

OMAN  DAILY

Observer



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SALAH SCORES AS LIVERPOOL BEGIN SLOT ERA WITH WIN AT IPSWICH

RAM empowers Omani youth

Aiming to develop and refine the leadership skills of young Omani leaders from various sectors, the Royal Academy of Management recently launched the 'Future Leaders Programme' in collaboration with Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), GLOBIS Europe, Matterz Business Group, and KAOSPILOT. The initiative was founded on His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's vision to provide the nation's current and future leaders with the capabilities and skills to make impactful and meaningful contributions within their organisation and the nation, as outlined in Oman Vision 2040. **DETAILS ON P5**

SUNRISE - 05:44 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:25 AM
DHUHR - 12:16 PM
ASR - 03:42 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:43 PM
ISHA - 07:57 PM



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OMANTEL UNVEILS NEW DATA CENTRE IN DHOFAR GOVERNORATE

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OMANI DOCTOR COMPETES IN HISTORIC MINI COOPER CHAMPIONSHIP

SALALAH CAUTION WHILE VISITING DHOFAR

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PORT HANDLES 1.7M CONTAINERS

Port of Salalah has reported impressive figures for the first half of 2024, with the handling of approximately 1.7 million standard containers and 11.6 million tonnes of general cargo. This robust performance has resulted in a net profit of RO 1.570 million, reflecting the port's growing efficiency and operational success. To support its expanding capabilities, the port has recently added 10 new cranes to its fleet, raising the total number of cranes to 27. Eng Mohammed al Maashani, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Salalah Port, provided insights into the port's current and future strategies. According to Al Maashani, the port is already linked with many of the world's largest shipping lines and is actively working to attract additional global shipping partners. **DETAILS ON P15**

IZMIR FOREST FIRE RAGES IN TURKISH CITY

Firefighters were battling a strong forest fire in Turkiye's Aegean city of Izmir for a third day on Saturday, with hundreds more people evacuated overnight. In the northern suburb of Ornek-koy, journalists saw the charred remains of several buildings and vehicles in an industrial zone while grey smoke billowed into the sky. "We don't know what to do. Our workplace is located in the middle of the fire. We have lost our livelihood," said 48-year-old Hanife Erbil, who earns a living collecting paper and plastic waste. The pine trees that once crowned the surrounding hills were also burned.

Oman supports Palestinians' right to self-determination

ASSIGNED BY HM, SAYYID ASAAD PARTICIPATES IN VOICE OF GLOBAL SOUTH SUMMIT

MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, on Saturday participated in the 3rd Voice of Global South Summit (VOGSS).

The virtual summit was held under the chairmanship of Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, with the participation of heads of states and governments.

HH Sayyid Asaad delivered a speech in which he conveyed the greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Indian government and people for hosting the summit, themed "An Empowered Global South for a Sustainable Future". He expressed special greetings to the Republic of India on the occasion of its Independence Day. During the speech, HH Sayyid Asaad said, "Cooperation has now become more urgent than ever, with the world facing serious challenges that affect its security and stability. Recent years saw political and economic turmoil and armed conflicts that escalated the existing regional tensions. We believe that sustainable solutions to these challenges can only come through dialogue, cooperation and joint action to consolidate the pillars of international peace and security."

In the speech, HH Sayyid



HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said attending the 3rd Voice of Global South Summit virtually on Saturday.

Asaad laid emphasis on the Palestinian cause, which he described as "one of the region's most serious issues that requires a just stance by this Group and the rest of the international community."

"It should be a stance in support for the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and their right to establish their independent state on their land, and a stance for the realisation of peace and stability in the (Middle East) region that has suffered the impacts of this unresolved issue, notably under the Israeli persistent, illegal occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands since 1967, in addition to Israel's violation of all relevant UN resolutions, its

disregard for international law and standards of international human rights and its violation of international humanitarian law."

Speaking about the global sustainable development goals (SDGs) and other issues, HH Sayyid Asaad said that, through Oman Vision 2040, the Sultanate of Oman has drawn out a roadmap to achieve a diversified and sustainable economy based on innovation and knowledge. "We believe that the future requires us not only to develop the economy, but also to protect the environment and ensure the welfare of the whole society. This is envisaged through investment in sectors of blue economy, renewable energy and modern technology," he added. **TURN TO P5**

No cases of monkeypox recorded, says ministry

MUSCAT: In light of the growing global concern about the spread of monkeypox (mpox), the Ministry of Health has said that measures are taken by the Sultanate of Oman to monitor the health situation and deal with any future developments. This statement came after the World Health Organization declared monkeypox a public health emergency of international concern.

The ministry has confirmed that no cases of monkeypox have been recorded in the Sultanate of Oman so far, calling on citizens and residents to follow the news from official sources.

The ministry confirmed that Oman is taking all necessary measures to ensure that this virus does not spread on its territory.

In this context, the ministry said that the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and the Emergency Management Centre are closely monitoring all developments related to monkeypox, in cooperation with the WHO and international and regional organisations concerned with monitoring infectious diseases. This

coordination includes exchanging information and immediate updates on any changes in the health situation at the international level.

The ministry said that laboratory tests necessary to diagnose monkeypox are available in Oman, which reflects the health system's readiness to deal with any potential cases. The ministry confirmed that all tests are carried out in accordance with the highest international standards to ensure accuracy in diagnosis and speed in response.

Regarding the local epidemiological situation, the ministry said that health teams continue to monitor the epidemiological situation in the country, and take all necessary preventive measures to maintain the safety of citizens and residents.

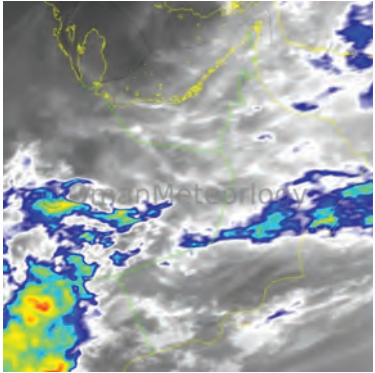
This statement comes within the framework of the ministry's efforts to enhance trust among citizens and residents and ensure that they obtain the correct information in a timely manner, which enhances the community's ability to face health challenges with awareness and responsibility.

Low pressure to bring rains from Monday

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH @lakshmioman

The Oman Met Office announced on Saturday that a low-pressure system is set to impact most parts of the Sultanate of Oman, bringing rains of varying intensity from Monday to Wednesday.

The latest updates and analysis from the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre indicate that Oman will experience the effects of



a low-pressure system from the Arabian Sea starting from Monday through Wednesday.

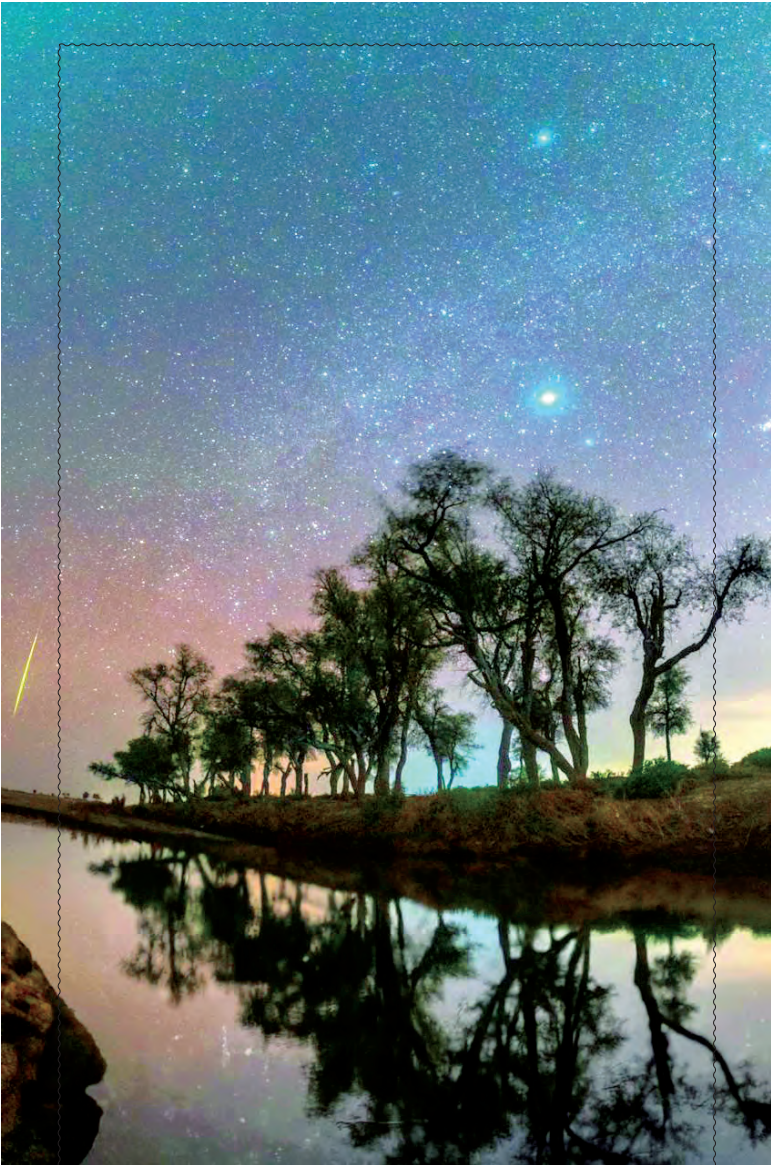
This system is expected to cause cloud advection over much of the country, with chances of isolated rain and occasional thunderstorms.

Cloud advection is expected across most governorates of Oman, bringing isolated rains of varying intensity. Thunderstorms are possible in the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Wusta, Dhofar, parts of Muscat, Al Batinah South and Al

Dhahirah, as well as Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas. The governorates expected to be most affected include Dhofar, Al Wusta, Al Dhahirah, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Dakhiliyah.

The expected impact could see a rainfall ranging between 15-45 mm, which may lead to flow of some wadis.

Fresh downdraft winds is expected to have a speed ranging between 15-35 knots (28-65 km/h).



A DELIGHT FOR EYES!

The pitch-dark night in Wadi Halfain in the Wilayat of Adam offers a great opportunity for photographers to get spectacular pictures of the Perseid meteor showers presently active in the skies of the Sultanate of Oman until August 24. PHOTO BY YAHYA AL KINDI



DUQM: PORTRAIT OF A LIVELY CITY IN AL WUSTA

DUQM: Located in Al Wusta Governorate on the west coast of the Sultanate of Oman along the Arabian Sea, Duqm awakens each morning to the rhythm of a new project, adding to the more than 2,300 projects established in the special economic zone since its inception in late 2011.

The city boasts encouraging relative and competitive investment advantages.

Its strategic location on the Arabian Sea, open to the Indian Ocean and near international shipping lanes, gives it significant economic importance on the global trade route. It is poised to become a logistics gateway for the region and a commercial hub linking the East and West.

The construction of the modern city of Duqm began with the launch of the Port of Duqm and Asyad Dry Dock in 2007. Over the years, Duqm has attracted local and international attention as a modern project aimed at drawing global investments and expertise, fostering numerous economic ventures and creating more job opportunities for Omani youth.

INVESTMENT PROJECTS
The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) spans 2,000 square kilometres and accommodates a range of investments. These include industrial, commercial and tourism ventures, as well as transportation, real estate development and logistics projects.

Since its establishment, Duqm has welcomed investors, and it officially opened the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company LLC (OQ8) under the auspices of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The Refinery is the Sultanate of Oman's third and largest

oil refinery, with a production capacity of 230,000 barrels per day. Duqm also hosts the largest multipurpose commercial and industrial port, capable of handling the latest generation of container ships.

Duqm also hosts the largest fishing port in Oman, designed to support seafood and related industries. An industrial zone for seafood and food processing has been established to enhance the economic value of Duqm's fishery resources. Additionally, Duqm is known for its dry dock for ship repair, maintenance and construction, the Ras Markaz crude oil storage terminal, the Karwa Bus Factory specialising in buses and armoured vehicles, and the integrated power and water plant at Duqm, which supplies power and industrial water to the Duqm Refinery and the oil storage facility.

In the previous year, during the Duqm Economic Forum, several agreements were signed to position Duqm as a major player in renewable energy, green hydrogen and green ammonia. These agreements pave the way for Duqm to lead the green hydrogen industry in the Sultanate of Oman.

In addition, there are several notable hotel establishments, including the 4-star Crowne Plaza Duqm, invested in by the Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN) under the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), and the 4-star Park Inn by Radisson Hotel and Residence Duqm, funded by the private sector.

URBAN LANDMARKS
On both sides of Sultan Said bin Taimur Road in the heart of Duqm, a row of modern commercial buildings line up, competing to attract customers from locals, residents, and tourists visiting this vibrant city. This road reflects the



philosophy of modern Duqm. It is a wide avenue with three lanes in each direction, flanked by green spaces and service roads, embodying the city's vision of being accessible to everyone. The road has traffic safety signs, energy-efficient smart lighting systems and traffic signals to manage flow. Any tourist or investor arriving in Duqm will notice the city's transformation, via the Muscat-Sinaw-Duqm Road or the Haima-Al Jazir-Duqm Road. The first route leads to the Duqm Refinery, while the second route brings visitors to Duqm Airport, which serves as a vital air transport link with daily flights connecting Duqm to Muscat International Airport and several international

destinations.

While Sultan Said bin Taimur Road facilitates commercial traffic along its length and routes vehicles towards the Duqm Refinery, the industrial quay, the Chinese Industrial City and the bus manufacturing plant, Sultan Qaboos Road provides a smooth connection between the airport and Port of Duqm.

Its primary purpose is not just to ensure seamless transport for those arriving or departing through the airport, but also to enhance the logistical link between Port of Duqm and the air cargo centre at the airport.

The buildings constructed along Sultan Qaboos Road reflect the modern architectural

style being established in Duqm. Notable examples include the SEZAD building, the Hassad building, which was funded by government investments, and the building of Biladi Trading and Building materials, funded by foreign private sector investments.

CITY FOR EVERYONE

Over the years, Duqm has met the expectations and needs of its residents and visitors, evolving into a city that accommodates various nationalities. The local community has warmly embraced this diversity and actively participates in shaping the future of the new city.

The education sector is a key component in fostering stability and work-life balance in the city. Asoud Global School (AGS) welcomes both Omani and international students into a diverse school community. Additionally, Duqm hosts several public and private schools offering high-quality education.

The opening of the first university college in Duqm is anticipated for the 2024/2025 academic year, which will further enhance the educational sector, both at the school and higher education levels.

In the healthcare sector, Duqm Hospital, operated by the Ministry of Health (MoH), works alongside several private healthcare facilities established in recent years to enhance health services in Duqm.

By the end of June, the number of private hospitals and health centres in Duqm had reached seven, with six pharmacies also operating in the area.

In the sports and recreational sector, the Oman Bowling Centre is a popular choice for both youth and families, offering a variety of facilities. It features a bowling hall with

12 lanes, high-quality score displays and precise result calculations. The centre meets high standards, allowing it to host both local and international competitions. Recently, the centre expanded by adding three new buildings, which include padel tennis courts and a fitness centre.

In the parks and recreational sector, Duqm Beach Camping and Children Park are standout destinations.

A new public park is also under construction in the new Saay District, covering 13,000 square metres. This park will feature playgrounds, a walking path and green spaces. The Saay District is part of the comprehensive development plan for the SEZAD and is designed to be a model neighbourhood aligned with environmental sustainability plans.

In the tourism sector, the Rocks Garden, beaches and Arabian Oryx Sanctuary are among the top destinations for tourists and residents. Duqm's unique environment offers a distinctive variety, making it a key tourist spot on the Arabian Sea, open to the Indian Ocean.

PREFERRED CITY FOR LIVING, WORKING AND SETTLING

The numerous projects underway in Duqm, in infrastructure or various investment sectors, underscore the city's economic prosperity. With over 2,300 economic activities operating in the SEZAD, diverse options in education and healthcare, and rich tourism assets, Duqm meets the expectations of its residents as a preferred city for living, working, and residing. The city continuously evolves to offer its inhabitants greater variety, richness and excitement each day.





ROP urges caution while visiting khareef season

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has advised people visiting Dhofar Governorate to exercise caution, adhere to the safety regulations and instructions provided, and to avoid approaching rocky cliffs or mountain edges overlooking the sea and unsafe places, not to risk swimming and to supervise children.

This is in the wake of a couple of complaints of missing people in the sea while swimming at unauthorised places, falling from rocky areas or having capsized after boating near prohibited areas, according to the ROP.

“The Coast Guard Police has received several reports of people missing at sea due to boat capsizing or falling from a rocky cliff. We are committed to securing beaches by deploying marine rescue team patrols on

beaches that witness a large turnout of visitors to places such as Al Dahariz, Al Hafa, Al Mughsail and Awqad beaches to ensure a rapid response to any reports or incidents that may occur near these sites,” said Lieutenant Mohammed bin Ali al Amri, chief of the Coast Guard Police.

“We also urge fishermen to be forewarned and take all safety measures and not to risk sailing in difficult conditions, with the need to continuously follow up on weather updates issued by the competent authorities,” he added.

Speaking to the media, he said that the ROP carried out its tasks in coordination with the relevant authorities according to a comprehensive plan to secure all tourist sites and organises traffic to reduce congestion and facilitate the movement of visitors, in addition to the deployment of security patrols around the clock to quickly deal



with any emergency. “We have strengthened communication with the public through various channels in

order to provide support and assistance and answer inquiries, in addition to organising awareness initiatives aimed

at spreading awareness of public and traffic safety,” said Lieutenant Colonel Suleiman bin Said al Jabri.

“We have been working tirelessly in cooperation with the relevant authorities to provide all means and capabilities to ensure a khareef season free of accidents and obstacles based on a comprehensive plan that includes all locations in Dhofar. Our aims are to ensure the safety of visitors, maintain public order and establish security throughout the governorate,” he added. In view of the heavy fog that sometimes makes it dangerous to drive due to lack of horizontal visibility, the ROP further advises all vehicle drivers to adhere to traffic safety standards while driving in order to facilitate ease of traffic movement.

“We remind all vehicle drivers of the need to turn on the directed lights, leave a safe distance, drive at low speeds

and not use mobile phones while driving, while ensuring that children do not get out of the vehicle windows while it is moving to ensure their safety.”

When any traffic accident occurs, the centre distributes a quick response code (QR code) to enable visitors to follow the alternate route until work is completed at the accident site.

With thousands of visitors flocking to Dhofar Governorate from various governorates and neighbouring countries, the organisational and security role of the ROP is highlighted in contributing to the success of the khareef season, which confirms its commitment to ensuring the safety of the public and the comfort of visitors.

He further said that the department has dealt with many reports related to vehicle stunt shows on green areas, reckless driving, exceeding the legal speed limit, and hiding vehicle plates.

Dhofar Art Expo celebrates global exchange

SALALAH: The Dhofar International Contemporary Art Exhibition, organised by the Omani Women’s Association in Salalah in collaboration with Dhofar Municipality, concluded on Friday at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

The five-day exhibition showcased over 300 artworks from 200 artists, both from within Oman and internationally, featuring a diverse range of fine arts, sculpture and photography.

In his closing remarks, Amer bin Ahmed al Amri, Assistant Supervisor General of the Exhibition, emphasised the significance of the event in fostering cultural, intellectual and artistic growth. He highlighted the exhibition’s wide participation from various countries, underscoring its role in promoting the khareef season through the exchange of experiences and cultures.

The exhibition was well received by citizens, residents and visitors alike, with its diverse collection of artistic paintings and photography attracting considerable attention. Following the remarks, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Shashai, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Information in Dhofar Governorate and the sponsor of the ceremony, honoured the sponsors, supporters and participants for their contributions to the event’s success. — ONA



Omani Traditional Games Season kicks off

SALALAH: The Omani Traditional Games Season kicked off at Al Dahariz Beach in Salalah, on Saturday and will run until August 19.

The event is organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth in cooperation with Dhofar Municipality as part of the Khareef Dhofar Season 2024. It includes a host of activities such as the Dhofar Governorate Clubs Championship for Omani Traditional Games with the participation of the governorate’s clubs.

The accompanying activities comprises virtual reality technology for children to introduce them to traditional Omani games, an exhibition that showcases a group of

expressive pictures related to Omani traditional games as well as an interactive theater also featuring traditional games.

The event displays a number of traditional games in cooperation with the Omani Women’s Associations in Dhofar Governorate and hosts a number of Omani folk art troupes.

The activities of the Omani Traditional Games Season in Salalah aim to introduce visitors to the cultural, civilisational and sporting heritage of the Sultanate of Oman with special focus on the traditional Omani games and sports. It includes activities that contribute to preserving traditional games and sports and promoting sporting events. — ONA

Dhofar beauty, milking festival begins

SALALAH: The Dhofar Beauty and Milking Festival commenced on Thursday in Salalah, organised by the Salalah Wali Office in collaboration with the Oman Camel Racing Federation and Dhofar Municipality. The festival, which runs until September 30, features the participation of 230 camels

and will span three days. The festival is dedicated to preserving Oman’s national identity, heritage and culture. It aims to ensure the sustainability of traditional practices and encourages the Omani community to invest in heritage preservation, recognising its historical and cultural

significance for camel owners across the Sultanate of Oman. A highlight of the festival is the beauty contest, set to begin on August 18, which will take place over three rounds, featuring Omani camels from the plains, mountains, and the highly anticipated challenge category. — ONA



OMAN BROADBAND MARATHON LAUNCHED

SALALAH: The Oman Broadband Marathon for Governorates, in its second edition for 2024, was held on Friday. Organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth in collaboration with the Oman Athletics Federation, the event attracted a diverse range of competitors from within Oman and beyond.

The marathon featured three race categories to accommodate various age groups and skill levels: a 2-kilometre race for children aged 7-12 years, a 5-kilometre race for participants aged 13 and above, and a 10-kilometre race for those aged 18 and above.



Samira bint Shaneen Al Shakili, Director of the Sports Activities Department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, emphasised that the event aims to engage as many sports enthusiasts, athletes, and runners as possible. By involving all segments of society, the marathon seeks to promote health awareness and highlight the tourism appeal of the region.

The carefully structured race categories ensure that participants of all ages and abilities, from professional runners to beginner amateurs, have an opportunity to compete and enjoy the event.

— ONA



RECALL DATE: 18.08.2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
MAN TGS Trucks	Jan 01, 2020 – Aug 22, 2022	65

*Not all vehicles in this production period, are affected.
#Subject to revision, based on the information received from the manufacturer, from time to time.

Recall consequence Continuous product monitoring by MAN has shown that the hexagonal locking nut of the pull hitch on the drop arm may disintegrate under certain conditions if it is not sufficiently tightened. In this case, it is no longer certain to steer or control the vehicle, leading to the risk of an accident and thus posing a risk to the lives of users. way others, to avoid this risk and to ensure that a uniform quality standard for MAN products is maintained. Listed trucks should be inspected for the condition of the affected components and carry out conversion work by replacing the affected parts if necessary. Thus ensuring the safe operation of the truck

Recall action As per Technical information ref no T18272TR advised by MAN

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



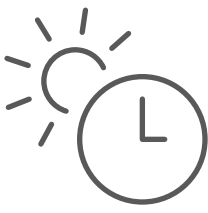
Contact details: Toll free - 80073000
Working days: Sunday – Thursday
Working Time: 8:00 – 17:00 hrs.



خط المستهلك
Consumer line
80079009
80077997



OUTDOOR
ACTIVITY
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SKILLS, SOCIAL
INTERACTIONS



LIMIT
OUTDOOR
ACTIVITIES
DURING PEAK
SUN HOURS



SUMMER
SAFETY
TIPS



STAYING
HYDRATED
IS CRUCIAL



ADULT
SUPERVISION
IS ESSENTIAL



CLOTHES
MUST BE
LIGHTWEIGHT,
LIGHT-
COLOURED

BALANCING SUMMER FUN AND SAFETY



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

As children make the most of the final days of their summer vacation, parents face the perennial dilemma: screen time or outdoor play.

According to Unicef Oman, outdoor activities offer significant benefits, contributing to children's overall health and happiness.

They note, "Children who play outside are often healthier than those who don't. The differences in happiness between children who rarely play outside and those who do so daily are large. Spread the word!"

Fresh air and sunlight provided unlimited health benefits ranging from vitamin D, motor skills, creativity, and social relations as well as connection with nature.

However, the summer temperatures can have an impact on children who are more vulnerable to the summer heat than adults.

Summer also means afternoon rains in and around the areas of Al Hajar Mountains of Oman.

Rainwater has always been an attraction for children and it is crucial to have adult supervision during this time water puddles and

flash floods are a norm.

Summer safety in arid areas is crucial due to the high temperatures, low humidity, and potential for dehydration and heat-related illnesses.

One of the key tips and guidelines for staying safe during hot summer months is to stay hydrated.

"Drink plenty of water," say the experts pointing out that it is important to consume water regularly, even if you don't feel thirsty. Aim for at least 8-10 glasses per day.

"Water is essential among children just like food. Drinking water keeps them hydrated, by maintaining electrolyte balance, prevents and improves constipation, maintains urine output, and prevents urinary tract infections," explains Sumaira Fathima, Clinical Dietitian, Apollo Hospitals Muscat.

She added that young children

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Drinking water keeps children hydrated, maintains electrolyte balance, prevents and relieves constipation, supports healthy urine output, and reduces the risk of urinary tract infections

SUMAIRA
FATHIMA
Clinical Dietitian

are active and tend to play irrespective of the season and lose water through sweat.

Hence water intake should be encouraged and given priority.

Avoiding caffeine is another point that is stressed and this is because products with caffeine can lead to dehydration. The best option is electrolyte-replenishing drinks especially if engaging in strenuous activities.

"Caffeine stimulates the nervous system and causes insomnia, and increased heart rate are among its most common effects. It interferes with a child's development, especially emotional and social health. It has zero nutritional value but many adverse health issues. Caffeine should be strictly avoided among younger children. Water is essential for growing children and we must discourage them from drinking caffeine-related drinks," she points out.

Dressing appropriately is also a significant part of being in summer.

Wearing lightweight clothing using light-coloured, loose-fitting clothes made of breathable fabrics like cotton or linen can make a tremendous difference to children.

Activities can be planned wisely by avoiding peak sun hours by

limiting outdoor activities during peak heat hours usually between 11 am and 4 pm.

And when outdoors let them seek shade by utilising trees or other forms of shade.

According to health experts, it is important to recognise heat-related illnesses and know the signs. Some of the symptoms such as dizziness, headache, excessive sweating, weakness or confusion may indicate heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

In such situations where someone is experiencing heat-related symptoms, it is important to move them to a cooler place, provide water, and seek medical attention if necessary. This is one of the reasons why they say it is important to stay indoors during the hottest parts of the day as well as utilise fans or cool showers to help regulate body temperature.

Laila al Harthy pointed out that sometimes children play near the streets and some children ride electric bikes and are so little that someone in a wheel would have missed them.

Experts also advise keeping an eye on children, the elderly, and those with health conditions which may be more susceptible to heat-related illnesses while travelling by road.

Understanding the landscape is essential to knowing potential hazards such as steep terrain or plants, especially when one is exploring new places.

But with all safety measures in place, outdoors is indeed the ideal playground for children as outdoor play connects them with nature and has been proven to benefit their mental health.



OMAN SUPPORTS PALESTINIANS' RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION



FROM PAGE 1

ZERO CARBON

HH Sayyid Asaad pointed out that Oman has set ambitious goals to achieve zero carbon neutrality by 2050 through integrated strategies for renewable energy and by improving energy efficiency. He affirmed that Oman believes that realisation of the SDGs requires collective the cooperation of all at the regional and international levels in a manner that serves national strategies in building prosperous and sustainable economies in the Global South.

HH Sayyid Asaad also affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's support for the principles of this summit. He voiced Oman's support for constructive action among friends in the Global South to achieve the common objectives and the aspirations of their peoples for development, prosperity, security and stability.

The summit dealt with a wide range of issues of significance to developing countries, most notably climate change. It underscored the need to address the disproportionate impact of climate change on developing countries and explore solutions to

achieve sustainable development by promoting an inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic growth, with special emphasis on achieving the global SDGs.

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

The summit also elaborated on global governance aimed to achieve a fair governance structure that gives greater voice and representation to developing countries. It stressed the need for better international cooperation through diplomatic relations and cooperation between countries of the Global South, to address common challenges like health crises, economic instability and food security.

The virtual summit was attended by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, Shaikh Khalifa bin Hamad al Badi, Secretary-General of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Special Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, and Ahmed bin Hashel al Maskari, Head of the GCC and Regional Neighbourhood Department at the Foreign Ministry. – **ONA**

RAM empowers 50 Omani youths through 'Future Leaders Programme'

MUSCAT: Aiming to develop and refine the leadership skills of young Omani leaders from various sectors, the Royal Academy of Management recently launched the 'Future Leaders Programme' in collaboration with Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), GLOBIS Europe, Matterz Business Group, and KAOSPILOT.

The initiative was founded on His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's vision to provide the nation's current and future leaders with the capabilities and skills to make impactful and meaningful contributions within their organisation and the nation, as outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

The 'Future Leaders Programme' represents a significant milestone in empowering the next generation of leaders across Oman to drive transformative and positive change and achieve sustainable development across the public and private sectors. By inspiring a culture of innovation within institutions, it aims to significantly enhance participants' readiness to navigate rapidly evolving conditions.

The six-month programme comprises three in-person modules and three talent labs. It kicks off with the 'Discover' module, which focuses on enhancing leadership skills, strategic framing, and work ethics. This is followed by 'Foresee' module, designed to explore successful and advanced international practices and rapid



The Royal Academy of Management launched the 'Future Leaders Programme'

technological changes. 'Pioneer' module focuses on leadership at work and influence, and business-success-oriented mindset and drives achievement. All modules are crafted to develop future-focused skills and integrate international best practices among the participants.

The programme also includes a visit to Japan, where participants will explore a range of educational and entrepreneurial institutions and engage with Japanese leaders to exchange insights and experiences.

The visit will address essential topics such as rapid technological advancements, change management strategies, and the development of creativity and innovation skills in the workplace, alongside sustainable leadership practices.

This journey is intended to broaden participants' horizons, enhance their global perspective, and immerse them in diverse experiences and culture. The initiative offers fresh ideas and insights for the participants to

apply in their professional and personal lives.

Dr Fathiya al Rashdi, Vice-President for Programme Affairs at the Royal Academy of Management, said, "The Future Leaders Programme embodies the Academy's vision of developing young national leaders capable of innovation and positively impacting their communities. Empowering today's youth is an investment in Oman's bright future. The programme builds on the Academy's initiatives aimed at various leadership levels, seeking to create a comprehensive system in executive education, ensuring close alignment with leadership, and adapting to national requirements and global trends.

She added, "We hope this initiative will build a robust network of young leaders who can collaborate to address future challenges and achieve sustainable development goals."

The programme targets 50 young Omani professionals aged between 25 and 34 from both the public and private sectors,

including employees of small and medium-sized companies, startups and freelancers.

The programme will take them on a knowledge journey that includes intensive learning sessions, interactive workshops and practical training, addressing real-world challenges and learning from local and international leadership experiences. The programme is expected to achieve several key objectives, including enhancing leadership competencies, developing innovative problem-solving strategies, fostering self-awareness and teamwork, and cultivating a culture of innovation within institutions.

As part of its strategic partnership with leading experts in leadership and management, the programme offers participants a unique opportunity to engage with top leaders from Oman and around the world. This valuable interaction is aimed at broadening their perspectives, enhancing their professional networks and strengthening their ability to effect positive change within their workplaces and communities.

The Royal Academy of Management is dedicated to achieving its vision and upholding its core principles through a range of targeted initiatives. These initiatives are designed to support leadership communities from multiple sectors in Oman, empowering young leaders with the essential knowledge and skills to drive change within their organisations.

Exploring the Bronze Age kibaykib towers of Sur

AHMED AL KAABI

MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

The Wilayat of Sur in the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate is celebrated as one of Oman's most significant archaeological regions, rich in historical sites that date back to ancient times.

Selected as the Arab Capital of Culture for 2024, Sur offers a treasure trove of history and heritage, with the Kibaykib Towers standing out as a remarkable archaeological highlight.

Discovered in late 1991, the Kibaykib Towers, dating back to the second millennium BC, are among the most prominent landmarks in Sur. Approximately 90 towers were unearthed, each showcasing a distinctive cylindrical design. These structures stand between 4 to 5 meters tall, with diameters ranging from 3 to 4 metres, situated around 2000 metres above sea level. Their round tops and dual-wall construction, with stones filling the space in between, reflect the advanced engineering skills of the Bronze Age.

The Kibaykib Towers not only demonstrate the architectural prowess of ancient Oman but also provide insight into the sophisticated social and economic systems of the time. Their location in the high mountainous areas, where



temperatures range from 15 to 30 degrees Celsius in the summer and become very cold in the winter, adds to their historical allure.

As a key tourist attraction, the Kibaykib Towers offer visitors a unique glimpse into the region's rich history and ancient civilisation. They play a crucial role in enhancing cultural awareness and promoting the preservation of Oman's national heritage. Sur's designation as the Arab Capital of Culture in 2024 underscores its historical and cultural significance. Once a central hub for maritime trade linking Oman with the world, Sur remains a vibrant example

of cultural preservation and national identity. The Sultanate of Oman's commitment to safeguarding archaeological sites like the Kibaykib Towers supports Sur's reputation as a vital cultural and historical centre.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in Oman is dedicated to protecting, maintaining, and promoting Sur's archaeological treasures, including the Kibaykib Towers. These efforts are aimed at fostering cultural and historical tourism, attracting researchers and enthusiasts from around the globe to explore and appreciate the region's rich history.

Oman awaits Apple Pay launch in September

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

Banks in the Sultanate of Oman are gearing up or are in the final stages of launching the Apple Pay digital payment service.

According to top sources in the industry, dates have not been set yet but the target is to launch services sometime in September.

"All the banks are gearing up but nothing official on the launch date yet," said a source in one of the leading banks.

The service is available and widely used in UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain.

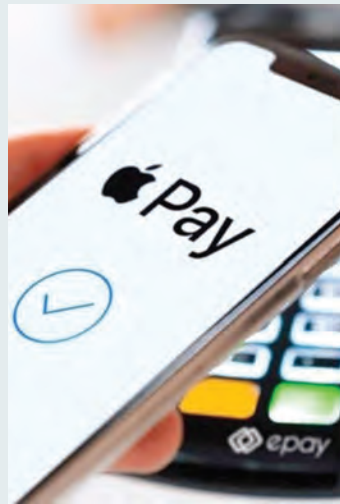
Not just banks, but even customers are keen to move away from card and cash payments.

"Several retailers have started accepting mobile transfers if the customer does not have cash with them. They find it more convenient than accepting cards, which comes at a cost to the retailer. Currently,

mobile transfers can be done only if both parties have an account with the same bank. Digital payments by Apple will encourage transfer irrespective of accounts," said Nasser al Balushi, a frequent traveller.

As iPhones are widely used in the Sultanate of Oman, its digital payment launch has been eagerly awaited across the country.

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued guidelines and instructions for banks and payment service



providers to provide the Card Tokenization Service, which will replace the current method of card-based payments.

Customers will not be charged any fees for activating and using the service.

According to CBO, the latest decision will encourage innovation in electronic payments and be less cash-dependent.

All banks have already

launched the Samsung Pay digital wallet in the country.

An executive from the CBO recently said that Apple is in the final stages of preparations and will be launched in the next couple of months.

According to a CBO report, the total volume of retail transactions has experienced a significant growth of 22.5 per cent compared to the previous year. In 2023, the number of transactions reached 355.2 million, up from 274.4 million in 2022, which can be attributed to factors such as wider adoption of E-payment methods and the increasing shift away from cash usage.

Apple Pay will be easy to set up for customers on their iPhone wallets.

According to sources, customers simply need to hold their iPhone or Apple Watch near a payment terminal to make a contactless payment.

The purchase is secured because it is authenticated with Face ID, Touch ID or device pass code, as well as, a one-time security code. Apple Pay will be accepted in all stores, taxis, restaurants, coffee shops, retail stores and many more places.

Customers will be able to make faster and more convenient purchases in apps or on the web in Safari without having to create accounts or repeatedly type in shipping and billing information.



DEADLY ISRAELI STRIKES AS MEDIATORS PUSH GAZA TRUCE



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike in Al Zawayda in the central Gaza Strip. – AFP

GAZA: Deadly Israeli strikes hit Lebanon and Gaza on Saturday as the US secretary of state was set to visit Israel aiming to finalise a Gaza truce agreement, which diplomats say could avert a wider regional conflagration.

Lebanon's health ministry said an Israeli air strike in southern Lebanon killed 10 people including a Syrian woman and her two children.

The strike was among the deadliest in southern Lebanon since the onset of near-daily exchanges of fire following the start of the Gaza war in October.

In Gaza, civil defence rescuers said an Israeli air strike killed 15 people from a single Palestinian family. The fatalities in Al Zawaida helped push the Gaza health ministry's war death toll to 40,074.

The Gaza war between Israel

The strike was among the deadliest in southern Lebanon since the onset of near-daily exchanges of fire following the start of the Gaza

and Palestinian groups has displaced most of the territory's population, destroyed much of the housing and other infrastructure, and left diseases spreading.

The United Nations appealed for seven-day pauses in the fighting so it could vaccinate children against polio, after the Palestinian health ministry reported Gaza's first polio case in 25 years.

"We are closer than we have

ever been" to a ceasefire in the Gaza war, US President Joe Biden said on Friday.

On Saturday a senior Hamas official, Sami Abu Zuhri, said Biden's comment is an "illusion".

The stakes have significantly risen since the killings in quick succession in late July of Fuad Shukur, a top operations chief of Hezbollah in south Lebanon, and Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was set to leave for Israel and seek to "conclude the agreement for a ceasefire and release of captives and detainees", the State Department said. With a deal "now in sight, no one in the region should take actions to undermine this process," Biden said.

Egyptian, Qatari and US mediators are working to

finalise details of a framework ceasefire and hostage-release deal initially outlined by Biden in May.

In a joint statement after two days of talks in Qatar, the mediators said they presented both sides with a proposal that "bridges remaining gaps". Talks aiming to secure a deal are to resume in Cairo "before the end of next week", they said.

Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi of Jordan blamed Netanyahu for "impeding attempts to finalise" a deal and urged pressure on him.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty on Saturday met his French counterpart Stephane Sejourne in Cairo for talks on "containing the escalation and efforts to reach a ceasefire," Egypt's foreign ministry spokesman said. — AFP

Indian doctors stage nationwide strike



Medical professionals hold posters during a protest in New Delhi. – AFP

NEW DELHI: Indian doctors held a nationwide strike on Saturday, escalating protests after the murder of their colleague that has channelled outrage.

The discovery of the 31-year-old doctor's bloodied body at a state-run hospital in the eastern city of Kolkata on August 9 sparked furious protests in several cities across the country.

Many have been led by doctors and other healthcare workers but also joined by tens of thousands of ordinary Indians demanding action.

In Kolkata, thousands held a candle-lit vigil into the early hours of Saturday morning.

The murdered doctor was found in the teaching hospital's seminar hall, suggesting she had gone there for a rest during a 36-hour shift. An autopsy confirmed physical assault and, in a petition to the court, the victim's parents said they suspected their daughter was gone through so.

One man, who worked at the hospital helping people navigate busy queues, has been detained.

However, Kolkata's police were accused by an angry public of mishandling the case and the city's High Court transferred the investigation to India's top Central Bureau of Investigation to "inspire public confidence".

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) escalated protests on Saturday morning with a 24-hour "nationwide withdrawal of services", and the suspension of all non-essential procedures.

"We ask for the understanding and support of the nation in this struggle for justice for its doctors and daughters," IMA chief R.V. Asokan said in a statement ahead of the strike.

The IMA called the killing "barbaric". "The 36-hour duty shift that the victim was in and the lack of safe spaces to rest... warrant a thorough overhaul of the working and living conditions of the resident doctors," the IMA said in a statement. Doctors are demanding the implementation of the Central Protection Act, a bill to protect healthcare workers from violence.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanded swift punishment for those who commit "monstrous" deeds against women. Doctors say the protests are also to highlight "systemic issues" plaguing India's overstretched public healthcare infrastructure. — AFP

Trump and Harris to vie for Pennsylvania votes

PENNSYLVANIA: Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Kamala Harris will hold duelling campaign events in Pennsylvania, the political battleground that may be the most critical state in the Nov. 5 presidential election.

Trump, the former president, was set to hold a rally in Wilkes-Barre in the northeastern section of the state. Vice-President Harris will conduct a bus tour of western Pennsylvania starting in Pittsburgh on Sunday, ahead



Republican presidential nominee and former US president Donald Trump speaks during a press conference, New Jersey. – Reuters file photo

of the Democratic National Convention kickoff on Monday in Chicago.

With 19 electoral votes out of the 270 needed to secure the White House, compared with 15 in Michigan and 10 in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania may be the biggest prize in November's election.

A statistical model created by Nate Silver, the election forecaster, estimates that

Pennsylvania is more than twice as likely as any other to be the "tipping point" state - the one whose electoral votes push either Harris or Trump over the top.

Harris' entry into the race after Biden ended his reelection bid last month has upended the contest, erasing the lead Trump had built during the final weeks of Biden's shaky campaign.

Harris is leading Trump by more than two percentage points in Pennsylvania, according

to the poll tracking website FiveThirtyEight.

Both Trump and Harris have visited the state more than half a dozen times each this year.

Trump was injured during an assassination attempt at his rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, on July 13. He has said he will return to Butler in October, and also announced he will give remarks on the economy at a campaign event in York, Pennsylvania on Monday. Trump's running mate,

Senator JD Vance, will deliver remarks in Philadelphia that day as well.

Trump's trip to Wilkes-Barre on Saturday in Luzerne County is aimed at solidifying support among the white, non-college-educated voters who lifted him to victory in 2016. The blue-collar county voted Democratic for decades before swinging heavily toward Trump in 2016, mirroring other similar regions around the country. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

LONDON

Firefighters tackle blaze at London art centre

Around 125 firefighters tackled a large blaze at London's historic Somerset House cultural centre on Saturday, with flames leaping out from underneath its roof.

"Twenty fire engines and around 125 firefighters are now responding to the fire at Somerset House.

Crews are continuing to work at bringing the fire in the building's roof under control," the London Fire Brigade posted.

The official X account of the Renaissance building, which



opened in 1796, said that "owing to a fire in one small part of Somerset House, the site is currently closed."

It added that "all staff and public are safe." — AFP

BANGKOK

Thai ex-PM Thaksin gets royal pardon

Thailand's billionaire former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra received a royal pardon shortening his parole by two weeks, his lawyer said on Saturday, a day after his daughter was elected premier by parliament.

"Thaksin is among the prisoners that received the royal pardon" for prisoners in honour of the king's birthday last month, his lawyer, Winyat Chartmontri said. "It will take effect on Sunday." Parole was due to end at the end of the month, but was short-



ened to Sunday as part of the royal pardon.

Thaksin's daughter Paetong-tarn Shinawatra, 37, was elected on Friday as Thailand's second female prime minister. — Reuters

CARACAS

Venezuelan oppn, regime backers to hold protests

Venezuela's opposition and regime supporters were set to vie for the streets of Caracas in competing demonstrations amid a political crisis sparked by a disputed election where both President Nicolas Maduro and his rivals have claimed victory. "We have to remain firm and united," opposition leader Maria Corina Machado urged supporters. She had called for backers to take to the streets in hundreds of cities in Venezuela and abroad.

A heavy security presence



was taking shape early Saturday. Access to Caracas's vast Petare neighbourhood was being controlled by National Guard vehicles backed by motorcycle-mounted troops. — AFP

Ukraine’s push into Russia met early success



Kim Barker

The writer is a New York Times reporter writing in-depth stories about national issues



Constant Méheut

The writer is a reporter for The New York Times, currently covering the war in Ukraine

The ultimate strategy and goals of the attack, though, are still murky. Western allies, including the United States and Germany, say they are watching and monitoring the situation

The success of Ukraine’s secret incursion into Russia is clear. Ukrainian forces pushed past two lines of Russian defences in the southwestern region of Kursk and moved through Russian highways and villages with little resistance. Since the operation began 11 days ago, they have gone beyond Kursk to the neighbouring region of Belgorod, putting other communities on edge and rattling Moscow.

The ultimate strategy and goals of the attack, though, are still murky. Western allies, including the United States and Germany, say they are watching and monitoring the situation but letting Ukraine lead the way. Even the Ukrainian leadership seems surprised by the extent of the operation’s initial success, the first time that Russia, a nuclear power, has been attacked since World War II.

Ukrainian forces could try to keep pushing farther into Russia. They could dig into the territory they now hold and try to defend it. Or, battered by continual losses in eastern Ukraine, especially this week near the strategically important city of Pokrovsk, they could decide that they have made the point to the West, and to Moscow, that Russia is not invincible. In that case, they could then pull back.

“We are playing here a bit on the psychological point that great powers do not lose their territories,” said Mykola Bielieskov, a senior analyst from Come Back Alive, a foundation that provides support to members of Ukraine’s military. If Russia loses, “it means that they are not that big.”

Ukrainian officials have told senior US civilian and military officials that the operation aims to create an operational dilemma for the Russians — to force Moscow to divert troops off the front lines in the eastern Ukraine region of Donetsk, where they have made slow but steady progress for weeks.

But the operation has also created a vulnerability for Ukraine. Some of its valuable, battle-hardened soldiers from the 600-mile front line in eastern and southern Ukraine have moved to Kursk. And that has weakened its positions in eastern Ukraine.

So far, the Ukrainians have not talked publicly about their plans in Russian territory. Gen. Oleksandr Syrsky, who took over as Ukraine’s top military commander in February, claimed on Thursday that his troops had pushed more than 21 miles into Russia. He said that Ukraine controlled more than 80 Russian settlements in the Kursk region, including Sudzha, a town of 6,000. The claims could not be independently verified, although analysts say that Sudzha is likely under full Ukrainian control.

Fighting has also expanded to the neighbouring regions of Belgorod and Bryansk, where Russia has introduced counterterrorism measures.

As Ukrainian soldiers make inroads into Russia, the leadership appears to be making plans to hold ground, analysts say.

Syrsky said that Ukraine had set up its first military office in Kursk. A deputy prime minister



A soldier from the First Presidential Brigade of Ukraine's National Guard at the front line in the Donbas region. — NYT

talked about creating a humanitarian corridor extending from the Kursk region south to the Ukrainian border region of Sumy. At a Wednesday meeting, President Volodymyr Zelensky said Ukrainian troops were protecting Russian citizens and following the rules of international law.

So far, Ukrainian troops do not seem to be building the kind of entrenched lines seen in eastern Ukraine, where trenches, anti-armoured vehicle ditches and antitank pyramid obstacles known as dragon’s teeth dot the landscape.

Any fixed position would be exposed to potentially devastating Russian air strikes and would be difficult to defend against Russian troops attacking from different sides. Russia, after all, has the upper hand in forces and weapons.

Kuzan said Ukraine should instead continue to execute what he called “highly manoeuvrable combat operations,” by attacking where Russia does

not expect and performing raids with small units to probe and destabilise Russian defences.

Ukraine also claims to have captured hundreds of Russian prisoners of war, who could be traded for Ukrainian prisoners held by Russia. The Russians guarding the border posts in Kursk were mostly conscripts, forced to serve as part of Russia’s mobilization, as opposed to the battle-hardened contract soldiers and irregular forces fighting in Ukraine’s east and south.

The real goals of the operation may not be on the Russian battlefield. After the failure of Ukraine’s much-advertised counteroffensive last year and the ongoing losses in the east, it appears to be trying to change the war’s narrative. The Ukrainians may be trying to convince the West that they will not give up, and that the United States in particular should allow them to use American long-range cruise missiles inside Russia.

Disease trackers set their sights on pets



Emily Anthes

The author is a science reporter at The New York Times

Trupanion, a Seattle-based pet insurance company, is partnering with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to create a disease tracking system for pets, the company announced this week. The system will draw on insurance claims submitted to Trupanion in real time when sick dogs and cats visit the veterinarian.

“The concept is to proactively detect potential threats to pets and public health,” said Dr. Steve Weinrauch, the chief veterinary and product officer at Trupanion.

The effort, which also includes academic scientists and other companies in the pet industry, is still in its early stages. Initially, it will focus on bird flu, a virus that has been spreading through American dairy cows and spilling over into domestic cats.

“This is a really important public-private partnership that is going to help fill some important gaps,” said Dr. Casey Barton Behravesh, who directs the CDC’s One Health Office, which focuses on the connections between human, animal and environmental health.

It’s one of several ongoing efforts to address such gaps, which extend far beyond bird flu. Like most other countries, the United States has no comprehensive national system for

tracking diseases in pets. While the CDC is charged with protecting human health and the Department of Agriculture focuses on farm animals, companion animals tend to fall through the cracks.

It’s a public health blind spot that leaves both animals and people at risk, experts said. Many infectious diseases — including bird flu, Covid-19 and mpox — are zoonotic, which means that they can spread from animals to humans and back again. And there are few animals that people have closer contact with than those that live in their homes.

Scientists have known for years that cats are susceptible to bird flu, which they can catch when preying on infected wild birds. But the dairy outbreak has created new risks; since late March, dozens of bird flu cases have been confirmed in American cats, some of which were infected after lapping up virus-laden milk.

Bird flu infections in any mammals are cause for concern, giving the virus opportunities to evolve into a bigger threat to humans. “But I think it’s really important that we focus heavily on cats,” said Kristen Coleman, an infectious disease researcher at the University of Maryland.

Cats infected by wild birds could bring the virus home with them, passing it on to their owners, while those that prowl



Cats sit on steps at Grazing Plains Farm in Newton, Kan. — NYT

The effort, which also includes academic scientists and other companies in the pet industry, is still in its early stages. Initially, it will focus on bird flu

dairy farms could transport the virus off the premises, spreading it to animals in the wild. To date, however, cats have been a relative afterthought in bird flu surveillance.

Advances in technology and changes to the veterinary industry, including the rise of large veterinary chains and the increasing use of pet insurance, have made it more feasible to collect large volumes of health data on pets.

Trupanion now insures more than 1 million pets, and more than 10,000 clinics across North America use the company’s software to submit insurance claims. A sudden spike in claims for coughing dogs in California or feverish cats in New York might be an early signal of a disease outbreak. In the long term, the company hopes to build a system that can flag any such aberrations automatically, Weinrauch said. But it will start with more focused investigations, such as scouring the data for signs that bird flu might be spreading in cats.

In the United States, the Companion Animal Parasite Council tracks the prevalence of Lyme disease in dogs using test results collected from major veterinary laboratories. Every month, the council publishes maps of the prevalence of Lyme, and other parasitic diseases, in every county.

Who am I now? Facing and surviving identity crises



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

Ahmed was in his late twenties when his first son was born. He was both anxious and excited about being a father. Unfortunately, the boy was diagnosed with brain cancer and died within months after spending most of his short life in hospital beds.

Ahmed felt devastated after the death of his son falling into severe depression especially after being dismissed from his job for taking many days off to be with his son in hospital. He felt his ‘world fell apart’ after losing his identity as a father and a working person.

Our identities are made of memories, experiences, relationships and values. These components create our sense of self. An identity crisis can be defined as a period of uncertainty or confusion in a person's life that occurs when we feel insecure and unstable.

This can happen when we are faced with life events that change our lives such as losing our health, the death of a loved one, or any change

in our social environment. We experience various identity crises during our lives that impact our well-being. If you have lost your only child, or you retired from your job or you had to flee your country because of wars or economic hardships, you may feel that you’ve lost your identity as a parent, a working person, or a citizen.

You may start asking yourself, who am I now? But the reality is that you’re still an amazing person regardless of any title. You earned that identity and no one can take that away.

The second identity crisis is the one in which the identity you long for is denied to you. You might desperately want to be a doctor or teacher, but you never got the right grades for a medical or teaching college.

In this case, you might need to ask yourself, am I over-attached to how I’m going to achieve this identity? Remember there are many ways to live a fulfilling life. You need to be flexible about how you’re going to excel in new fields and reach your potential.

AN IDENTITY CRISIS CAN BE DEFINED AS A PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY OR CONFUSION IN A PERSON’S LIFE THAT OCCURS WHEN WE FEEL INSECURE AND UNSTABLE

A third identity crisis occurs when you cling to an identity you thought you wanted, but which no longer serves you. You might have built your life around being a university professor, but when you get the title, you feel empty and start asking yourself, was it worth all the struggle and the time I spent away from my family?

At this stage, you would need to reassess your priorities in life. If you’re truthful with yourself about your real identity, you might find you want something else, like a more creative job, or a flexible role that lets you spend time with family. Sometimes, a crisis occurs because of your own actions.

You may have made the wrong business plans that led you to bankruptcy or chosen to remain in a destructive relationship because of your fear of loneliness.

In such situations, it is normal to experience guilt and shame but don’t let these negative emotions take over. Reflect on the decision you made and be prepared to start with new perspectives.

Nordic nations unite to tackle Swedish gang crime

JOHAN AHLANDER

Nordic countries will increase police cooperation and form a hub in Stockholm in an effort to prevent Sweden's serious gang crime problem from spreading to Norway, Finland and Denmark, the Swedish government said.

Swedish gangs have long been among the most violent in Europe but this year 10 Swedes - over half of them minors - have been charged in Denmark with attempted murder or weapons possession, stirring alarm and harsh criticism in Denmark.

Swedish Justice Minister Gunnar Strommer said that in response, Sweden and Denmark would post police officers in each other's countries.

“An important reason for this is to be able to share information between our countries in real time,” Strommer said. “Both to be able to identify at an earlier stage which children and young people are at risk of being drawn into these criminal networks, and to prevent it”

In addition, a Nordic hub of police officers from Finland, Norway and Denmark would be set up in Stockholm. Norwegian and Finnish officers were already there, and the Danes would join in a few weeks’ time.

Swedish gang members have been hired by Danish gangs for violent attacks on rivals and Danish Justice Minister Peter Hummelgaard said there were 25 such instances just since April.

He labelled them “child soldiers” and said Sweden had a “sick” culture of violence not wanted in Denmark.

“The reality right now is that not only Denmark but large parts of the Nordics are feeling the consequences of long-standing failed immigration and legal policies in Sweden, and we take that extremely seriously,” Hummelgaard told a news conference on Wednesday.

Strommer said Denmark also bore some responsibility for its own gangs but agreed with much of the criticism regarding Sweden's gang problem. Sweden for several decades had some of the Western world's most generous immigration policies but has tightened them substantially in recent years after a sharp rise in crime largely blamed on poor integration of immigrants.

Sweden has the highest per-capita rate of gun violence in the European Union. Last year 55 people were shot dead in 363 separate incidents in a country of just 10 million people. By comparison, there were just six fatal shootings in the three other Nordic countries combined.

— Reuters

Kamala Harris: Behind the mask



Karim Easterbrook
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The writer is School Principal from Cambridge UK

Kamala Harris may well be the US's next President. Certainly, the money men are backing her.

Compared to Trump she appears more intelligent, more caring and above all younger. She knows how to put on a good show in front of the TV cameras. She’s a person of colour.

This latter accident of birth didn’t harm Barack Obama’s presidential campaign and for some unknown reason many, Americans consider the colour of a Presidential candidate’s skin to be important.

I didn’t get that with Obama and I don’t get it with Harris. Who cares whether someone is the first black, white, yellow, green or purple President in American history?

Or whether the future President also happens to be a black (or brown?) Native American woman? It’s her policies that count and in particular her policy towards the Zionist genocide taking place in the State of Palestine. So let’s forget the colour of her skin, her gender, her ability to look good in front of TV cameras and her designer clothes.

Her record as District Attorney and Attorney General (2003 -2010) suggests that when it comes to Harris what you see isn’t necessarily what you get. It’s worth taking a look at her record before becoming Vice-President to Biden, especially regarding the death penalty which seemed to change with the weather or depending on what was most advantageous to her career advancement at any given time.

She made her bid to be appointed District Attorney in 2004 when it was a vote winner to promise never to seek the death penalty. Consequently, she made that promise and only three months after becoming DA that promise was tested when a young police officer named Isaac Espinoza was shot dead.

Without discussing her decision with the deceased police officer’s family or other police chiefs Harris quickly arranged a press conference. Just two days after the officer’s murder and only two days before his funeral Harris announced publicly that she would not be seeking the death penalty for the murderer. To many in attendance, this smacked of a political propaganda

stunt rather than an opportunity to express her sympathy for the murdered police officer’s widow and child. For many, it seemed like an opportunity to demonstrate her honesty and sincerity by keeping to her campaign promise not to seek the death penalty.

When criticised for not seeking the death penalty she stated “Throughout my entire career I have been opposed, personally opposed, to the death penalty and that has never changed.” That was until the summer of 2014 when a US District Court Judge ruled that California’s death penalty was unconstitutional thus halting all executions in the State.

HARRIS APPEARS MORE INTELLIGENT, CARING AND ABOVE ALL YOUNGER THAN TRUMP. SHE KNOWS HOW TO PUT ON A GOOD SHOW IN FRONT OF THE TV CAMERAS

Harris was by then the Attorney General and had the power to intervene to block the Judge’s ruling by filing an appeal to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals within 45 days. Knowing her earlier well-publicised views opposing the death penalty everyone expected her to do nothing.

By doing nothing the death penalty would have been abolished in California. But just two days before the 45 day window closed Harris filed the appeal thus ensuring that the death penalty remained as part of California’s penal system and that executions would continue to take place. However when California’s new Governor Gavin Newsom signed an executive order to put a stop to the death penalty by calling it “ineffective, irreversible and immoral” Harris was the first to praise the Governor’s decision calling the death penalty “a deeply flawed system of capital punishment.” Am I being too harsh by suggesting her change of opinion had more to do with currying favour with the Governor than to do with moral principles? I don’t think so.

These convenient U-turns on such serious legal matters haven’t gone unnoticed. However, if nothing else her inconsistency was consistent.

An innocent black man and his lawyers demanded that the newly available DNA testing should be made available to prove his innocence. Harris, who was the District Attorney at the time, refused this request and insisted that the man be executed, thus eliminating any chance of the truth of his innocence or guilt being discovered.

In a fiery democratic debate a Republican Congresswoman, Tulsi Gabbard, accused Harris of blocking evidence (DNA) that would have freed an innocent man from death row. The Courts eventually forced Harris to allow the DNA testing to take place.

Harris has made a number of conciliatory statements towards those who continue to demand that the Zionist genocide in Palestine should be stopped. She has expressed sympathy for Palestinians and vowed that as President she would speak out against the slaughter of innocent Palestinian children. But in the past Kamala Harris has had no difficulty in using manipulative words to promote an image to support her ambitions and for 10 months Harris has given her unconditional support to that arch Zionist Biden.

She continues to express her unwavering support for that Zionist colony built on the homeland stolen from the Palestinian people. She refuses to consider placing an arms embargo on that Zionist colony, arms which are being used to murder innocent families in their own country.

Not once has Harris mentioned the right of Palestinians to have a State of their own. To call what is taking place in The State of Palestine a humanitarian crisis is a Zionist trick. It is much more than that.

It is a fight to give people back their country from Zionist invaders. The other Zionist trick is the proposal of a two-State solution. Surely we all know by now that the Zionists want the whole of The State of Palestine and if possible the death of all Palestinians.

Until we understand these facts we are in danger of ignoring the Zionist master plan for world domination and risking the Zionists dragging us into yet another world war.

It’s sad that the world’s only superpower has a choice of only two Presidents.

Fresh air and nature, seaside therapy

The Sultanate of Oman, for many reasons, is recognised as the ‘Jewel of the Arabian Gulf’. Probably the most appropriate are its golden sands and azure sea, which Lena and I still find the most delightful, and comforting, of environments.

Oh, don’t get me wrong, living in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate for 12 years was an absolute joy, but to be able to step away and enjoy, so often, within only a few hours, the splendour and solitude of the seaside, was the ‘icing on the cake’, enabling us to appreciate the majesty of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Jabal Shams, through our shared experiences with the diversity of Ras Al Jinz, Masirah Island, the Dhofari coastline, Suhar Beach, Shiya Beach, and our favourite, Ras Al Ruways in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

I’ve lost count of the number of times we have visited the turtle sanctuary at Ras Al Jinz, and we are not the only ones. For tourists of course, it’s a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but we have been incredibly fortunate to have embraced the ‘turtle experience,’ at least twelve times, and probably closer to twenty. We have gone on our own, with friends, with visitors, at play, as part of our journalistic and photographic pursuits, and never had the same experience twice... and that’s why we keep going back. It is always remarkably evocative, whether it is the turtles, their eggs, the hatchlings, the seagulls, the foxes or wild dogs... Or the sand state, the sea state, the sunrise or sunset, or the Omani guides, who draw it all together. All these factors contribute to amazing natural and authentic experiences. What a shame it can’t be bottled and exported!

We’ve been to Masirah I think three times, always staying at the Masirah Island Resort, the perfect base for our fishing adventures. We have never caught any of the aquatic giants that Masirah boasts, but just fishing from the shore, we have been thoroughly captivated by the many varieties we have caught, and always taken home some beautiful fish for the table.



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

Another memorable highlight of the island was discovering the multiplicity of its birdlife, which adds yet another layer of nature to its persistent calls upon us to return.

Visiting Salalah during the khareef is clearly a ‘rite of passage’ for all who live in Oman, and part of that rite is to be ‘dunked’ by the blowholes at Al Mughsail Beach. Reaching almost 30 metres in the air, the younger daredevils often tempt fate by challenging Mother Nature, but not me... getting wet is one thing, but getting injured, well, I’ll leave that to youth and impetuosity. We also found the seas tempestuous, rarely settled, and this probably explains why so many have perished at its hands, while on a less miserable note, the geological ‘digs’ north of the city are well worth a visit.

We booked a stay at the Sohar Beach Hotel on New Years Eve of 2011/12, and enjoyed a wonderful, as usual for Oman, dinner buffet during the evening.

During the buffet we won a ‘lucky draw’ among the diners, for a weekend stay at the hotel on a later weekend, so basically had a two-for-the-price-of-one stay. I also enjoyed, with my daughter Sasha, a ride on the beach, with horses provided by a local entrepreneur. On a beautiful sunny day, the pictures of Sasha and I riding on the beach, and in the sea’s shallows, will linger long among my memories.

Shiya Beach is one we have often fished, and we have shared coffee and dates with the local fishermen and caught some lovely sea bass. It was also there my good friend Vishal, and his wife Yasha, caught their very first fishes, and again, the delight on their faces was something else.

Unbeatable for us though, is Ras Al Ruways, where we always stay at the nearby Al Asala Hotel, where the management and staff are incredibly courteous. We always catch fish, large and small, eat well, and love our own brand of days and nights, at the beach.

Once again, this New Year, we will no doubt make more memories to savour, upon our return to Ras Al Ruways, and who knows... maybe we’ll see you there?

VISITING
SALALAH
DURING THE
KHAREEF IS
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ALL WHO LIVE IN
OMAN

SOARING HIGH!



A man looks at animated kites soaring over the sky on the third day of the Tamil Nadu International Kite Festival on the outskirts of Chennai, India, on Saturday. – AFP

Recommitting to pandemic preparedness

Four years ago, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, governments were scrambling to protect their populations and prevent an economic meltdown. No one would dispute that addressing this existential threat was the top political priority back then.

As a former prime minister and director-general of the World Health Organization, I was impressed by the coordinated international response to Covid-19. To be sure, there were large inequalities within and between countries, resulting in society’s most vulnerable paying too high a price, especially when it came to vaccine access. But I saw reason to hope that the pandemic’s devastating impact would prompt a political sea change and lead to a greater commitment to future preparedness, prevention and response.

I was wrong. It is depressingly obvious that the lessons of Covid-19 are being forgotten. The world remains stuck in the familiar cycle of panic and neglect that has characterised this past pandemic. Political leaders are largely ignoring current threats, including Covid-19 (which has not been consigned to the history books, despite no longer being a public-health emergency), H5N1 bird flu and dengue fever. And new pandemics with potentially catastrophic outcomes will almost surely occur, especially as climate change and environmental degradation worsen.



Gro Harlem Brundtland

The writer is a former prime minister of Norway and director-general of the World Health Organization, is a co-chair of the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board and a member of The Elders

IN JUNE, THE 77TH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY FAILED TO FINALISE A NEW PANDEMIC ACCORD, REFLECTING THE GROWING TRUST DEFICIT BETWEEN ADVANCED AND EMERGING ECONOMIES

These are not hypothetical risks. On Wednesday, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared the latest outbreak of mpox in East Africa a “public-health emergency of international concern.” Not only must the international community now rally behind affected African countries and those at highest risk, it must also prepare itself for potential spread into more countries and across the globe.

Even before Covid-19 hit, I had been warning that our failure to break this vicious cycle was putting us at grave risk. In September 2019, the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (which I co-chair) issued a report highlighting the acute risk of a devastating global epidemic or pandemic. Little did we know how prescient our warnings were.

And now we find ourselves in a new phase of neglect, which can only be understood as a failure of political will. For all the pious words uttered in the Covid-19 era, heads of state and governments are failing to address the inequalities that stymied recovery efforts. It is unacceptable that rich countries have done so little to make the next pandemic response more equitable – and therefore more effective.

In June, for example, the 77th World Health Assembly

failed to finalise a new pandemic accord, even though the Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) had been working on the global pact, which aims to prevent a repeat of Covid-19, for two years. Member states have extended talks for up to 12 months. But, crucially, they still seem unwilling to provide negotiators with the political support needed to agree on measures that can address inequities in pandemic readiness, response and recovery.

The failure to find consensus on substantive matters is symptomatic of the growing trust deficit between advanced and emerging economies, and

of the ineffectiveness of the multilateral system in an era of deepening geopolitical tensions. But this cannot be an excuse to delay action on one of the biggest threats of our time. The INB needs a new approach that enables maximum engagement from independent experts and civil-society organisations, while ensuring that member states stay focused on improving — instead of just paying lip service to — global equity.

Moreover, if the past four years have taught us anything, it is that WHO-led processes alone are not enough to tackle the existential threat of pandemics. Other multilateral institutions

should take up the cause of improving preparedness. The United Nations’ Summit of the Future in September, as well as the upcoming meetings of the G7 and the G20, must highlight the urgency of this challenge and encourage world leaders to act. More visible advocacy for global health security in these fora could be crucial in securing the political leadership and financing needed to bring about meaningful change.

To that end, the group of former political leaders known as The Elders support the adoption of an emergency platform — a set of protocols that would allow UN leaders to respond quickly to global shocks — at the Summit of the Future. World Trade Organization members should also agree to review, as proposed by Colombia, the implementation of the agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights. The TRIPS agreement governs patent protection for vaccines and treatments, and thus plays a key role in pandemic-response efforts.

Recommitting to pandemic preparedness is essential. But it also should be part of a broader revival of multilateralism. Only through compromise and collaboration can we confront humanity’s gravest challenges.



It is depressingly obvious that the lessons of Covid-19 are being forgotten.



Photo by
Abdulawahead al Hamadani

OMAN SHINES AT SPORTS SPARK BOXING AND KICKBOXING CHAMPIONSHIP

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

The Boxing and Kickboxing Championship concluded on Friday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. This was part of the sports programmes included by ‘Sports Spark’, which aims to promote martial arts and boxing as prominent sports in Oman.

The championship witnessed strong competition between a group of local and international athletes. More than 10 countries and local clubs participated, competing for multiple titles in different weight categories amidst a large audience of more than 800 fans of different ages and nationalities.

The championship concluded with several champions winning in their different categories, as Mustafa Behlim won the title of

the children’s category at 35 kg, Hussam al Hinaï won in the 52 kg weight category, while Amer Orabi achieved victory in the 68 kg weight category.

In the 60 kg weight category, Mohammed al Ghassani won the title, and the 54 kg weight title went to Rabin D Rabe Jr Sheikh. Samer al Ashqar also won in the 70 kg weight category, while Ibrahim al Hooti won in the 57 kg weight category, Jawad Jihad in the 77 kg weight category, Muneer al Mashaykhi in the 75 kg weight category, and Ziaullah Amin in the 70 kg weight category.

Waddah al Harthy, the tournament official, confirmed that the event comes within the framework of supporting boxing and martial arts, noting that the tournament attracted distinguished Omani athletes who participated in regional

and international tournaments, in addition to the presence of international referees and a specialised medical team to ensure that the fights proceed safely and professionally.

Ali Kerdi, owner of the ‘Fit Box’ club and coach of players Ahmed al Ghailani and Ziaullah, expressed his pride in the performance of his players in the boxing and kickboxing tournament held as part of the ‘Sports Spark’ events.

Kerdi confirmed that Al Ghailani and Ziaullah gave an exceptional performance, which attracted the attention of many international entities, especially from the World Boxing Championship (WBC), as they received invitations to participate in upcoming international tournaments. He stated that this distinguished level came as a result of intensive preparations

and high-level training.

Kerdi added that it was an extraordinary event in the history of martial arts, especially boxing in Oman, as the championship received direct support from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

He pointed to the professional organisation witnessed by the championship, stressing that the safety of the players was a top priority, as all global measures were taken in such competitions to ensure that they were not exposed to any risks.

Kerdi added that boxing and martial arts are witnessing a remarkable development in Oman, thanks to the continuous efforts of sports bodies and local clubs to spread this sport and attract new talents.

He explained that boxing has begun to gain increasing popularity among young

people and the Omani public, which was clearly reflected in the large attendance at the last championship, which witnessed enthusiastic encouragement from the public.

Kerdi spoke about the challenges facing this sport, explaining that it is not a wrestling sport as some promote it on social media, but rather a boxing art recognised internationally by the Olympics.

He expressed his great hope that the Sultanate of Oman will be able to participate in the Olympics, stressing that the expected support from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth after this tournament contributes to qualifying Omani youth to participate in local and international tournaments, leading to competing in the Olympics. He added that the youth, after receiving the

necessary support, will be able to raise Oman’s flag on the international stage.

Regarding the controversy that arose regarding the women’s fight that was cancelled, Kerdi explained that some social media outlets misrepresented the idea to the public, as some thought that the tournament was an all-female tournament. He stressed that the tournament included only one fight between two girls who would adhere to modest dress, wearing the hijab and headgear, and not as incorrectly circulated.

Finally, Kerdi stressed the importance of promoting the sport and supporting it as a professional sport known as the art of boxing, pointing out that practitioners of this sport are among the most disciplined and prepared people, as participating in the fight requires high physical and health readiness.

Alcaraz out after ‘worst match’ while Sinner wins in walkover

CINCINNATI: Carlos Alcaraz let loose his frustrations with a violent racquet smash in a 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 defeat on Friday at the ATP and WTA Cincinnati Open that he called the “worst match” of his career.

The reigning Roland Garros and Wimbledon champion could not match the wily skills of 37-year-old French opponent Gael Monfils, two decades in the game and a threat to any young gun.

“It was the worst match that I ever played in my career,” Alcaraz said. “I couldn’t play.

“I don’t know what happened. Honestly, I couldn’t, I couldn’t control myself. I couldn’t be better. It was impossible to win, and that’s all.” The Spaniard added: “I came here thinking I’m going to feel good. I’m going to put in a good tennis, because I know how to play on this court.” Alcaraz said he had never before broken a racquet in anger but this match was the exception.

The ATP number three and 2023 Cincinnati runner-up heads to the US Open starting a week from Monday without

a hardcourt win and only one second-round summer cement match in his legs.

“It’s really difficult to find some goodstuffs from this match — I want to forget it and try to move on to New York,” he said. “I’ll try to practice well, to get used to those courts. And I will forget this match.”

Monfils then started a third-round catch-up match only hours after his victory, but ran out of puff as Holger Rune scraped out a 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 comeback victory.

While frustrated second seed Alcaraz was fuming at his form and occasionally screaming at his team, world number one Jannik Sinner celebrated a quiet 23rd birthday, with fate handing him a present in the form of a walkover.

The Italian advanced effortlessly into the quarters when Australian opponent Jordan Thompson withdrew before their match with a rib injury. Sinner next gets a rematch of last week’s quarter-final in Canada, which he lost to Andrey Rublev. The Russian

finished a rain-delayed match over Brandon Nakashima 7-6 (7/5), 6-1. Third seed Alexander Zverev advanced into the last eight over Spain’s Pablo Carreno Busta 7-5, 7-6 (8/6). Number five Hubert Hurkacz continued his quick return from July knee surgery with a 6-3, 3-6, 6-1 defeat of Italy’s Flavio Cobolli.

The poor run of form for seventh seed Casper Ruud continued as the Norwegian went down 6-3, 6-1 to Felix Auger-Aliassime in 68 minutes, with the Canadian sending down 14 aces.

Women’s top seed Iga Swiatek defeated Marta Kostyuk for the second time this season, powering into the quarter-finals 6-2, 6-2.

The Pole backed up her win over the Ukrainian at Indian Wells last March and now stands 3-0 in the rivalry without the loss of a set.

Top-ranked Swiatek was able to finish off victory efficiently after struggling through three sets in the previous round to defeat Varvara Gracheva.

Swiatek secured the

opening set in 31 minutes and was untroubled as she rolled through the second.

“I’m happy that I kept my intensity, in the first match, it got a little bit down,” Swiatek said. “But I was ready in every game.

Three-time semi-finalist and third seed Aryna Sabalenka beat Monfils’s wife, Elina Svitolina, 7-5, 6-2 for her fourth quarter-final here.

Sixth seed Jessica Pegula won a delayed second-round match over 2023 runner-up Karolina Muchova 5-7, 6-4, 6-2. Pegula’s second win of the day was a 6-2, 6-3 triumph over US compatriot Taylor Townsend to reach a quarter-final against former US Open finalist Leylah Fernandez.

Mother-of-two Caroline Wozniacki lost to Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 7-5, 6-4.

Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen beat Poland’s Magdalena Frech 6-1, 7-5, but then lost a third-round match to Pavlyuchenkova 7-5, 6-1.

Teen Mirra Andreeva beat Italy’s Wimbledon finalist Jasmine Paolini 3-6, 6-3, 6-2.

— AFP



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain returns a shot during his match against Gael Monfils of France on day five of the Cincinnati Open. – USA TODAY Sports

Oman, Sohar, Al Khabourah triumph in Oman League



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

Oman Club secured an exciting 2-1 victory over Saham Club on Friday at the Seeb Sports Stadium, marking the opening match of the Omani league. The first half saw a balanced performance from both teams, but Oman Club quickly asserted their offensive dominance. In the 8th minute, Azzan al Tamtami capitalised on a clever pass from Faisal al Breiki to open

the scoring for Oman.

Despite Saham's attempts to equalise, Oman's defence held firm until the 28th minute when Abdullah al Maryikhi exploited a defensive lapse, allowing Ali al Hashemi to head home the equaliser.

The second half saw a slight advantage for Saham, whose players posed a real threat to Oman's goal, but the brilliance of goalkeeper Abdulaziz al Hasani prevented further goals. In the



74th minute, Al Munther al Alawi capitalised on a high ball to score Oman's second goal, restoring their lead. Despite Saham's continued efforts to find an equaliser, Oman's defence and goalkeeper held firm until the final whistle.

Sohar Club clinches victory over Al Rustaq

Sohar Club earned a well-deserved 2-0 victory over Al Rustaq Club in a match held on Friday at the Sohar Sports Complex.

The match began with an exchange of attacks between the two teams, as Rustaq missed a dangerous opportunity in the second minute. Sohar responded quickly in the 3rd minute through a shot by Abdullah al Shabli, but it was weak and easy for Rustaq's defence.

The attempts continued from both teams, and in the 45th minute, Rustaq goalkeeper Sultan al Raqadi made a mistake in dealing with a ball that he unsuccessfully pushed away to reach the Portuguese player Silva,

who did not hesitate to deposit it in the net, scoring Sohar's first goal before the end of the first half.

At the beginning of the second half, Rustaq tried to equalise the score, and in the 50th minute, Abdullah al Shibli missed an opportunity to score Sohar's second goal.

In the 54th minute, Faiz al Rashidi saved a direct shot from Fiston Abdul, maintaining his team's lead. Abdullah al Shibli did not delay in strengthening Sohar's lead, scoring the second goal in the 64th minute after a perfect pass from Silva, placing the ball in the far corner out of the reach of the Rustaq goalkeeper. After this goal, Rustaq's hopes of a comeback diminished, and the match ended with a clean two-goal victory for Sohar.

Al Khabourah upsets Al Shabab
Al Khabourah achieved a valuable victory over Al Shabab with a score of 2-1 in the match that was held at the Rustaq Sports Complex Stadium.

The match began with caution



from both teams, as Al Khabourah, who had recently been promoted to the Omantel League, Zakariya al Qartoubi opened the scoring for Al Khabourah in the 15th minute after a successful penetration between Al Shabab defenders.

Al Shabab continued their attempts to equalise the score, but Al Khabourah added a second goal through Hisham al Balti from a penalty kick in the 36th minute. Before the end of the first half, Khalid al Buraiki managed to

reduce the difference by scoring a goal for Al Shabab in the second minute of stoppage time. Despite Al Shabab's pressure in the second half, Al Khabourah held on for the win.

According to the results of the first round, Al Seeb tops the general standings of the Omani League teams after the first round with 3 points and a goal difference from four other teams that achieved victory, namely Sohar, Al Khabourah, Oman and Al Nahda.

MARKRAM, VERREYNNE PUT SOUTH AFRICA IN CHARGE OF 2ND TEST

Providence, Guyana: Half-centuries by Aiden Markram at the top of the innings and Kyle Verreynne at the end of the day put South Africa in charge of the second Test against the West Indies on Friday.

At stumps on the second day, the Proteas were 223 for five in their second innings, for an overall lead of 239 runs.

Having dismissed the home side for 144 in the morning session to earn a nominal 16-run first innings lead, the Proteas go into day three looking to Verreynne and all-rounder Wiaan Mulder to further extend a sixth-wicket partnership that has already realised 84 runs.

After 17 wickets tumbled on a frenetic opening day, day two saw a return to regular Test match programming with the typical ebbs and flows of a long, energy-sapping day.

Starting the morning at 97 for seven in reply to South Africa's first innings total of 160, Jason Holder's unbeaten 54 (88 balls, six fours and one six) was vital in getting the home side closer to their opponents' first day effort.

He put on 40 for the last wicket with considerable assistance from local hero



Aiden Markram (L) and Kyle Verreynne (2L) of appeal for an lbw against Shamar Joseph (R) of West Indies. — AFP

Shamar Joseph.

Buoyed by a five-wicket haul on his first day of senior international cricket in his homeland, Joseph took advantage of being dropped first ball to belt 25 with four fours and one six before falling leg-before to left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj.

"I was just trying to eke out as many runs as we could," said Holder at the end of the day.

"First session tomorrow is obviously crucial for us. The most important thing is not to let the runs get too far away, let them sweat a little bit more for

their runs, and I believe, with the amount of time left in the game, that we can chase anything they give us."

- Verreynne, Mulder in runs
- With the first innings of both teams very much dominated by the bowlers, Markram and opening partner Tony de Zorzi changed the tone of the match with an attacking start to the second innings.

West Indies' bowlers pulled back the scoring rate deeper into the afternoon session and it was Jayden Seales who eventually separated the pair after they had

put on 79 when de Zorzi (39) feathered a catch to wicketkeeper Joshua da Silva.

Their discipline brought greater rewards at the start of the final session as South Africa lost four wickets for 19 runs to be in trouble at 139 for five, a slide triggered by Gudakesh Motie's dismissal of Markram for 51 (108 balls, six fours).

Seales (3 for 52) and left-arm orthodox spinner Motie (2 for 61) led the Caribbean side's fightback and the West Indies sensed the chance to dismiss South Africa before the end of the day.

However wicketkeeper-batsman Verreynne, whose unbeaten 50 has come off 71 balls and included seven fours, found a resolute partner in Mulder, the all-rounder following up his haul of four for 32 in the West Indies first innings with a determined 34 not out. Notwithstanding the need to preserve their wickets first and foremost, both looked for opportunities to score and Mulder did anything but shut up shop in the day's final two overs as he hoisted Motie and occasion left-arm spinner Kavem Hodge for the two sixes of his innings so far. — AFP

OMAN U-17 FOOTBALL TEAM KICKS OFF TURKEY TRAINING CAMP

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

The Oman Under-17 football team commenced their training sessions in the underway overseas camp in Turkey on Friday. The purpose of the preparatory gathering is to ensure the players readiness ahead of the upcoming's assignment represented by West Asian Championship which will begin on September 2 and 2025 AFC U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers in October. The camp will run until August 25 and for a period of ten days.

The head coach of the national team Anwar al Habsi focused on the earlier training sessions on recovery exercises after the trip to Turkey. Also, the players trained on various technical sides beside the implementation of some tactical sessions.

It is expected that the junior national team will play three friendly matches as the head coach will implement several playing techniques beside giving chances for the players to evaluate their technical levels and to gain the players with more experience of international games ahead of the forthcoming events.

Ahead of the team's existing camp, the national team had an internal gathering in the past weeks included two domestic games against Seeb and Nizwa U-19 clubs.

The junior Red Warriors won against Seeb club by 3-0. The first goal came by Seeb's defender through an own goal while Osama al Maamari and Ahmed al Omrani netted the goals for Oman team. Then, the team they registered a 1-0 victory over Nizwa club. The only goal in the match came by Ahmed al Omrani. In all the warm



up games, head coach Anwar al Habsi provided chances for the squad to play the games and select the final squad for the next assignments.

Oman's Under-17 football team closest participation will be at the 11th edition of the West Asian Championship which will take place in Jordan from September 2 to 11. The tournament will feature participation of nine teams which will be distributed into three groups. Oman U-17 team will play against Yemen and Saudi Arabia in Group B while Group A will comprise from the hosts Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon while Bahrain will secure slot against Syria and Palestine teams in Group C.

Oman begins their group matches at the West Asian tournament with a match against defending champions Yemen on September 2 on the opening day and then meets Saudi Arabia on September 4. The topper from each group will advance to the semifinal besides the best second-placed team among the three groups. Oman junior Red Warriors will eye to book slot at 2025 AFC U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers. Oman team will compete against Tajikistan, Guam and host Singapore in Group J for the 2025 AFC U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers.



SCORES AS LIVERPOOL BEGIN SLOT ERA WITH WIN AT IPSWICH

IPSWICH, United Kingdom: Arne Slot got off to a winning Premier League start as Liverpool manager thanks to two quickfire goals from Diogo Jota and Mohamed Salah in a 2-0 win at newly-promoted Ipswich on Saturday.

Slot has the unenviable task of succeeding Jurgen Klopp at Anfield, but the Dutchman will have been heartened by a commanding second-half performance.

“The first taste in the first half was maybe as expected because they were all on top of us, very aggressive. Second half was a joy to watch,” said Slot.

Ipswich were riding the crest of a wave after back-to-back promotions and a return to the Premier League for the first time in 22 years.

Celebrity fan and minority owner Ed Sheeran was in attendance at Portman Road, although the singer-songwriter had to leave at half-time to attend a gig in Serbia.

Sheeran saw the best of the Tractor Boys, who were far from overawed by their illustrious opponents early on.

Omari Hutchinson had a shot blocked inside two minutes before Jacob Greaves headed the best chance of the first half too close to Alisson Becker.

Slot is the only new face at Anfield as Liverpool are



Liverpool’s Mohamed Salah celebrates scoring their second goal with Luis Diaz and Diogo Jota. – Reuters

the only side in the Premier League yet to make a signing in the transfer window.

The need for some fresh faces was shown in a sloppy and slow first 45 minutes on the ball.

However, Slot’s half-time team talk did the trick as the Reds were a different side after the break and could have run out far more convincing winners.

“First thing was we don’t have to speak about tactics if you lose so many duels,” added

Slot. “I think we needed to win the long balls through the air. That helped and gave us control. I don’t think Ipswich could keep up with the tempo in the second half.”

Greaves needed to make a vital clearance to prevent Salah’s effort curling in at the far corner.

But Liverpool also had a narrow escape as a potential penalty for a Virgil van Dijk push on Liam Delap was ruled out for a marginal offside in

the build-up.

Luis Diaz missed a glorious chance to open the scoring when he scooped over from close range after wonderful play from Trent Alexander-Arnold and Dominik Szoboszlai to tee up the Colombian.

Alexander-Arnold’s teasing cross was then headed wide by Jota with the goal gaping.

Liverpool’s pressure finally told on the hour mark as another defence-splitting pass from Alexander-Arnold

opened up Ipswich and Salah unselfishly squared for Jota to make amends for his earlier miss.

Five minutes later it was 2-0 as Salah pounced to score for the ninth time on the opening weekend of the season for Liverpool after a one-two with Szoboszlai.

Ipswich goalkeeper Christian Walton made a string of saves in the closing stages, notably from Salah and Conor Bradley, to prevent a more embarrassing opening day defeat.

Kieran McKenna’s men had been unbeaten at home in the league for nearly 12 months.

But Ipswich were given an early lesson in the gulf in quality between the Championship and Premier League.

Things will not get any easier for Ipswich next weekend when they travel to defending champions Manchester City.

Liverpool, on the other hand, have the chance to build up some early momentum under Slot.

Either side of a trip to Manchester United next month, they face Brentford, Nottingham Forest, Bournemouth, Wolves and Crystal Palace in their next six Premier League games before the October international break. — AFP



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Oman issues around 2,800 e-commerce licenses in H1 2024

MUSCAT: The Oman Business Platform of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has completed 487,300 transactions in the first half of 2024, while the number of automatic licenses submitted in the same period of the current year amounted to 195,556 licenses.

The number of non-automatic licenses issued through the Platform was 6,061 in the first half of this year, and the number of e-commerce licenses was 2,747 licenses during the same period in 2024.

MoCIIP through the Oman Business Platform aims to facilitate the procedures for starting businesses and encourage investors to establish various projects that support the national economy and enhance economic activity, in addition to improving and facilitating business for investors, so that they can apply the best international practices through the platforms, as it is a single point of access to all electronic government services.

Mubarak bin Mohammed al Dohani, Director General of Commerce and Head of the Digital Transformation Team at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said: Oman Business Platform provides many facilities and services to investors, bringing the number of services provided to about 50 electronic services that contribute to enhancing the



The MoCIIP through the Oman Business Platform aims to facilitate the procedures for starting businesses and encourage investors.

business environment. Statistics showed an increase in downloads of the Oman Business Platform application via smart devices, reaching 7,245 downloads of the application, including 3,209 on the Android version and 4,036 on the “IOS” version.

He pointed out that the services provided through the Platform include the service of certificates of origin for Arab, Singaporean, and AFTA countries, services for updating investor data, registering patents and registering industrial models, licenses for the free zone in Salalah and Suhar, visual documentation for transferring ownership of the commercial register, the freelance work service, marketing and promotion activity through social media sites, reducing fees for the foreign investment register and treating it as an Omani investor.

The service of requesting to change the legal form from a sole proprietorship to a commercial company has also been launched, in addition to the service of evaluating the satisfaction of beneficiaries of self-services electronically through the Platform.

MoCIIP in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Municipalities Sector in the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, through the Oman Business Platform, launched electronic services in the private school education sector and launched the service of issuing commercial signs by integrating this service into the service of applying for economic activity licenses when registering the new branch of the place of practicing activities.

The number of transactions completed through the self-service last year amounted was 280,311, while the number of transactions completed through the free zones (Sohar - Duqm — Al Mazunah) during the past year was 653 transactions, and the number of transactions completed through law firms last year was 3,898 transactions, and the number of transactions completed through Sanad offices during the year 2023 was 377,746.

Oman’s first solar panel manufacturing project launched at Suhar

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Ecoprogetti SRL, a leading European supplier of machinery for solar panel manufacturing plants around the world, has announced the successful completion of the production line of Oman’s first solar PV project.

The Omani client is Sheida Industries LLC, which has established the country’s maiden solar panel manufacturing plant at Suhar Industrial City. Sheida Solar, as the new plant is called, is set to be the first of a growing handful of investments targeted the production of solar photovoltaic (PV) systems, and related hardware, for Oman’s mega-billion dollar renewable energy and green hydrogen industries.

“We are excited to announce the launch of the first advanced photovoltaic production line in Oman,” said Italy-based Ecoprogetti SRL in a post on Friday. “Sheida Industries LLC is proud to present a 50MW line, now producing 450, 550 and 590 watt panels with state-of-the-art TopCon technology. This significant landmark represents the production of the first solar panel from this state-of-the-art plant located in Suhar. We are thrilled with the results and confident in the bright future this brings to Oman: a future powered by the sun!” Sheida Solar made its debut at the Oman Sustainability Week 2024, which was held in Muscat during April – May this



View of Sheida Solar’s plant at Suhar Industrial City. (Picture courtesy: Ecoprogetti)

year. Julanda al Balushi, Chief Executive Officer, led a team of senior company executives at Sheida Solar’s stall at the event.

Commenting on the outlook for the new company’s commercial success in Oman, Ecoprogetti SRL added: “Under the leadership of Julanda al Balushi, CEO, and with a commitment to sustainability, Sheida Solar is leading the way towards a green future. They are committed to providing high quality solar panels to meet diverse market demands and build a sustainable environment for future generations.” While Sheida Solar is expected to target the small and medium-scale solar PV market, newer solar plants announced in recent markets will have an eye on major solar PV and green hydrogen schemes planned in Oman and the wider region in the coming years.

Just last month, Q-SUN – a leading Chinese solar PV tech company – announced the signing of an agreement with an Omani firm for the joint development of a 10-gigawatt (GW) capacity solar module factory in the country.

Omantel unveils new data centre in Dhofar Governorate

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 17

Omantel, the leading telecommunications company in Oman, has announced the launch of the second-largest data centre in the region, located in Salalah. This new centre is part of the company’s strategy to enhance the digital infrastructure in the Sultanate of Oman, equipped with the latest technologies to support the rapid growth in demand for data services.

The launch was marked during the Oman Information Technology Forum held at the Millennium Resort Salalah under the auspices of High Highness Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, on Friday.

Hosted by Omantel, the event included a presentation by Talal bin Said al Maamari, CEO of Omantel, in which he highlighted the digital sector in the Sultanate of Oman in general and in Dhofar



The new data centre will be interconnected with over 10 new submarine cables connecting Salalah to Asia and Europe, along with three relay centres to provide efficient network support services (Picture for illustration only).

Governorate in particular, and the innovative services and solutions provided by the company.

According to Omantel, the new data centre will be interconnected with over 10 new submarine cables connecting Salalah to Asia and Europe, along with three relay centres to provide efficient network support services in Salalah and the southern part of Oman.

Notably, this new centre will also host data centres for global companies like Equinix, Facebook, and Google, further establishing Salalah as a key destination for digital infrastructure in the region.

During the forum, a discussion session was held entitled “Challenges related to the adoption of digital technologies in the Sultanate of

Oman.” Dr Amer bin Awad al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Energy Association (OPAL), Lujaina al Kharousiyah, Vice-President of Governance and Regulatory Affairs and Compliance at Omantel, and Laila al Hadhramiyah, Executive Director of the Omani Information Technology Association, took part in the discussion.

The importance of developing the telecommunications infrastructure and providing high-quality Internet services were discussed. The need to enhance technical awareness and develop youth skills in the field of technology to keep pace with rapid digital developments, as citizen’s knowledge of digital technology is vital in our time was stressed. Currently, because technology plays a crucial role in facilitating people’s lives and developing communities where a good understanding of

digital technology contributes to benefiting from electronic services efficiently and easily, saving time and effort, the participants stressed.

A technical exhibition was held on the sidelines of the forum to introduce modern technical solutions such as the national cloud, cybersecurity, Digital Twin solutions, remote control services and digital surveillance cameras.

The forum aimed to inform the audience of the latest technical developments and review the most prominent digital solutions and technologies offered by Omantel.

Through its investments in a number of global technologies, Omantel has been able to provide customers with a range of modern telecom and Internet services, which in turn has contributed directly to the knowledge economy of the Sultanate of Oman and improving the digital sector system.

All-new BMW M5 Touring delivers exceptional dynamics

MUNICH: BMW M GmbH is expanding its offering in the high-performance segment and at the same time pushing ahead with the electrification of its model range. The new BMW M5 Touring combines standout dynamics on the road and track with variable-use interior space for everyday jobs, leisure activities and trips away. This is the third current BMW M car to be powered by an M HYBRID drive system, in which a high-revving V8 engine is boosted by an electric motor with extremely rapid power delivery. Together, the engine and motor generate maximum output of 727 hp and peak torque of 1,000 Nm. The new BMW M5 Touring accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in 3.6 seconds and will put smiles on faces with its outstanding elasticity and unparalleled precision in highly dynamic driving situations.

Exterior design: athletic forms, typical Touring proportions. With a fresh interpretation of the signature M design for high-performance cars, the new BMW M5 Touring clearly expresses its racing-car-inspired character. A particularly high proportion of surfaces painted in body colour and a Black solid finish for the roof create a puristic appearance to go with the familiar proportions of a Touring model. A model-specific side frame design incorporating prominently flared wheel



The vehicle and drive concept of the new BMW M5 Touring lay on an exceptionally multifaceted driving experience.

arches teams up with muscular shoulders and a long-roofline to headline the athletic appearance of the new BMW M5 Touring – and set it apart emphatically from the new BMW 5 Series Touring. M HYBRID drive system combines a free-revving V8 engine with a powerful electric motor. The M HYBRID drive system in the new BMW M5 Touring brings together a 4.4-litre V8 engine and an electric motor integrated into the eight-speed M Steptronic transmission. As well as the latest version of M TwinPower Turbo technology,

the combustion engine also benefits from a cross-bank exhaust mani-fold and optimised oil separation. It develops maximum output of 430 kW/585 hp and peak torque of 750 Nm. The electric motor is from the latest, fifth generation of BMW eDrive technology and produces maximum output of 145 kW/197 hp. Its nominal torque of 280 Nm increases to effective torque at the transmission input of 450 Nm with the help of the pre-gearing stage patented by BMW. M-specific chassis technology delivers compelling dynamics.

Wide range of assistance systems for automated driving and parking. The new BMW M5 Touring comes as standard with a wealth of driver assistance systems, whose functionality is further enhanced by the integrated braking system and networked transverse dynamics management. Standard specification includes front collision warning, Lane Departure Warning including lane return with steering assistance, the Evasion Assistant, the Attentiveness Assistant and the Speed Limit Info system.

As an option, customers can also order their car with the Driving Assistant Professional including Steering and Lane Control Assistant, Active Cruise Control, automatic Speed Limit Assist, traffic light detection and Active Navigation. The likewise optional Parking Assistant Professional allows parking and manoeuvring to be controlled by smartphone from outside the car. Configurable driving experience for everyday driving and track sessions. The M-specific control panel on the centre console offers additional options for customising the driving experience. For example, the Setup button enables direct access to the settings for the drive system, Drivelogic function, chassis, steering, braking energy recuperation intensity. Drivers can use the M buttons on the steering wheel to call up two configurations they have previously programmed for the vehicle setup. M Dynamic Mode – for adjusting the stability control – can also be activated at the touch of a button. DSC can also be fully switched off. Drivers can use the M Mode button to adjust the configuration of the displays and driver assistance systems. In SPORT mode, the interventions from the assistance systems and the content shown on the information display and

BMW Head-Up Display are restricted to just the essential functions required for sporty driving. Progressive sports-car cockpit with M-specific displays. The driver-focused cockpit of the new BMW M5 Touring exudes an authentic racing-car aura with its newly designed M leather steering wheel, M multifunction seats, M-specific readouts on the BMW Curved Display and the standard BMW Head-Up Display. Helping to create an exclusive, premium ambience on board are Merino leather trim, the BMW Interaction Bar, four-zone automatic climate control, M-specific interior lighting with Welcome Animation and a Bowers & Wilkins Surround Sound System. Among the items on the options list are steering wheel heating, active seat ventilation and a panoramic glass sunroof. From spring 2025, customers will also be able to give their cars an additional touch of luxury in the form of BMW Individual Metallic Merino leather trim. The load capacity of the new BMW M5 Touring can be expanded from 500 to a maximum of 1,630 litres. The standard-fitted Comfort Access and automatic tailgate operation enable easy loading and unloading. The maximum trailer load for the optional trailer coupling is 2,000 kg.

Experience luxury on every adventure with Lynk and Co 09

Lynk & Co, renowned for its cutting-edge European technology and innovative designs, is committed to revolutionising the driving experience in Oman. The Lynk & Co 09 SUV, a range model that has shaken up the market, is built for both safety and unparalleled thrill. It has made its mark on Oman's automotive scene, ushering in a new era of driving excellence, advanced technology and unwavering safety standards. The 09 Model: For A Luxury Voyage Lynk & Co 09, is an exquisite MHEV seven-seat full-size SUV that marks a significant milestone in the automobile industry. Combining progressive tech, a head-turning design and comfort, it redefines urban style in Oman. Conquer family adventures and elevate your city experience - the 09 is perfect for every drive. The Perfect SUV Companion The Lynk & Co 09 presents striking exterior shades of gray, black and white. The design transitions from the bold front grille to the meticulously crafted interior, prioritising spacious comfort for extended travels. The Drive-E 2.0 TD T5 turbo engine and BSG system with an 8-speed

automatic transmission combine for a responsive and exciting driving experience, without sacrificing efficiency on your journeys. Beyond performance, it is the ideal companion for family adventures. The spacious interior provides ample legroom for everyone to stretch out, while a user-friendly rear-seat infotainment system keeps passengers entertained on long-journeys. Safety is paramount and the 23 advanced driver-assistance systems, including Lane Change Assist, Emergency Lane Keeping Assistant with Rear Car Detection and Blind Spot Detection, provide peace of mind on every mile. This tech-forward SUV equips a cutting-edge Smart Connectivity & Infotainment System, featuring a user-friendly interface that caters to the most discerning driver. The expansive 12-inch+6-inch centre touchscreen and crystal-clear Head-Up Display put information at your fingertips, while the premium 14-speaker BOSE Audio System elevates every journey with immersive sound. It prioritises your comfort with plush, spacious seating crafted with luxurious NAPPA leather.



The Lynk & Co 09 SUV, a market disruptor, is built for safety and thrill.

Sohar Port and Freezone celebrates over 400 students in second Maseer programme



The Maseer programme, a collaborative effort between SOHAR and Kidsity.

BUSINESS REPORTER SUHAR, AUGUST 17

Under the auspices of Shaikh Haitham al Shehi, Deputy Wali of Liwa, SOHAR Port and Freezone proudly celebrated the remarkable achievements of over 400 students from Suhar and Liwa during a certification ceremony, marking the successful conclusion of the 2024 Maseer programme. This transformative three-week initiative is dedicated to equipping Oman's youth with essential skills in advanced technologies while fostering awareness of diverse educational and career pathways. The Maseer programme, a collaborative effort between SOHAR and Kidsity, provided specialised training in key areas such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence (AI), cloud data, smart city development,

web development, Arduino programming, 3D CAD, photography and photo editing, and renewable energy solutions. By emphasising hands-on learning and real-world applications, Maseer empowered students with the knowledge necessary to seize emerging digital opportunities. Throughout the programme, participants engaged in a variety of workshops led by experts gaining invaluable insights into the practical applications of emerging technologies. The closing ceremony served as a fitting tribute to the hard work and dedication of the students, showcasing their newfound skills and innovative projects. Aisha al Muqbali, a participant in the Maseer programme expressed her enthusiasm for the experience, stating, "The Maseer

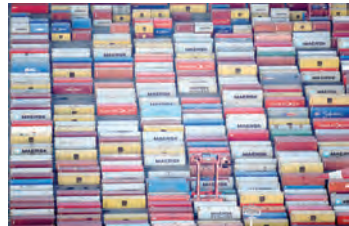
programme was an incredible opportunity to learn new skills that will benefit me in the future. I especially enjoyed the 3D design workshops where we used Tinkercad to create models and then brought them to life by operating 3D printers. The trainer's teaching style made it easy to pick up these new technologies, and my skills in 3D design improved tremendously through this programme. Everything was well-organised and fun, but I would have loved even more time to delve deeper into this fascinating field. Another participant, Mohammed al Bahri, shared, "I joined the programme to improve my English skills, and it turned out to be an incredible experience. The practical workshops were not only engaging but also fun, especially the competitions that made learning exciting. I now feel

much more confident speaking English. I would definitely recommend this programme to my friends because it's enjoyable and offers valuable skills that will help us in the future." The Maseer programme exemplifies SOHAR Port and Freezone's broader commitment to nurturing local talent and empowering Oman's youth as pivotal contributors to the nation's growth and prosperity. By focusing on skill development and providing access to world-class training, this initiative equips participants with vital skills and knowledge that lay a strong foundation for their future careers. In doing so, Maseer supports Oman's goals for economic diversification and sustainable development, ensuring that the next generation is well-prepared to navigate the challenges.



In brief

■ BONN

**GERMAN FISHERMEN'S
2023 HAUL ROSE BY 4% TO
ALMOST 157,000 TONNES**

After two years of declining quantities, German fisheries brought more fish ashore again in 2023. They recorded a landing weight of 156,924 tonnes, about 4 per cent more than the previous year, the Federal Agency for Agriculture and Food (BLE) reported in Bonn on Friday. The increase in fish quantities is attributed mainly to higher catch quotas for schooling fish such as blue whiting. The fishermen achieved revenues of around 182 million (\$200million), slightly less than in 2022, when it was about 187 million. "The reason why the revenue for German fishermen has declined despite increased landing quantities includes the composition of the landings from rather cheaper fish, such as sand eel and horse mackerel, and fewer high-priced fish like edible crab, Norway lobster or turbot," said BLE expert Lutz Wessendorf. — **dpa**

■ WASHINGTON

**US CONSUMER
SENTIMENT REBOUNDS
MORE THAN EXPECTED**

Preliminary data released by the University of Michigan on Friday showed consumer sentiment in the US has improved by more than expected in the month of August.

The University of Michigan said its consumer sentiment index rose to 67.8 in August after falling to 66.4 in July. Economists had expected the index to inch up to 66.9.

The consumer sentiment index regained ground after hitting its lowest level since November 2023 in the previous month.

"With election developments dominating headlines this month, sentiment for Democrats climbed 6 per cent in the wake of Harris replacing Biden as the Democratic nominee for president," said Surveys of Consumers Director Joanne Hsu. — **dpa**

■ BENGALURU

**BITCOIN RISES
5.17% TO \$59,609**

Bitcoin, the world's biggest and best-known cryptocurrency, rose 5.17 per cent to \$59,609 at 20:13 GMT on Friday.

Bitcoin, the world's biggest and best-known cryptocurrency, is up 54.8 per cent from the year's low of \$38,505 on January 23. — **Reuters**

Oman-made flanges set to enter European market



The flanges are approved as per the global requirements and as per the main exploration & production (E&P) companies in Oman.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

Made in Oman flanges manufactured by Hema Energy's subsidiary, Oman Flanges, are set to enter the European market. This expansion represents a significant milestone for Oman Flanges, which has established itself as a reputable manufacturer since its inception in 2015. With the capability to produce flanges that meet ASME standards up to class #2500, and sizes ranging from ½" to 12", the company is well-equipped to meet the demands of its new target market. ASME, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, sets codes and standards for mechanical devices.

Central to this ambitious expansion is the partnership between Omani company Hema Energy and Oman Reservoir Services (ORS). Last week, Hema Energy and ORS signed a partnership agreement which aims to facilitate the entry into Norway by leveraging mutual strengths in product exchange and market intelligence.

In an interview with *Observer*, Azzan bin Moghrob al Asmi, Acting Group Managing Director of Hema Energy, said, "One of the high-demand products in the energy industry is flanges, which we proudly produce from our facility in Nizwa. Our products are approved as per the global requirements and as per the main exploration & production (E&P) companies in Oman." However, entering the European



Azzan al Asmi, Acting Group Managing Director of Hema Energy.

market poses its own set of challenges. Market intelligence is a primary obstacle that the partnership aims to overcome. Oman Reservoir Services' expertise will be instrumental in navigating this complex landscape. Al Asmi explained, "The main challenge is market intelligence, which our partner will support us to achieve and to start getting more into exporting our products to Europe." Another critical aspect of this expansion is ensuring compliance with European regulatory and quality standards. Oman Flanges has proactively conducted thorough checks against various European standards and confirmed compliance. Engaging with the Italian embassy in Oman has further solidified their commitment to meeting these exacting requirements. "We have also started to communicate with Italy via the Italian embassy in Oman to explore the opportunities across the two countries," Al Asmi noted.

The initial feedback from European clients has been

promising. Oman Flanges received a letter of acceptance regarding its product standards and is preparing to ship samples to Norway for testing. This positive reception underscores the company's dedication to stringent quality control and adherence to international standards.

Hema Energy has ambitious plans for Oman Flanges in Europe. The long-term vision includes establishing Europe as a primary export destination for their products. This expansion is not merely about selling flanges; it signifies a notable advancement in Oman's manufacturing industry. "The long-term plan is to have Europe as one of our main lines of export, which I believe will demonstrate how Oman has moved forward in the manufacturing industry," Al Asmi shared. In addition to flanges, there are plans to expand the current facility to produce other essential products for the energy sector.

The partnership between Hema Energy and Oman Reservoir Services will be crucial in this journey. Their mutual agreement is expected to pave the way for Oman's presence in numerous other countries, enhancing the global footprint of Omani manufacturing. "The mutual agreement between the two companies will help in expanding the presence of Oman in many other countries, which we are all looking for," Al Asmi concluded.



NON-OIL SECTOR GIVES A BOOST TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) data for the first quarter of this year showed continued expansion in non-oil activities, which were a major source of economic growth, with an increase of by 6.5 per cent for agriculture and fishing activities, 5.7 per cent for industrial activities and 3.9 per cent for service activities compared to the same period in 2023.

The Ministry of Economy said that the contribution of non-oil activities to the GDP during the first quarter, at constant prices, amounted to RO 6.8 billion, while at current prices it amounted to about RO 7.2 billion.

The Ministry indicated that the contribution of agriculture and fishing activities, at constant prices, represents 2.3 per cent of the gross domestic product, industrial activities 20.8 per cent, and service activities 48.2 per cent, and at current prices the contribution of the three sectors to the gross domestic product represents 2.7 per cent, 19.3 per cent and 46.9 per cent, respectively.

The Ministry added that the transportation and storage sector continues its good performance over the years of the tenth plan, recording a real growth of 7.8 per cent during the first quarter of this year, and its contribution to the GDP reached 6.4 per cent, while mining and quarrying activities recorded a growth of 0.9 per cent and its contribution to the GDP reached 0.6 per cent, and the growth of accommodation and food services activities decreased by 12 per cent, and its contribution to the GDP reached 1.5 per cent, and the growth of the education sector rose to 3.2 per cent with a contribution of 4.5 per cent to the GDP. In other economic sectors, the construction sector has been on the road to recovery since the end of last year, with growth rising to 2.7 per cent in the first quarter of this year compared to a 1.3 per cent decline in the same period last year, which provided significant support to GDP growth given the size of the construction sector's contribution, which amounted to 8.3 per cent of GDP.

The wholesale and retail trade sector also achieved a growth of 5.8 per cent and its contribution to the GDP increased to 8.1 per cent. The growth of financial and insurance activities increased by 5.6 per cent with a contribution to the GDP of 5.8 per cent. As for oil activities, they witnessed a decline of 2.4 per cent during the first quarter compared to a growth rate of 5.1 per cent during the same period last year, due to the decline in oil production and a decrease in the growth rate of crude oil activity by 3.3 per cent.

The Ministry said that the economic growth data for the first quarter monitors the good performance of the non-oil sectors, which achieved real growth of 4.5 per cent compared to the same period in 2023, which balanced the effects of the decline in the added value of oil activities, and contributed to the continued real growth of the Omani economy at a rate of 1.7 per cent.

The tenth five-year plan (2021-2025) aims to raise the contribution of the transportation and logistics sector to 7.5 per cent, the tourism sector to 3 per cent, the fisheries sector to 2 per cent, the agriculture sector to 1.5 per cent, the mining sector to 0.7 per cent, and the education and scientific research sector to 6.2 per cent.

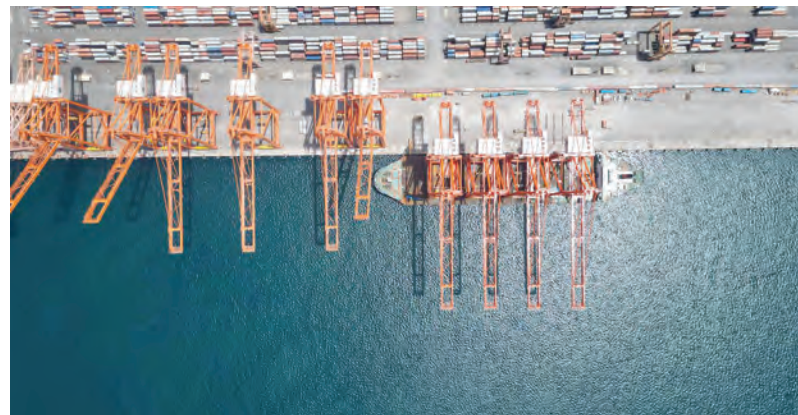
Forecasts for 2025, the last year of the tenth five-year plan, indicate that the GDP growth rate will continue to rise, supported by the continued momentum of growth in the non-oil sectors, which are expected to grow to about 3.2 per cent. The economic growth prospects are also enhanced by the expected recovery of oil activities during the coming period, in light of the OPEC Plus group's move to gradually increase oil production starting from the end of 2024.

Salalah Port handles 1.7m containers in H1 2024

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 17

Port of Salalah has reported impressive figures for the first half of 2024, with the handling of approximately 1.7 million standard containers and 11.6 million tonnes of general cargo. This robust performance has resulted in a net profit of RO 1.570 million, reflecting the port's growing efficiency and operational success. To support its expanding capabilities, the port has recently added 10 new cranes to its fleet, raising the total number of cranes to 27.

Eng Mohammed al Maashani, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Salalah Port, provided insights into the port's current and



Salalah Port has recently added 10 new cranes to its fleet, raising the total number of cranes to 27.

future strategies. According to Al Maashani, the port is already linked with many of the world's largest shipping lines and is actively working to attract additional global shipping partners. This initiative aims to

enhance the port's connectivity and solidify its position in the international shipping industry.

One of the key projects underway at Salalah Port is the expansion of its container terminal. The port is set to

increase its capacity to 6 million standard containers annually by the first quarter of 2025. This significant expansion is part of the port's broader strategy to accommodate growing trade volumes and strengthen its role as a critical logistics hub in the region.

Al Maashani emphasised the strategic geographic location of Salalah Port, which serves as a crucial link for re-exporting goods between Europe, Asia, and Africa.

The port's location not only facilitates global trade but also enhances its appeal to international businesses and investors. The port's high operational efficiency and its ability to connect major

global markets contribute to increased business confidence locally and make Salalah an attractive destination for foreign investment.

The port's role extends beyond its immediate operational successes. It plays a vital part in bolstering the local economy of Dhofar Governorate by providing exceptional connectivity for both importers and exporters. This enhanced connectivity supports investment in key areas such as Raysut Industrial City, the Salalah Free Zone, and the Al Mazunah Free Zone.

Salalah Port's continued growth and strategic initiatives are expected to further boost the region's economic development and global trade engagement.

AI hype fades as crypto regulation advances

Global stock markets have faced significant challenges in the past two weeks, driven by concerns over escalating interest rates and the looming threat of an economic slowdown. This turbulence has been particularly evident in the technology sector, where investor sentiment has taken a hit, leading to a noticeable pullback.

Artificial intelligence (AI) continues to dominate the investment landscape, but recent filings reveal a surprising trend: Wall Street's billionaire investors are steadily selling off shares of Nvidia, the leading AI hardware provider. Despite the company's massive gains this year, fuelled by demand for its AI-powered GPUs, a growing number of prominent money managers are trimming their stakes, raising concerns about the sustainability of Nvidia's meteoric rise.

Nvidia's exceptional performance in 2023 is undeniable. The company's stock price has skyrocketed by 709 per



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WITH BUSINESSES STILL FIGURING OUT HOW TO MONETISE THEIR AI INVESTMENTS, THE AI BOOM COULD BE THE NEXT BUBBLE WAITING TO BURST

cent, translating to a market cap increase of over \$2.5 trillion. This remarkable growth is attributed to the surging demand for its data-centre hardware, particularly the H100 GPU, which has become the cornerstone of generative AI solutions and large language models. With Nvidia holding a near-monopoly in the AI GPU market, the company has been able to command premium pricing, significantly boosting its profit margins.

However, the latest round of 13F filings paints a different picture. Seven prominent billionaire asset managers, including Ken Griffin of Citadel Advisors and David Tepper of Appaloosa, reduced their Nvidia holdings during the June-ended quarter. This trend of selling continues a pattern observed in previous quarters, raising questions about the underlying reasons behind this exodus.

Several factors could explain this shift in investor sentiment. Historical trends suggest that early-stage bubbles are common in next-big-thing technologies.

With businesses still figuring out how to monetise their AI investments, the AI boom could be the next bubble waiting to burst. If this occurs, Nvidia, as the leading AI hardware provider, could face significant repercussions.

Although Nvidia currently dominates the AI GPU market, increased competition looms on the horizon. Several external competitors are entering the market with their own AI-GPUs. Additionally, some of Nvidia's largest customers are developing their own AI chips in-house, potentially reducing their reliance on Nvidia's hardware.

US export restrictions on high-powered AI chips to China could also significantly impact Nvidia's revenue. These restrictions could cost Nvidia billions of dollars in sales.

Further adding to the concerns, Nvidia's own executives and board members haven't purchased company stock on the open market since December 2020. CEO Jensen Huang has even been selling

his shares recently. This lack of insider buying suggests a lack of confidence in the company's future prospects.

Finally, while Nvidia's forward price-to-earnings ratio may seem reasonable, its trailing-12-month price-to-sales ratio reached alarming levels in June, comparable to the peaks observed in companies like Cisco Systems and Amazon before the dot-com bubble burst. This raises concerns about the sustainability of Nvidia's current valuation.

In contrast to the cooling sentiment around AI, the cryptocurrency market, although experiencing its share of volatility, is witnessing a strengthening of its foundations.

Governments worldwide are increasingly recognising the legitimacy and potential of digital assets, paving the way for greater integration into the global economy.

A landmark ruling in Dubai, recognising cryptocurrency as a legitimate form of salary payment, is a prime example of this trend. This ruling, in case

number 1739 of 2024, overturned a previous decision from 2023 and highlights a growing recognition of the evolving financial landscape within the Web3 economy.

The case revolved around an employee whose contract stipulated a monthly salary in both fiat currency and EcoWatt tokens. The employer's failure to pay the token portion of the salary for six months led to the legal dispute.

In the initial ruling, the court acknowledged the inclusion of tokens in the contract but did not enforce payment, citing a lack of a clear method for valuing the cryptocurrency in fiat terms.

However, the court's stance changed in 2024, ruling in favour of the employee and ordering the payment of the crypto salary as per the contract, without conversion to fiat. This decision, according to UAE lawyer Irina Heaven, showcases a "progressive approach" towards integrating digital currencies into the country's legal and economic framework.

Summer market shock not quite over as investors brace for more turmoil

Big investors are bracing for this summer's stock market rout to run into the autumn, fearing a broader wave of selling will follow the turmoil sparked by US recession concerns and the Bank of Japan wrong-footing currency speculators.

The sudden reversal of crowded equity and foreign exchange trades generated vicious feedback loops of price drops, volatility and hedge fund selling has eased, with world stocks almost 2 per cent higher so far this week.

But asset managers overseeing hundreds of billions of dollars of investments said they were more likely to carry on selling stocks than buy back in, with signs of weakness in the US jobs market and global consumer trends lowering the bar for market aftershocks.

The buy-the-dip mentality, where investors typically respond to selloffs by making recovery bets, has been replaced by fear.

"It's not simply now a large financial market accident, which maybe we could describe last week as. It's broader than that," said Mahmood Pradhan, a former IMF deputy director and head of global macro at the research arm of Amundi, Europe's largest fund manager.

He expects investors, who according to Bank of America have already cut equity positions and shifted increasingly into cash, to remain cautious.

Michael Kelly, head of multi-asset at PineBridge Investments, which oversees around \$170 billion of client funds, is among those to have reduced his funds' stock market positions and he may pull back further.

"It's going to be very, very volatile in the next two months," he said.

A first US rate cut, expected next month, might be too late to rescue the economy, he added.



NAOMI ROVNICK

The author is a markets correspondent at Thomson Reuters

The VIX measure of expected volatility on Wall Street's S&P 500 and its European equivalent hit multi-year highs last week before easing but a related index continues to send warning signals



The Wall Street entrance to the New York Stock Exchange is seen in New York City, US. – Reuters

Investors' global growth expectations have fallen to eight-month lows.

WHO SELLS NEXT?

A weak US employment report and a shock BOJ rate hike drove the global stock market selloff as volatility linked and trend-following hedge funds headed for the exits and anxious investors herded into government bonds.

The BOJ hike wrecked billions of dollars worth of previously profitable trades where speculators had borrowed yen cheaply to buy higher-return assets like US tech stocks.

About 70 per cent of that carry trade has now been unwound, JP Morgan estimates. But money flows tied to yen-related positions are tough to measure and Amundi's Pradhan said the

possibility of further unwinding is making people quite risk averse. UBS European equity strategy head Gerry Fowler said hedge fund selling was likely over but slower moving mainstream investment managers often take four-to-six weeks to adjust their portfolios.

Those fund managers could be the next to sell, said Edmond de Rothschild Investment Partners multi-asset portfolio manager Marie de Leyssac, but would do so based on economic data.

While she doesn't see a savage US slowdown as likely, she wasn't buying stocks, instead preferring put options, which insure against equity losses by paying out when markets fall.

Pension funds would also further sell equity exposure and move into fixed income,

Goldman Sachs strategist Scott Rubner said in a note, adding that the second half of September has been the worst period of the year for Wall Street since 1950.

TURBULENCE

Russell Investments chief US investment strategist Paul Eitelman said another weak US jobs report would have the potential to spark fresh volatility.

Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell's speech at next week's annual Jackson Hole central bank conference and artificial intelligence giant Nvidia's August 28 earnings report are other market risk events.

"Volatility makes it hard to increase exposure even if you think it fundamentally makes sense," Pictet Asset Management senior multi-asset strategist Arun

Sai said.

Money managers' risk mandates tend to prevent them from buying equities when prices are fluctuating widely.

The VIX measure of expected volatility on Wall Street's S&P 500 and its European equivalent hit multi-year highs last week before easing but a related index continues to send warning signals.

The VVIX, another options market gauge that rises when traders expect the VIX itself to be turbulent, is trading above the 100 mark, suggesting the market's wild ride is not yet over.

"Until you see the VVIX get below 100 you should have it on your radar. It is the key metric at this point," Citi's head of equity trading strategy Stuart Kaiser said. — Reuters

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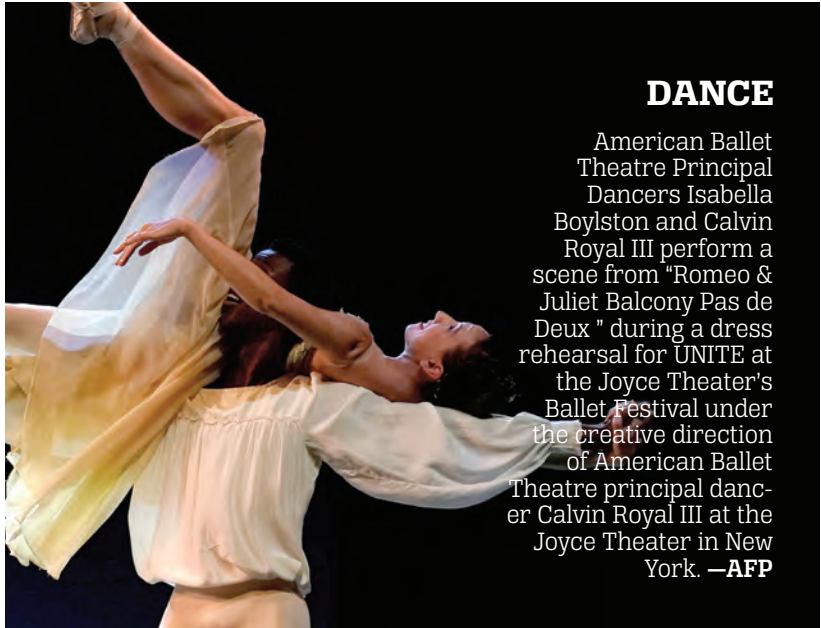
US-British actress Lily Collins attends Netflix's "Emily in Paris" Season 4, Part 1, premiere at the Egyptian Theatre in Los Angeles. — AFP

EMILY IN PARIS



DANCE

American Ballet Theatre Principal Dancers Isabella Boylston and Calvin Royal III perform a scene from "Romeo & Juliet Balcony Pas de Deux" during a dress rehearsal for UNITE at the Joyce Theater's Ballet Festival under the creative direction of American Ballet Theatre principal dancer Calvin Royal III at the Joyce Theater in New York. —AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

US actor Cailee Spaeny poses on the red carpet upon arrival to attend the UK gala event for "Alien: Romulus" at Cineworld in Leicester square, central London. —AFP



CULTURE

A performer poses in a traditional Simb costume during a cultural show at Ngor in Dakar. The Simbs perform dances and rituals throughout the year in Senegal for various occasions, such as Independence Day etc. — AFP



ART

A visitor views artwork at the exhibition "To Catch a Fleeting Moment: 150 Years of Impressionism", displayed in a "protected space" at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, due to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas and ongoing regional tensions with Iran and Hezbollah. — AFP



art & life

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A YOUNG OMANI'S PASSION FOR CAPTURING THE NIGHT SKY

Since he was young, Ali al Kindi has been fascinated by the universe, thus beginning his career as an astrophotographer. In this feature, he shares the challenges of being an effective astrophotographer and the satisfaction he gets whenever the beauty of the cosmos is preserved on film... P20

DISCOVERY

Archaeologists unearth bodies in Peruvian temple up to 3,800 years old

ARCHAEOLOGISTS HAVE unearthed four human remains believed to be more than 3,000 years old in a stretch of barren land in northern Peru that appears to have housed a ceremonial temple honouring the gods of an ancient local culture. The funeral bundles were found nestled between some mud and stone walls near a valley in the dry, coastal Viru province in the South American nation's La Libertad region, home to many major

ancient cultures over the millennia. Feren Castillo, an archaeologist at the National University of Trujillo in Peru who heads a research project in the area, said the remains and the walls were likely between 3,100 and 3,800 years old. "This allows us to have a clear idea of the cultural evolution in this area," Castillo said, adding that finding four remains in such a small space meant there could well be many more buried there. "It also shows the importance of the space. People have for a long time wanted to be buried in temples because these are very sacred spaces to them," Castillo added. Peru, rich in archaeological sites of various ages, was home more than 500 years ago to the Inca empire that dominated a sprawling territory in the southern part of the continent from southern Ecuador and Colombia to central Chile until the arrival of Spanish conquistadors. Researchers in La Libertad last month announced the discovery of the skeletons of 11 "high class" dating to 800 years ago. These were discovered near Chan Chan, the largest mud citadel in the Americas, built by the Chimu culture whose rule spanned swathes of Peru's northern coast. — Reuters



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ENTERTAINMENT



Pedro Almodovar to be honoured at San Sebastian festival

OSCAR-WINNING SPANISH director Pedro Almodovar will receive a lifetime achievement award at Spain's San Sebastian film festival next month, organisers said Wednesday.

The 74-year-old will pick up the Donostia award for "extraordinary contributions to the world of cinema" on September 26 before the screening of his first feature film in English, "The Room Next Door", starring Tilda Swinton and Julianne Moore.

Swinton, who also appeared in his short film "The Human Voice", will present him with the distinction.

"Almodovar's cinema is remarkable for the writing of its female characters, the directing of its actors, its courage in addressing subjects such as the universe, religion, addiction and historical memory, and his political commitment," organisers said in a statement.

They also praised his "artistic talent and his instantly recognisable visual style — his personality shines through from the art direction to the soundtrack".

Almodovar's "All About My Mother" about a woman struggling with the sudden death of her teenage son, picked up the best foreign language Oscar in 1999.

He won the screenwriting Oscar for his 2002 movie "Talk to Her", about two men who form an unlikely bond when both their girlfriends are in comas.

Almodovar, who is a regular at the festival, has in previous years handed out Donostias to Al Pacino, Woody Allen and Antonio Banderas — one of his frequent collaborators.

"This year they are giving it to me, and I am delighted and grateful," Almodovar said in the statement.

"I mean it, it's an honour. San Sebastian is one of the cities where the cinema is celebrated with enormous enthusiasm."

Organisers announced in May that Australian actor Cate Blanchett would also receive the Donostia award at this year's festival, the highest-profile movie event in the Spanish-speaking world.

She will also feature on the main poster of the 72nd San Sebastian film festival which runs from September 20 to 28. — **AFP**

'Jackpot' movie inspired by martial arts icon Jackie Chan

FOR DIRECTOR PAUL Feig, the comedy film "Jackpot" is what he calls "the Lost Jackie Chan movie," referring to the work of the famous Hong Kong actor and martial artist.

"His (Jackie Chan's) characters are always classically somebody who didn't want to be in the situation, in over their head, trying to get out of it, not being aggressive, just trying to fight their way out of something," said Feig.

"And that just checked every box for me. And his movies are really funny too, but they also have danger and art. So, there it was," he added.

"Jackpot" is an Amazon MGM Studios action-comedy starring Awkwafina and John Cena as their characters Katie and Noel work together in a dystopian Los Angeles where a "Grand Lottery" winner can be legally murdered before sundown by someone wishing to claim their multibillion-dollar jackpot.

The movie arrives in US theatres on Thursday.

One thing that helped bring the action-packed story to life was Cena, who is also a wrestler, being able to do some of his own stunts.

"I'm not taking anything away from our stunt team or my tremendously talented double, Spencer Thomas, but the action in 'Jackpot' was a lot of the skills that I can offer a coordinator," Cena said.

"This one was throwing big haymakers and tossing people around, and a lot of the stuff I do on WWE as well as a lot of stunt driving, which I love driving, too," "The Suicide Squad" actor added.

While his previous experience came in handy when filming "Jackpot", there was no time for Cena to bond with co-lead Awkwafina before they began shooting.

"We did not have time to build rapport before filming, but we actually ended up building great rapport while we filmed," Cena said.

Similarly, Awkwafina found that getting to know Cena while creating the movie was fulfilling.

"I loved working with John Cena. He's really one of the most professional guys I've ever worked with," the "Crazy Rich Asians" actor said. — **Reuters**

OMANI DOCTOR COMPETES IN HISTORIC MINI COOPER CHAMPIONSHIP

BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

Dr Ahmed Shahrabani, an Omani doctor and tech entrepreneur based in London, is making waves in the world of motorsport. He has competed in the Historic Mini Cooper Championship, proudly representing Oman as the only entrant flying the Omani flag at the event. The race took place at Silverstone on August 17th.

This marks Dr Ahmed's third year in the championship. His inaugural season saw him achieve a 7th-place finish, followed by a 5th-place finish in his second year. This season, he has already secured two 2nd-place finishes, demonstrating steady progress as he continues to elevate the Omani-flagged Mini to the podium.

"I am incredibly proud to represent Oman and believe the country deserves greater recognition on the global stage. Growing up in Oman shaped who I am today, and I couldn't be prouder to represent my country as a doctor, technology entrepreneur, founder, and now a semi-professional race car driver," said Dr Ahmed Shahrabani.

Dr Ahmed's passion for motorsport began in his childhood, with weekend visits to the go-karting track at the Oman Automobile Association racing circuit. "As a child, I was always



building model race cars and became familiar with the mechanics at a basic level, even constructing petrol-powered remote control cars from scratch to understand the engineering behind them," he recalled.

He earned his driving license in Oman at the age of 18 and frequently embarked on

off-roading adventures in the Empty Quarter and abroad, though these experiences differed greatly from circuit racing. It wasn't until 2020 that Dr. Ahmed began competing in real-life circuit racing.

"I have travelled to Japan multiple times to take lessons in the motorsport series of drifting, both in Fukushima and



near Tokyo, and have also been learning the Japanese language over the past two years. However, given the rich history of motor racing in the UK and its prestigious circuits, I chose to specialise in circuit racing," he explained.

In 2022, Dr. Ahmed obtained his racing license after passing the exam at Thruxton Circuit in England. He then purchased a classic Mini Cooper, which he meticulously converted into a race car. "I modified everything, from the engine and gearbox to the fire safety system," he added.

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A YOUNG OMANI'S PASSION FOR CAPTURING THE NIGHT SKY

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

In 2019, under the cover of night, Ali al Kindi ventured out with his camera and tripod, driven by a curiosity that has since evolved into an unwavering passion for astrophotography.

For Ali, capturing the intricate beauty of astronomical images is a form of psychological therapy. As an accomplished astrophotographer and a member of the Oman Astronomical Society, he reflects, "These images invite contemplation of celestial objects far beyond our Earth—nebulae, galaxies, stars, and planets."

Becoming a professional astrophotographer is not as difficult as it may seem. Ali emphasises that acquiring the necessary skills is the first step. "Creating an astronomical image demands considerable time—sometimes up to a week of observation, photography, and meticulous editing with specialised software. Patience is essential. Only a deep passion for this craft can fuel the perseverance needed to overcome challenges and excel. Mastery of image editing tools is also crucial."

One of the greatest challenges in astrophotography is combating light pollution. Ali advises, "To capture clear images, one must venture far from city lights. Even moonlight can interfere with astrophotography, so it's best to choose nights when the moon is absent." Weather conditions also play a significant role, and Ali recommends consulting weather maps to ensure clear skies before embarking on an astronomical excursion.

For beginners, Ali suggests starting with the basics. "Before diving into astrophotography, it's beneficial to experience camping under the stars and observing them with the naked eye—your eyes are like a telescope to the universe. Start using your phone, as some models have settings optimised for capturing stars."

Every awe-inspiring astronomical image often has a story of challenges behind it. One of Ali's favourite photos is of the Milky Way Arch, taken in the Masruq Desert in Al Dhahirah Governorate, Wilayat of Ibb. This image came at a significant risk. "On a hot, night, with scorpions crawling around us, we were determined to capture the galaxy, even though it would rise late. The final image made all the effort worthwhile. We used special lights to spot the scorpions."

Creating an astronomical image involves several stages before it reaches its final form. "After capturing the image with the correct settings, we move on to the processing stage using specialised software. This entire process can take up to a week, so patience is key."

Oman offers an ideal environment for astrophotography, as Ali notes, "The country has many locations free from light pollution, such as the Star-Light Reserve, which provides perfect conditions for photography."

The efforts of the Oman Astronomical Society have significantly contributed to the growth of astrophotography in Oman. Astrophotographers can even turn their hobby into a source of income by selling their images, conducting paid workshops, and organising astronomical trips. "I have a project that supports enthusiasts in this field by organising astronomical trips to teach the basics of astrophotography. Those interested can follow the project on Instagram at @stargazers.om."

Ali also recommends that astrophotography enthusiasts keep track of celestial events using the Astronomy Calendar on seasky.org.

WHAT IS ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY?

Astrophotography is the practice of photographing celestial objects and phenomena, such as stars, planets, galaxies, and nebulae. Combining elements of both art and science, it requires a keen understanding of astronomy and the use of specialised equipment to capture the faint light emitted by distant objects in space.

The history of astrophotography began in 1840 when John William Draper, an American scientist, took the first photograph of the Moon. This pioneering effort marked the beginning of a new era in astronomy, allowing scientists to document and study celestial objects with greater precision. By 1880, Henry Draper, John William's son, captured the first photograph of a nebula—the Orion Nebula—paving the way for deeper exploration of the universe.

Over the 20th century, advances in photographic technology, including the introduction of colour photography and larger telescopes, significantly expanded the capabilities of astrophotographers. The public was captivated by images of planets, stars, and galaxies, many of which were made widely available for the first time.

In recent years, astrophotography has seen a resurgence, fuelled by the availability of high-quality digital cameras with sensitive sensors, which allow for stunning images of the night sky. Digital image processing has further enhanced this field, enabling photographers to produce clearer and more detailed images.

The popularity of astrophotography has also been boosted by social media, where enthusiasts share their work, inspiring a new generation of photographers. This growing trend is further driven by public interest in space exploration and celestial events like eclipses and meteor showers.

Today, astrophotography stands as both a scientific tool and an artistic pursuit, allowing people to connect with the cosmos and capture its breathtaking beauty.

