi-Sur stretch.

around RO 11 million, out of a total project cost of RO 68 million awarded to the main contractor, Al Tasnim Projects.

Significantly, AZEP has had an operational presence during the construction of all four sections of the landmark expressway project. "AZEP has been fortunate enough to have played its part in this mega infrastructure development where we have been the Concrete Works contractor on all four sections of this Expressway," the company noted in a post.

Underscoring its leading role in Oman's civil construction sector, AZEP is currently undertaking a number of prestigious projects around the country. The biggest of these is the Adawrib Flood Protection Dam, being constructed in Salalah at a cost of around RO 24 million. The project is scheduled for completion by around the end of this year.

“Thank you”: A two-letter word for higher productivity



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is the founder of Knowledge Oman.

SALARY INCREASE ARE TEMPORARY FORM OF RECOGNITION WHERE THE IMPACT MAY NOT LAST LONGER

Recently I had an intriguing discussion with an experienced senior executive professional from one of the reputed organisations here in Oman who stated that despite that their organisation was paying their employees with high salaries yet he noted that some of these employee’s motivation level was low, job satisfaction was poor, and stress level was high. I replied, “Did you also notice that these employees take periodic sick and emergency leaves apart from their official annual leaves?” He said, “Yes!” I then replied “The next action that you would most probably see from these employees is a resignation letter, especially if they get a better offer and/or environment to work for, elsewhere”. While there is no disagreement that a good and competitive salary continue to remain important to individuals, yet, they are definitely not the only thing that motivates employees in organisations today (especially the quality ones that knows he or she can easily attain competitive offers elsewhere). Not being recognised and valued as a

professional is probably the number #1 cause of why talented individuals leave projects, teams, businesses and organisations as a whole. A simple yet honest appreciation in the form of “Thank you” from organisations and its respective managers is required apart from a good salary to maintain the talent. In my article today, I would like to share a few approaches organisations can follow. Yet first, let’s look at what stats in general show. One of the studies that I came across lately while I was on a vacation reported that employees within an organisation that value their work, contribution, deliverables and the likes, demonstrate job satisfaction, great level of well-being and high commitment to their role. A survey by Gallup, one of the reputable organisations world-wide that provides analytics and management consulting to organisations, reported that employees who feel recognised by the organisations they work for are 4.6 times more likely to perform at their best for the respective organisations. Another study I read online reported that

79 per cent of employees that resign and leave their organisation is due to not being appreciated (and not because of wanting more salary). I in fact know employees that don’t complain about a salary increase yet on their well-being (and stress attained), treatment (and unfairness) and of course no recognition per se. So what can organisations do in order to maintain quality employees? Apart from compensating them monetarily fairly (closer to what the market pays), they should also create a culture of gratitude where employees feel valued for the kind of contribution they bring to the organisation’s table. How? By merely thanking them, be it privately or publicly, in a form of personalised messages (email, sms, instant messaging) or via team meetings, organisation’s public events, social media pages and the likes. Furthermore, the organisation should strive to celebrate milestones achieved and recognise the employees in question for the same. Salary increase are temporary form of

recognition where the impact may not last longer, yet periodic “Thank you’s” especially shared immediately after quality contribution (e.g. good work, timely and successful deliverables, etc) goes a long way to keep the employee happy, satisfied and loyal the organisation. The two letter word “Thank you” presented genuinely in whatever approach I shared in my article today can bring profound results in the form of higher productivity, more contribution and sincere loyalty from the employees towards the success of the organisation they work for. Furthermore, the positive impact would also be felt by the customers that the organisation depend on. Organisations that follow a balanced approach of offering employees with good salary along with healthy recognition will continue to remain a true “employer of choice” type of an organisation. Until we catch up again next week, stay positive, and YES, “Thank you” for being a good reader!

Darkening global outlook, central bank pivots signal more turbulence

LEIKA KIHARA, HOWARD SCHNEIDER AND BALAZS KORANYI

Growing signs of lackluster growth and risks emerging to the job market overshadowed a gathering of global policymakers at the US Federal Reserve’s annual Jackson Hole conference, highlighting the changing trajectory of monetary policy as US and European central banks eye cutting interest rates. Even as the focus of US and European central bankers shifts from high inflation to softening job markets, the Bank of Japan reaffirmed its resolve to wean its economy off decades of monetary support amid growing signs of sustained price growth. The divergence in policy direction, coupled with lingering weakness in China, the world’s second-largest economy, point to turbulent times for the global economy and financial markets. The policymakers who met at the annual economic symposium already had a taste of what may come when weak US jobs data earlier this month stoked recession fears and triggered a market rout aggravated by the BOJ’s surprise rate hike in July. So far, many analysts agree with the International Monetary Fund’s projection that the global economy will achieve modest growth in coming years as the US achieves a soft landing, Europe’s growth picks up and China emerges from the doldrums. But such rosy projections rest on shaky ground with doubts emerging over prospects for a US soft landing, euro-zone growth failing to revive and China suffering from sluggish consumption. While major central banks are veering towards rate cuts, it remains too soon to say whether the moves could be categorised as a “normalisation” of restrictive policy or first steps to prevent growth from faltering further. The uncertainty could leave global stocks and currencies

THE EURO ZONE ECONOMY BARELY GREW LAST QUARTER AS GERMANY, ITS BIGGEST ECONOMY, CONTRACTED, MANUFACTURING REMAINS IN A DEEP RECESSION AND EXPORTS HAVE FALTERED, DUE LARGELY TO WEAK DEMAND FROM CHINA



US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey, and Bank of Canada Governor Tiff Macklem take a break outside the Kansas City Fed. – Reuters

susceptible to volatile swings. “We could see other episodes of market volatility as markets are in a little bit of an uncharted territory,” as major central banks enter a monetary easing cycle after tightening policy to deal with a burst of inflation, said IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas. “Japan is on a slightly different cycle. The markets have to figure out what it all means, and markets overreact. So, we will have further volatility,” he said. **GROWTH RISKS** In his much-anticipated speech Fed Chair Jerome Powell on Friday endorsed an imminent start to interest rate cuts, declaring further job market cooling would be unwelcome. It was a significant shift from Powell’s comments as inflation surged in 2021 and 2022, and cemented the view the Fed was making a pivot from a policy that pushed its benchmark rate to a quarter-century high and held it there for more than a year. New research presented in Jackson Hole showed the US economy may be near a tipping point where a continued drop in job openings will translate into faster increases in unemployment. European Central Bank policymakers are converging on a September rate cut, partly on moderating price pressures but also because of a notable weakening of the growth outlook. The euro zone economy barely grew last quarter as Germany, its biggest economy, contracted, manufacturing remains in a deep recession and exports have faltered, due largely to weak demand from China. “The recent increase in negative growth risks in the euro area has reinforced the case for a rate cut at the next ECB monetary policy meeting in September,” ECB rate-setter Olli Rehn said. Even in Japan, recent inflation data showed a slowdown in

demand-driven price growth that could complicate the BOJ’s decisions on more rate hikes. While consumption rebounded in the second quarter, there is uncertainty on whether wages would rise enough to compensate households for the rising cost of living, analysts say. “Domestic demand is very weak,” said Sayuri Shirai, a former BOJ board member now an academic at Keio University in Tokyo. “From an economic perspective, there’s little reason for the BOJ to raise rates.” **CHINA WORRIES** Adding to the gloom is China. The world’s most populous country is verging on deflation and faces a prolonged property crisis, surging debt and weak consumer and business sentiment. Weaker-than-expected second-quarter growth forced China’s central bank to make surprise interest rate cuts last month, and heightens the chance of a downgrade in the IMF’s growth projections for the country. “China is a large player in global economy. Weaker growth in China has spillovers to the to the rest of the world,” said IMF’s Gourinchas. Further signs of slowing of US and Chinese growth would bode ill for manufacturers across the globe already feeling the strain from tepid demand. Private surveys showed factories struggled in July across the US, Europe and Asia, raising the risk of an underpowered global economic recovery. For resource-rich emerging economies like Brazil, China’s slowdown could hit metal and food exports, but help alleviate inflationary pressure through cheaper imports. Brazilian central bank Governor Roberto Campos Neto, speaking at Jackson Hole’s closing session, said: “The net effect...depends on how much the deceleration is.” — Reuters

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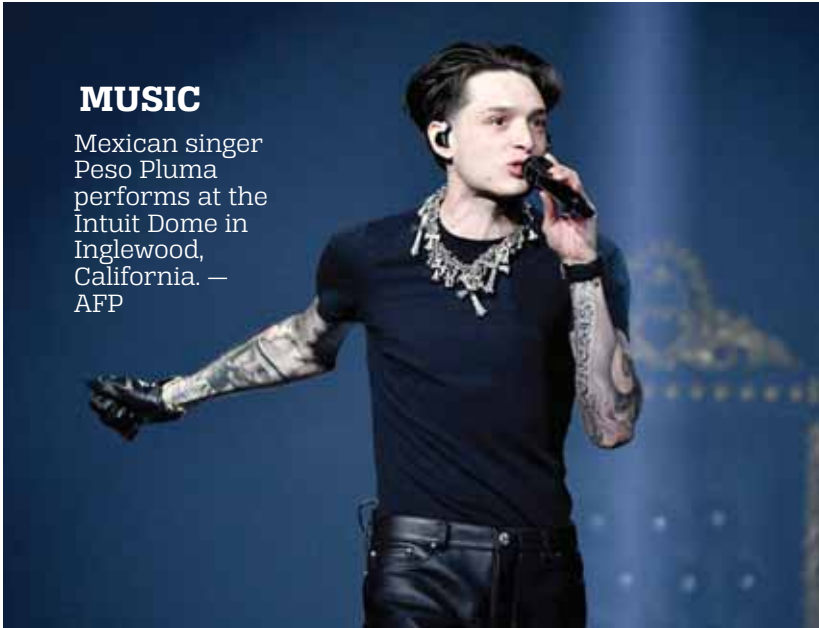
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MOVIES

US actress Cynthia Addai-Robinson poses on the red carpet upon arrival to attend the world premiere for season two of "The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power" at the BFI Southbank, in London. — AFP



MUSIC

Mexican singer Peso Pluma performs at the Intuit Dome in Inglewood, California. — AFP



CELEBRATION

A samba dancer poses for a photo during the Notting Hill Carnival, in London, Britain. — Reuters



CHANGING WORLD

Humanoid robots are seen during the World Robot Conference in Beijing. — AFP



CULTURE

A woman poses for photos as part of the tourism business as people visit the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. — AFP

art & life

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BACK-TO-SCHOOL FRENZY MADE BETTER WITH TEACHER PREPARATIONS AND SCHOOL SUPPLY PROMOS

School children in Oman are excited to return to school after a long vacation. We look at their preparations, the school's effort to welcome them back and the community involvement to make the school supplies accessible... P20



A LOOK AT THE ACADEME



DR. ZAINAB AL-AJMI

Dr Zainab al Ajmi, an erudite academic and dedicated educator, brings insightful perspectives to her columns. With a wealth of experience in teaching and research, her writings delve into the intersection of academia and societal issues, fostering intellectual discourse with clarity and depth. For feedback, you can email her at zeinbf@moe.om

Welcome Back, Teachers: Embracing Collaboration and Innovation This Year

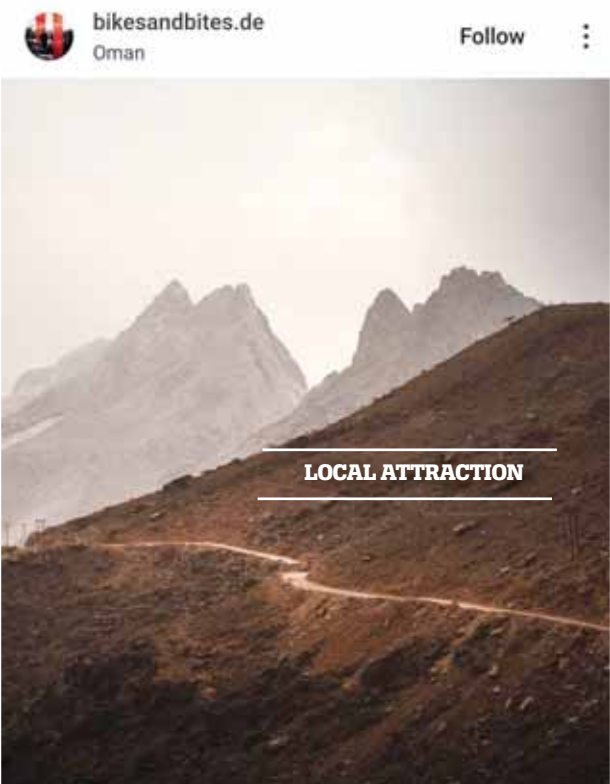
AS THE NEW ACADEMIC year dawns, all faculty and staff are warmly welcomed. With this new beginning, it is imperative to reflect on the dual pillars that can transform the educational experience: collaboration and innovation. In an ever-evolving educational landscape, teachers are not merely conveyors of knowledge, but also collaborators and innovators, crafting environments that foster student growth and success.

The significant impact made on the lives of the students by the dedication and hard work brought to the institution by each faculty and staff member fosters an environment of excellence and achievement. Confidence is placed in the belief that, through collective efforts, the high standards of the educational community will be maintained. Ideas or suggestions for the coming year are encouraged to be shared. A productive and successful school year can be ensured by supporting each other and working collaboratively. Researchers stress the importance of collaboration among teachers, students and the broader educational community is fundamental in creating a supportive and effective learning environment. Collaborative efforts can manifest in various forms, including co-teaching, team planning and professional learning communities. By engaging in collaborative practices, teachers can share insights, resources and strategies, thereby enhancing the overall educational experience for students. Referring to the view of DeJong (2022), one essential element of embracing collaboration and innovation in schools is the allocation of responsibility and professional space to teachers, allowing them to collaboratively improve education.

Professional Learning Communities: PLCs are instrumental in fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Within these communities, teachers can engage in reflective dialogue about their practices, analyse student data and implement evidence-based strategies. The collaborative nature of PLCs ensures that teachers are not working in isolation but are part of a supportive network that values shared learning and mutual growth. Co-Teaching and Team Planning: Co-teaching and team planning allow for a more integrated approach to instruction. When teachers plan and teach together, they can draw on each other's strengths, address diverse student needs more effectively and create a more cohesive curriculum. This collaborative approach not only benefits teachers, but also provides students with a richer, more varied educational experience. On the other hand, the technology-based learning environment produces innovation among students and improves their collaboration skills. In their study of innovative approach to education (Judijanto, Ili& Wardhana, 2024), results

showed that embracing technology and innovative learning methodologies facilitates a more dynamic and interactive learning environment, increasing student motivation and participation in the learning process. Additionally, study results indicated students showed improved performance in complex problem solving, critical thinking and teamwork, compared to traditional approaches. Furthermore, Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an innovative teaching approach that encourages students to engage in real-world problems and projects. This method promotes critical thinking, creativity and collaboration among students. Teachers who implement PBL create a dynamic learning environment where students take an active role in their education, leading to deeper understanding and retention of knowledge. To summaries, the intersection of collaboration and innovation can lead to powerful educational outcomes. When teachers work together and embrace innovative practices, they create a dynamic and responsive learning environment. This synergy is crucial in preparing students for the complexities of the modern world.

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HEALTH & WELLNESS

IS NAIL POLISH BAD FOR YOUR NAILS?

Q: I KEEP MY NAILS NEAR-CONSTANTLY POLISHED, BUT I WORRY THAT IT'S DAMAGING THEM. DO NAILS NEED BREAKS OR TIME TO "BREATHE"?

The idea that your nails need to "breathe" is a myth, said Dr Chris Adigun, a dermatologist in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, who specialises in nail disorders. "Your nails don't have lungs," she said.

However, there are some signs that your nail polish, or the way you remove it, may be causing changes to your nails that should prompt a break, experts said. And it's important to inspect your nails between polishes so you can spot any potentially worrisome shifts that might be occurring underneath the colour, Adigun said. Here's what to watch for.

IS NAIL POLISH BAD FOR YOUR NAILS?

In short, no, said Dr Adam Rubin, a dermatologist and nail specialist at NYU Langone Health.

There's nothing in traditional nail polish that will directly harm your fingernails or toenails, he said. But, he added, there are some cosmetic issues that may crop up if you keep your nails painted for too long, such as for several weeks at a time.

Some nail polishes — dark or red colours, in particular — can stain the surface of your nails, Rubin said. This isn't harmful, but you might not like the way it looks, he added.

Leaving polish on for too long may also dry out your nails, causing chalky, white patches to form on their surface, said Dr Anisha Patel, a dermatologist at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

Those patches, called keratin granulations, are benign and more commonly found on toenails, which are typically painted for longer than fingernails, Adigun said. They can sometimes be mistaken for a nail fungus called white superficial onychomycosis.

If you notice either staining or white patches after removing nail polish, there's no harm in disguising the discolourations by painting over them, Rubin said. If you do that, though, know that you risk making the stains or white patches worse.

To completely banish these issues, let your nails regrow fully, unpainted. This can take about six months for fingernails and 12 to 18 months for toenails, Adigun said.

To prevent staining or white patches from forming in the first place, it can help to apply a clear base coat before you paint your nails. Massaging moisturiser onto your nails and cuticles between polishes might also help keep keratin granulations from forming, Rubin said.

If you remove your polish and your nails look dry, moisturise them daily, whether they're polished or not, Patel said. You can use petroleum jelly, hand cream, nail oil or body lotion, Rubin suggested.

WHAT ACTUALLY WILL DAMAGE YOUR NAILS?

The way you remove nail polish, on the other hand, can damage nails, Rubin said. Scraping or picking at nail polish can strip the top layers of the nail and possibly lead to thinning. And acetone-containing nail polish removers can dehydrate and damage nails, he said, so it's best to use nail polish removers that are acetone-free.

This is one reason dermatologists typically urge caution with gel manicures. The removal process usually involves soaking your nails in acetone, which can lead to dryness and brittleness, Adigun said. The gel polish itself can also cause allergic reactions (like a rash or, more rarely, hives) and damage nails. And exposure to ultraviolet light during the application process can increase your risk for skin cancer and premature skin aging, according to the American Academy of Dermatology.

If you do get gel manicures, give your unpainted nails a break of at least a week or two between manicures to let nails recover, Adigun said.

WHEN SHOULD YOU WORRY?

Every time you remove nail polish, examine your nails for potentially worrisome changes, Adigun said.

Dark streaks, splitting, lifting from the nail bed and pain are all potential signs of skin cancer, so if you notice those, visit a dermatologist, Patel said.

Thickened, crumbly, yellow or misshapen nails can signal a fungal infection, Rubin said. And redness or swelling around your nails could indicate an injury or bacterial infection, according to the AAD. Tiny dents or pits in your nails; crumbling; nails separating from your skin; or white, brown or yellow discolouration could be signs of nail psoriasis.

When patients come in with nail problems, they often wonder if it's because of their nail polish, Rubin said. But that's usually not the case. They just may not have noticed the changes forming over time, "because the nail polish was covering their nails," he said.

Dermatologists recommend annual skin cancer checks, and that includes examining the nails, Patel said. "We ask our patients to come in without polish on at least once a year so that we can see their nails," she said. — **NYT**

FILM

'Blink Twice' Review: Nightmare Island

FOR A FILM like "Blink Twice" to land its horror-stained commentary on an assault and cancel culture as well as class and race, it would need a director capable of pushing beyond basic social politics. In her debut feature, Zoë Kravitz is not that director.

Rather her film, for which she also wrote the screenplay with E T Feigenbaum, exists more as a concept than a complete idea. The same could be said of the film's protagonist, Frida (Naomi Ackie). She pines for the lifestyle of the disgraced tech mogul Slater King, played by Channing Tatum, Kravitz's partner.

Frida and her roommate, Jess (Alia Shawkat), work as servers at a gala — which allows the two women to switch into eye-catching dresses to mingle with the rich. When Frida snaps her heel, it's Slater who helps her up, leading to a night of reverie culminating in an invite to his private island, where he has retreated after issuing a public apology for actions the film leaves relatively unknown.

For the tech mogul's entourage, Kravitz has assembled an impressive cast: Christian Slater, Simon Rex, Haley Joel Osment and Levon Hawke. These men are meant to elicit dread, with an appetising drink in hand. But only Slater King's therapist, Rich (Kyle MacLachlan), knows how to play pleasantness as threatening.

Kravitz crafts an uneasy atmosphere. Days and nights blend into one for an endless summer filled with perfume and parties, producing a double-edged pace that has snap even while it lulls viewers into malaise. Cinematographer Adam Newport-Berra uses shadows to carve Ackie's face, foretelling the angst she'll feel when friends begin to disappear, gaps in her memory occur and an exoticised Indigenous woman calls her by another name.

The same lighting is used for Tatum, who looks more haggard than you'd expect. In a relatively underwritten role, he casts a surprising darkness over his crowd-pleasing romantic persona to a frightening effect. Women like Frida and Sarah (Adria Arjona) compete for Slater's affections before finding solidarity in each other, a theme that is half-baked in the writing of Slater's aloof sister Stacy (Geena Davis).

"Blink Twice" is haunted by lost opportunities. As a woman and survivor, Frida feels ignored. But Kravitz leaves the erasure that Black women feel untapped. She renders Frida similarly invisible, using a twist to erase any back story about her. What does it say that Frida looks for self-worth in the wealth of a white man? Ideas about cancel culture are similarly underbaked, reiterating that the public has a short attention span and eats up canned apologies. That collective forgetting is unevenly paralleled with the memory loss that occurs in instances of the assault.

After the film's inevitable blood-soaked scream for revenge, it poses the idea that integrating into the same conniving capitalistic system that rendered its characters victims in the first place offers liberation for Frida. The film projects Black wealth as freedom and personhood, a cocoon that protects from persecution and is the best revenge. Like "Blink Twice," it's an idea that requires a double take. — **NYT**

Back-to-school frenzy made better with teacher preparations and school supply promos

BY KHALID AL BALUSHI
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After a three-month vacation, children have journeyed between their grandparents' homes, filled with memories of gatherings with aunts, uncles, and cousins. Others have travelled far, staying in hotels and jetsetting between airports, capturing the joy of visiting parks and resorts in Oman, the Gulf countries, and beyond. As the new school year approaches, the children are eager to shop for school supplies, making early trips to secure their favourites.

The anticipation of returning to school fills the children with excitement. They long to reunite with their classmates, teachers, and principals, who guided them through the previous school year.

As the new term draws near, the children delight in selecting their outfits, carefully choosing the perfect shoes, and eagerly picking out backpacks adorned with their favourite cartoon characters. They are just as enthusiastic about choosing notebooks with unique wooden or cardboard covers, gel pens, highlighters, and coloured pencils for their drawings.

This back-to-school season is a time of pride and joy as the children select personal items that will accompany them throughout the year. It's an opportunity for them to express their personalities, fostering a sense of independence and self-confidence.

Hayyan Al Musalmy, a Grade Three student, shared his excitement: "As we prepare for the new school year, I am so happy to go to school. But more importantly, I am very excited about my new school supplies. Back-to-school shopping brings me joy because it's the time to show my friends my new school items. I cannot wait to be with my teachers and friends after such a long time."

"I am ready with my school bag and eager to start my classes. What makes me happiest is the brand-new school I will be attending. I hope to meet my old friends there too," he added.

Children's excitement during this time positively impacts their expectations for school, allowing them to approach the new academic year with hope and optimism. Each carefully chosen item enhances their psychological and mental preparedness for the challenges ahead.

Salim Al Harrasi, a seventh-grade student, expressed his enthusiasm: "It feels great and exciting to go back to school after a long vacation. I carefully and enthusiastically selected my school items."

Preparing for school goes beyond shopping; it marks the beginning of a new journey filled with learning and discovery. The process of choosing supplies contributes to creating an engaging and enjoyable school experience, with each item selected with personal conviction. These moments offer an opportunity to create lasting and vibrant memories.

Al Qassim Al Busafi, also in Grade

offers encompass a wide range of items, from notebooks and pens to uniforms, backpacks, and electronic devices such as calculators, tablets, and laptops.

Retail centres like Nesto and Lulu also have their own version of discounted school items, dedicating vital spaces to showcase what is on offer for the kids to select. Beautiful stalls are also set up near the entrance or in places with easy access to maximise their impact on parents who come to purchase school items.

For families with multiple children, these discounts provide a much-needed financial reprieve, allowing them to purchase high-quality supplies without

READY FOR THE STUDENTS

As the new school year approaches in Oman, schools across the country are buzzing with activity, preparing to welcome students back into classrooms. Teachers and principals are at the forefront of these efforts, ensuring that every detail is in place for a successful year of learning.

Classrooms were meticulously prepared, with teachers arranging desks, organizing supplies, and creating vibrant displays that would engage and inspire students. The focus is not just on aesthetics but also on creating an environ-



Al Qassim al Busafi



Salim al Harrasi



Hayyan al Musalmy

Seven, captured the essence of this excitement: "It's an indescribable feeling! I am extremely happy and excited to meet my teachers and friends. I'm eager to study, complete my homework, and play with my classmates. I've bought all my school supplies, including my backpack, notebooks, pens, and more. I even wrote in my notebook about my plans for this important year since I'm a new student at the school. I must prove myself and show that I am an outstanding student."

BACK TO SCHOOL PROMOTIONS

As the new school year approaches, shopping malls across Oman are unveiling substantial back-to-school promotions, offering significant discounts to ease the financial burden on parents. Major shopping destinations, including City Centre Muscat, City Centre Qurum, and My City Centre Sur, are leading the way with discounts ranging from 25% to 75% on essential school supplies. These

straining their budgets. The promotions cover all the essentials, including writing tools, notebooks, art supplies, organizational tools, and health items like sanitizers and water bottles.

In addition to shopping, City Centre malls are enhancing the back-to-school experience with a variety of engaging activities for children. These include competitions, interactive knowledge checks, and entertainment zones designed to make the transition back to school enjoyable. The combination of significant savings, comprehensive school supply options, and family-friendly events positions these malls as premier destinations for back-to-school preparations.

This concerted effort by Oman's shopping centres not only supports parents in managing the costs of education but also provides children with a fun and engaging lead-up to the new school year, making the return to school both affordable and enjoyable.

ment conducive to learning, where students feel comfortable and motivated. School hallways and common areas are being decorated with educational posters, student work, and motivational quotes, reflecting the school's commitment to fostering a positive learning atmosphere.

Teachers were also busy planning a diverse range of learning activities that cater to different learning styles and abilities. From interactive lessons to hands-on projects, the goal is to make learning both enjoyable and effective. Meanwhile, principals are coordinating with staff to ensure that all logistical aspects, such as timetables and resource allocation, are seamlessly managed.

The dedication of Oman's educators is a testament to the country's commitment to excellence in education. Their tireless efforts not only enhance the learning experience but also help maintain Oman's reputation as a leader in the region's education sector.