

P10

AL NASR
COME BACK
TO BEAT AL
RUSTAQ



P13

OMAN ELECTRICITY
CONFERENCE
FOCUSES ON ENERGY
TRANSITION



P20

EMBRACING
THE THRILL
OF SPORT
CLIMBING



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO
PRESIDENT OF CHILE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Gabriel Boric of the Republic of Chile, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Gabriel Boric and the people of Chile.

TAWTEEN PLATFORM
FOR JOB-SEEKERS

Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, presided over the signing ceremony of the Tawteen Platform and the launch of the Recruitment Applications System. This event is part of the ministry's ongoing efforts to enhance employment initiatives in a systematic and well-planned manner with high efficiency within a digital environment that keeps pace with global advancements. Dr Baowain said the platform and the system will contribute to empowering the economic sectors to efficiently and effectively implement the National Employment Strategy. Tawteen is a keystone for enhancing collaboration between the public and private sectors, ensuring commitment to the national employment goals. Tawteen enables companies to follow up on local content plans and ensures commitment to national employment goals.

DETAILS ON P3

STUDENT SHINES IN PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION



Maria bint Mohammed al Rahbiyah, a student from the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), won second place at the individual level in the World Photography Cup for Universities and Higher Education Institutions 2024. Maria al Rahbi is a computer science major at the university's College of Science and a member of the photography group at the Deanship of Student Affairs. She took part in the contest as part of a team representing SQU after the competition was announced to all higher education institutions around the world. **DETAILS ON P2**

LEBANON HIT BY WAVE OF DEADLY PAGER BLASTS

BEIRUT: At least eight people were killed and 2,750 others, including Hezbollah fighters, medics and Iran's envoy to Beirut, were wounded on Tuesday when the pagers they use to communicate exploded across Lebanon, security sources and the Lebanese health minister said.

Lebanon's Information Minister Ziad Makary said the government

condemned the detonation of the pagers as an "Israeli aggression." Hezbollah also blamed Israel for the pager blasts and said it would receive "its fair punishment."

The Israeli military declined to comment on inquiries about the detonations.

A Hezbollah official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the detonation of the pagers was

the "biggest security breach" the group had been subjected to in nearly a year of conflict with Israel.

Hezbollah confirmed in a statement the deaths of at least three people, including two of its fighters. The third person killed was a girl, it said, adding that an investigation was being conducted into the causes of the blasts.

— Reuters

RO 15.4 million
Al Mazyouna
Hospital opens

ONA & NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 17

In line with Oman Vision 2040's strategic goals for the health sector, which aim to provide specialised and high-quality healthcare, implement a decentralised approach to healthcare services, and achieve health security, the Ministry of Health on Tuesday celebrated the inauguration of Al Mazyouna Hospital in Dhofar Governorate.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, in the presence of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, as well as the ministry's Under-Secretaries and a number of officials.

This project, overseen by

the Ministry of Health, aligns with the government's efforts to ensure the provision of quality healthcare services. The RO 15.4 million hospital project covers a built-up area of 13,649 square metres and aims to provide specialised healthcare services.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Moatasem al Maamari, official spokesperson for the Ministry of Health, said: "One of the key targets set by Oman Vision 2040 is achieving universal health coverage. We aim to provide high-quality healthcare services across all governorates of Oman. Today's inauguration of Al Mazyouna Hospital marks a significant national milestone in this regard. The hospital will serve more than 80,000 patients, offering 10 outpatient clinics, 5 wards, 50 beds and a maternity ward. **TURN TO P3**



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FAMILY INCOME BENEFIT DISBURSAL TO BEGIN TODAY

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 17

In a significant move underscoring the Government of Oman's dedication to social justice and improving the standard of living for its citizens, the Social Protection Fund has announced the commencement of disbursing the Family Income Benefit on September 18, 2024.

This initiative aims to offer direct financial support to low-income families, enhancing their economic stability and relieving financial pressures on the most vulnerable households.

The Family Income Benefit is part of a broader package of social programmes designed to strengthen Oman's social safety net. By providing direct financial aid to low-income families, this initiative addresses economic hardships stemming from low earnings or rising living costs.

It seeks to promote social justice by focusing on those most in need, while contributing to a fairer distribution of wealth. This, in turn, helps reduce socio-economic disparities and encourages sustainable development by improving the living conditions of impoverished families.

The Omani government envisions this support fostering social stability and, over time, boosting the productive capacity of families. This is anticipated to contribute to long-term sustainable development, with



Eligible families can submit their applications via a dedicated online platform, where simple forms require information on household income, family size, and any special needs

the ultimate goal of empowering families to become more self-reliant.

The Family Income Benefit targets specific groups identified by the Social Protection Fund, adhering to clearly defined eligibility criteria.

To ensure ease and accessibility, the application process has been streamlined for citizens. Eligible families can submit their applications via a dedicated online platform, where simple forms require information on household income, family size, and any special needs.

Upon receiving the applications, authorities will review and assess eligibility based on pre-established criteria. Monthly payments will then be made directly to the beneficiaries' bank accounts, ensuring swift and efficient delivery of support.

Youssef bin Mohammed

al Abri, Director of Social Protection at the Social Development Fund, stated: "On Wednesday, September 18, 2024, the Family Income Benefit will be disbursed to all eligible families. So far, 12 families qualify, and 700 cases have been registered, with registration still open." While the existing social security pensions will continue to be disbursed for now, they will eventually be replaced by the Family Income Benefit, which offers a higher level of support.

The initiative is expected to have a direct and positive impact on the lives of beneficiary families. By receiving additional financial assistance, low-income families will be better positioned to meet basic needs such as food, education, and healthcare. Beyond economic stability, the initiative aims to alleviate psychological and social stress

experienced by families coping with financial strain.

Maryam al Maskari, a low-income worker and mother of three, praised the government's efforts. "This support comes at a crucial time, especially with the rising cost of living. Thanks to this initiative, I can now provide for my children's basic needs without constantly worrying about monthly expenses," she said.

The Family Income Benefit represents a pivotal part of Oman's strategy to improve its social safety net and enhance citizen welfare. Amid global economic challenges, such initiatives will likely become even more critical in the future.

The government hopes to eventually expand the programme to offer additional support to the most vulnerable groups, with a long-term focus on self-reliance through vocational training and educational opportunities.

Ultimately, the Family Income Benefit serves as a cornerstone in Oman's efforts to strengthen social protection. Through direct financial aid to those in need, the government seeks to improve living standards and reduce the economic burden on vulnerable families.

With its transparent distribution system and well-defined criteria, the initiative is expected to be a highly effective tool in promoting both social and economic development.

ROP warns of fake 'Gulf traffic' fines

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) said that the Directorate General of Criminal Investigations has warned citizens and residents of fraud text messages showing traffic violations in the GCC.

These messages lead them to provide personal and bank details to make payments.

ROP advised everyone not to respond to unknown messages and to avoid disclosing personal and banking data.

It may be noted that as per a unified system, motorists can pay traffic fines acquired in the GCC through the ROP application.

To contest the fine, the motorists can go to the ROP traffic department and lodge a complaint or go to the GCC country where the fine has been registered.

According to the ROP sources, fines of any kind should be paid only through the



ROP has advised everyone not to respond to unknown messages

ROP website and application to avoid being a victim of online fraud.

Last week, Bank Muscat, warned customers to beware of false courier alerts often received as emails or SMSes.

In its warning, the bank said that fake courier notifications can trick one into sharing personal information or making payments.

Health campaign held at Majan University College



MUSCAT: An awareness campaign entitled 'My Body is a Trust' was launched at Majan University College, on Tuesday.

The event was held under the auspices of Shaikh Abdulhamid bin Abdulrahman al Kharousi, Deputy Wali of Muttrah in the presence of Dr Samira al Maimani, Director of the Healthcare Department in Muscat Governorate.

Dr Nabila al Wahaibi, Head of the Health Supervision Office in the Wilayat of Muttrah, delivered a speech in which she explained the importance of instilling the culture of protection and self-care for students emphasising the role of teachers, social workers and school nurses in enhancing students' wellness.

Then, Dr Rahma al Riyami, a family medicine specialist launched the campaign's slogan and identity.

A workshop was held to outline focal points for awareness

of sex education and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) which targeted teachers, social workers and school nurses in the schools of the Wilayat of Muttrah.

The campaign is conducted in cooperation with the Royal Hospital, the Ministry of Social Development and the Directorate of Education in Muscat Governorate and aims to raise awareness about health topics including HIV, healthy food, physical activity, drugs and psychotropic substances and smoking.

The workshop was prepared by certified trainers specialising in education and psychological counselling from the Ministry of Social Development represented by Dr Hilal al Kharousi and Jalila al Numani, certified trainer in HIV and senior nurse specialising in infection control at the Royal Hospital.

Omani student wins 2nd place in FIAP photography competition

MUSCAT: Maria bint Mohammed al Rahbiyah, a student from the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), won second place at the individual level in the World Photography Cup for Universities and Higher Education Institutions 2024.

Maria al Rahbi is a computer science major at the university's College of Science and a member of the photography group at the Deanship of Student Affairs.

She took part in the contest as part of a team representing SQU after the competition was announced to all higher education institutions around the world.

Each institution is allowed to participate with a maximum of 5 students. Each student can



Maria al Rahbi took part in the contest as part of a team representing SQU after the competition was announced to all higher education institutions around the world. - ONA

compete with 4 photos.

The competition was organised by the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP)



and it saw the participation of 88 universities from around the world.

The jury included prominent

specialists in the world of photography, including photographers from National Geographic Society, the Silk Road Photography Organization, and officials from the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP).

It is worth noting that the award will be presented at a ceremony in China in October 2024 as part of similar events that include an international conference and a photography exhibition.

Fifteen of Maria al Rahbi's works of art will be displayed in FIAP wings. On the sidelines of the award ceremony, Maria will participate in a workshop to be attended by international photographers. — ONA

Move to bridge skill gap of Omani youth in Al Batinah North

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, SEPT 17

As part of the Ministry of Education's strategic shift towards diversifying educational pathways, 300 students from Al Batinah North schools have enrolled in technical and vocational education for the 2024-25 academic year.

This initiative is a key step in the ministry's effort to address the growing need for skilled professionals in the labour market and equip students with industry relevant skills.

Saif bin Hareb al Ghafri, the General Assistant for Administrative and Financial Affairs at Al Batinah North



By embracing technical and vocational education, the Ministry of Education aims to bridge the gap between education and employment, preparing Omani youth to compete in a rapidly evolving job market

directorate said, "The students have been placed in various accredited training institutes, including Polyglot Sohar Institute, Sohar Industrial Training Institute (Sohar Aluminium), and Knowledge Grid Academy. Over the course of two years, they will engage in specialised programmes

in mechanical manufacturing engineering, engineering maintenance, solid structure maintenance, occupational health and safety, welding and metal forming, and lifting and lowering operations." This vocational pathway initiative is designed for students in grades 11 and 12, and



aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises sustainable development and economic diversification. "It reflects the Ministry of Education's forward-thinking approach, adapting to both local market demands and global trends in education," Al Ghafri added.

Ahmed Ali, a student participant in this initiative, commented, "We are glad for such initiatives, it widens our horizons and helps us to identify job markets and learn in real life. We met experts and experienced people in different fields. I feel that we are preparing for a bright

future, we are secured and ready for the future."

The collaboration with private sector companies offers students practical experience through on the job training, field visits, and real applications of their studies.

This approach ensures that students are not only receiving theoretical knowledge, but are also acquiring the practical skills required by industries in Oman and beyond.

By embracing technical and vocational education, the Ministry of Education aims to bridge the gap between education and employment, preparing Omani youth to compete in a rapidly evolving job market.



MOAFWR TAKES STOCK OF KINGFISH IN OMAN

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) is implementing various programmes to assess and manage the kingfish stock in Oman, as the species is overfished and it is prohibited to catch them during these months. As part of the ongoing effort to protect depleting fish species, the ministry is conducting a workshop from September 23 to 25 under the auspices of Eng

Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries. The ministry has announced a two-month ban on kingfish fishing and trading to protect the population and ensure sustainable fishing practices. The ban has been in effect since August 15 and will continue until October 15, 2024. “Oman’s kingfish stock is overfished and requires protection, preservation and rebuilding. As part of our goal



to protect them, we have several ongoing programmes and are conducting a workshop to brainstorm ways to safeguard

the species from September 23 to 25 under the auspices of Eng Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidy,” informed the media department at the ministry. These large, pelagic fish, part of the Scombridae family, similar to tuna, are known for their migratory patterns along Oman’s coasts. Kingfish is a staple on Omani tables and is popular across the Gulf for its nutritional value. Oman’s kingfish catch during months other than the ban period is depleting. In 2019, the

catch was 7,011 tonnes, 3.34 times less than in 2016, followed by further diminishing numbers. In 2002, Oman’s kingfish catch was 2,088 tonnes, according to statistics. The ban implemented to protect the species has been in force since August 15 and will continue until October 15. Violators of the ban will face fines of up to RO 300, imprisonment ranging from ten days to one month, or both penalties, according to sources at the MoAFWR.

Tawteen platform, Applications System to boost labour market

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 17

Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, presided over the signing ceremony of the Tawteen Platform and the launch of the Employment Applications System. This event is part of the ministry’s ongoing efforts to enhance employment initiatives in a systematic and well-planned manner with high efficiency, within a digital environment that keeps pace with global advancements. Dr Baowain said the Tawteen platform and Employment Applications System will contribute to empowering the economic sectors to efficiently and effectively implement the National Employment Strategy. Tawteen is a keystone for enhancing collaboration between the public and private sectors, ensuring commitment to the national employment goals. The minister emphasised that the platform and the Employment Applications System reflect the current trend towards digital transformation, creating an advanced and stimulating digital work environment for all entities operating in the employment sector. These tools will support the work of



Dr Baowain said the Tawteen platform and Employment Applications System will contribute to empowering the economic sectors to efficiently and effectively implement the National Employment Strategy.

the Employment Governance Committees, meet the needs of the labour market and enhance job opportunities. They will also introduce new and innovative roles, leveraging the tremendous advancements in artificial intelligence. The platform and the Employment Applications System represent a qualitative leap in the efforts to support national endeavours aimed at increasing employment opportunities and localisation rates across various economic sectors. This is overseen by the Ministry of Labour, which provides technical support. During the ceremony, an agreement was signed with the Tawteen. On behalf of the Ministry of Labour, the agreement was signed by Sayyid

Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, and on behalf of the company, it was signed by Ali bin Ahmed al Mujaini, Chairman of the Board. Eng Azhar bin Ahmed al Kindi, Technical Director of the National Employment Programme, stated that the Tawteen platform is an integrated digital system aimed at bridging the gap between job-seekers and available opportunities in the market. It provides an environment that enables companies and local suppliers to develop their businesses and enhance their competitiveness. In light of Oman’s strategic direction, the significance of this platform emerges as a central tool that contributes to realising

the national vision regarding empowering local talent and maximising their contribution to economic development. Al Kindi added that the concept of this platform was built from day one to serve as a national performance dashboard, enabling the comprehensive tracking and analysis of the dynamics of the Omani labour market, covering all aspects of supply and demand. It works on connecting Omani talents with available job opportunities across various sectors, whether through traditional jobs, entrepreneurship, or freelancing. It also serves as a strategic tool that supports decision-makers in various sectors by providing clear insights into employment trends, which contributes to building national competencies and attracting exceptional talents, according to integrated plans aligned with national economic goals and enhancing the capabilities of the local economy. Al Kindi pointed out that, in the context of the fundamental transformation the employment sector is undergoing, this platform represents a keystone for supporting the efforts of the Employment Governance Committees in the economic sectors.

Oman participates in GCC civil aviation executive committee



Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri affirmed the significance of the civil aviation sector as a basic pillar in achieving sustainable and economic growth in GCC states.

DOHA: Represented by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the Sultanate of Oman participated in the 20th meeting of the GCC Civil Aviation Executive Committee held in Doha on Wednesday. The meeting discussed the most important civil aviation issues of concern to the GCC and explored ways of consolidating integration among member states in a manner that best serves their common goals. Key issues discussed at the meeting included the establishment of a “GCC Civil Aviation Authority”, the implementation of a unified programme for assessing

the safety of foreign aircraft operating GCC airports, a mechanism for endorsing “the blacklist” and the culture of civil aviation security in the GCC air navigation and aviation sector. Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), affirmed the significance of the civil aviation sector as a basic pillar in achieving sustainable and economic growth in GCC states. Al Abri pointed out that the CAA in Oman is always keen to support all initiatives that would enhance cooperation and achieve integration among GCC states in the field of civil aviation. — ONA

RO 15.4 million Al Mazyouna Hospital opens

From P1

“Additionally, the hospital features a radiology department, laboratory, and emergency department. This hospital will save time for patients who used to travel approximately 250 km to reach Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah.” The main hospital building includes general medicine clinics, internal medicine, dentistry, paediatrics, surgery, ENT, ophthalmology, in addition to a clinic for vaccinations, gynaecology and obstetrics. The hospital has a capacity of 50 beds distributed across various inpatient wards including male and female internal medicine, obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, and surgery, as well as adult and neonatal critical care units. The facility also has an emergency and accident unit, a dialysis unit, a delivery room, and an



Dignitaries having a tour of various facilities of the hospital.

operating theatre. The building includes several clinics and departments such as diagnostic services, including a radiology department that will offer both CT scans and conventional X-rays, in addition to a biomedical engineering workshop, a central sterilisation unit, a medical warehouse, a general store, and other supportive services. Commenting on the hospital, Dr Al Sabti emphasised that in our journey, we are guided by the values of humanity. “We face a choice... either leave behind transient noise or create a lasting impact.” He highlighted that the commitment is to make a real difference, stating that they are not just echoes of fleeting clamour but a positive force shaping the future. Al Mazyouna Hospital is part of the ministry’s efforts to develop the healthcare system in Oman and enhance its efficiency

in line with population growth and the evolving demands for healthcare services across the country. Dr Ali bin Abdullah al Muqbali, Director-General of Health Services in Dhofar Governorate, emphasised that the hospital will provide primary and specialised healthcare services to the people living in the governorate, marking a significant shift in healthcare quality at the wilayat level. Eng Yusuf bin Yaqub Amboali, Adviser to the Minister of Health for Engineering Affairs, said that the opening of the hospital is part of the ministry’s strategy to enhance healthcare infrastructure and provide specialised and exceptional medical services close to local communities. This initiative aims to deliver the best healthcare services according to global standards to all citizens and residents of Oman.

THE RISE OF TECHNOLOGY
AND SOCIAL MEDIA
PLATFORMS HAS MADE IT
EASIER THAN EVER FOR
RUMOURS TO GAIN TRACTION,
FURTHER BLURRING
THE LINE BETWEEN REALITY
AND SPECULATION



BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 17

RUMOURS are an age-old social phenomenon that have adapted seamlessly to modern society, their rapid spread affecting individuals and communities alike. Whether for entertainment or as a tool to sway public opinion, rumours wield enormous influence and often have negative consequences, especially when used to manipulate information or incite discord.

Rumour by definition is “unverified information that spreads quickly among people without proper fact-checking.”

Ranging from political scandals to economic crises, rumours thrive in a digital world where a single piece of information can circulate globally within minutes, often becoming perceived as fact. The rise of technology and social media platforms has made it easier than ever for rumours to gain traction, further blurring the line between reality and speculation.

On a personal level, rumours can induce fear and anxiety, severely impacting mental health. Misleading information, particularly in critical situations such as public health crises, can have devastating effects. During the Covid pandemic, for instance, rumours about unscientific cures led people to make dangerous health decisions, delaying proper treatment.

Dr Muhammad al Ghailani, a mental health consultant, explains, “Rumours not only increase anxiety and stress but can escalate health crises by spreading misinformation that impedes efforts to combat epidemics.” The damage caused by rumours goes beyond individuals and ripples throughout society. Trust between citizens and institutions can erode, threatening both political stability and social cohesion. In times of political conflict or elections, rumours are frequently deployed as tools in psychological warfare, aimed at discrediting public figures or institutions. This false narrative can distort public opinion, shifting people’s perspectives based on lies rather than facts.

Abdullah al Rawahy, a social worker, highlights another danger: “Rumours can dismantle the social fabric by reinforcing divisions in society. When they target sensitive issues such as sectarianism or corruption, tensions can rise, sometimes sparking conflicts.” Social media platforms, with their rapid dissemination of unverified information, provide fertile ground for rumours. In the digital age, virtually anyone can become a source of information, accurate or otherwise. The problem intensifies with artificial intelligence technologies capable of manipulating images and videos, making it even harder to determine what’s real.

Despite efforts by some social media platforms to limit fake news — through fact-checking tools and partnerships with specialised



organisations — rumours continue to spread faster than they can be debunked.

Crises and periods of instability, whether political or economic, often create the perfect conditions for rumours to thrive. Economic uncertainty, for instance, breeds rumours about bank closures or currency collapses, leading individuals to panic and make decisions that further exacerbate the situation.

Addressing the harmful effects of rumours requires a multi-pronged approach. First, public awareness must be raised about the importance of verifying information before sharing it. This can be achieved by educating individuals on how to use available tools to fact-check news. Second, official institutions need to act swiftly and transparently to provide accurate information, filling the void that rumours typically occupy. Third, traditional media must continue to serve as a reliable source, offering well-researched and verified reports.

As Dr Al Ghailani stresses, “Community education is key to any strategy against rumours. While it may be impossible to completely prevent their spread, their impact can be minimised if people learn to verify information rather than be swayed by sensationalised stories.” In this digital age, where information moves faster than ever, it is imperative for individuals to be more discerning, and for media outlets to intensify their efforts in fact-checking. By fostering a culture of truth and transparency, society can better protect itself from the pervasive and disruptive power of rumours.





INVITATION TO TENDER

OMIFCO invites all reputed and specialized companies with relevant experience to provide the required services mentioned against the below tender for Fertilizer/Oil and Gas/Refinery/Petrochemical Industries to submit their best proposal for the tender:

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Bid Bond	OMR. 5,000/= (Omani Rial Five Thousand, only)
Minimum Experience	Ten (10) Years of experience in the subject filed in similar scope of work and scale.
Bid Submission due date	Not later than 12:00 pm on 15 th November 2024 (Oman time)

- All bidders shall submit their offer in THREE (3) separate file as following:
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All three files shall be sealed and tagged with the File Title, Tender Title and Tender Number and Password Protected in case of Online submission. Also, the company profile, registration documents and latest audited financials should be submitted along with the Technical Bid. All three files should be submitted at OMIFCO Head Office in Sur - Tender Box at the Main Gate or through a link sent to purchase@omifco.com.

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MOH MARKS WORLD PATIENT SAFETY DAY



This year's events emphasise the critical role of accurate and timely diagnosis in enhancing patient safety and reducing diagnostic errors

MUSCAT: Under the theme “Improving Diagnosis for Patient Safety,” the Ministry of Health (MoH) marked the 7th National and 6th World Patient Safety Day on Tuesday.

The event, organised by the General Directorate of the Quality Assurance Centre, coincides with the annual observance on September 17th, a date set by the World Health Organization.

The event was inaugurated by Shaikh Mansour bin Zaher bin Salem al Hajri, Member of the Majlis Ashshura and Head of its Health and Social Committee, with the presence of Dr Qamra bint Said al Sarriyah, Director General of the Quality Assurance Centre at the Ministry of Health, along with other officials.

This year's events emphasise the critical role of accurate and

timely diagnosis in enhancing patient safety and reducing diagnostic errors, which can result from both structural and cognitive issues. The initiative also aims to strengthen collaboration between patients, healthcare professionals, and leaders to ensure safe and effective healthcare services.

The National Patient Safety Month activities began on September 1, featuring educational awareness campaigns and patient empowerment initiatives on social media platforms.

A scientific exhibition on therapeutic diagnosis was held at Oman Avenues Mall on September 17 and 18. Additionally, a workshop on therapeutic diagnosis standards within the Omani National Accreditation System

and a scientific debate on the use of artificial intelligence in traditional diagnosis are scheduled for September 19th.

The celebration of World Patient Safety Day also includes widespread awareness campaigns across the governorates, with hospitals hosting exhibitions, visual presentations, and educational outreach for both the public and healthcare workers.

The General Directorate of the Quality Assurance Centre at the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with central general directorates, is leading these activities throughout September.

As part of the festivities, various health facilities and tourist landmarks in Oman have been illuminated in orange, symbolising the observance of World Patient Safety Day.

Al Sharqiyah South embarks on major Falaj rehabilitation

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 17

The General Directorate of Agricultural Wealth, Fisheries, and Water Resources in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate is planning significant projects to rehabilitate and maintain 65 ‘falaj’ (Oman’s ancient irrigation system) across the villages and wilayats of the governorate.

In alignment with the Ministry’s 2024 plan, 49 agreements have been signed with contractors to restore falajs damaged by the Al Wabel and Al Mutair depressions. These initiatives aim to ensure the sustainability of falaj systems, a vital water source deeply rooted in Oman’s historical irrigation practices.

Falajs, used for centuries by Omanis to irrigate crops, are of immense importance to the country’s agricultural heritage. Salah bin Salim al Mahjari, Head of the Dams, Falajs, and Protective Walls Department, highlighted that the rehabilitation efforts encompass various types of falajs—Al Adi, Al Aini, and Al Ghaili.

The work involves creating new channels, both surface and underground, with depths ranging from 3 to 25 metres, built to endure varying conditions. The designs ensure the smooth flow of water from the falaj’s source to the distribution areas.

So far, maintenance has been completed on 19 falajs, and work is progressing on the others. Some of the key falajs under restoration include Al Badawi, Abu Talqa, and Al Maqsum in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.



Falajs, used for centuries by Omanis to irrigate crops, are of immense importance to the country’s agricultural heritage

Notable falajs being maintained are, Al Badawi, Abu Talqa, and Al Maqsum, six falajs in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, such as Falaj Al Dhaheer and Falaj Al Zuwaied, six falajs in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, such as Falaj Al Souqiyah and Falaj Ain and five falajs in Al Kamil W’al Wafi, including Falaj Sabt and Falaj Al Batin.

The rehabilitation includes clearing debris, reinforcing channels, rebuilding damaged sections, maintaining collection basins, and constructing protective walls. This extensive project underscores the ministry’s commitment to preserving Oman’s falaj systems, ensuring their longevity, and bolstering the country’s water security.

SQU group makes headway in toursim promotion

MUSCAT: The Tourism Group at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), a student organisation affiliated with the Department of Tourism, has been developing tourism awareness in the Sultanate of Oman.

During the fall of 2024, the group participated in numerous events under the supervision of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT), including organising the Omani Culinary Arts Festival, the opening of the first Omani Press Forum in Dhofar, and the International Conference on Kidney Diseases and Transplantation.



The group also organised a tourist tour for a group of university doctors and the Marhaba Dhofar forum (B2B) for Saudi and Omani tourism companies.

Abdullah al Rawas, the head of

the group, states: “As a group, we are working towards achieving our goals through the events, workshops, and programmes we plan. We also seek to enhance tourism awareness and highlight the beauty of culture and heritage to the public.”

“We believe that tourism is not just an activity; it serves as bridges for communication and understanding between different cultures. Therefore, we strive to provide distinctive experiences that enrich the minds of young people and motivate them to explore the world of tourism,” he added.

Oman safe haven for Grey Plover

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY
YAHYA ALSALMANI

The Sultanate of Oman’s beaches host a variety of bird species including the Grey Plover (Scientific name: *Pluvialis squatarola*).

A passerine bird that can be seen naturally on beaches and wetlands, this bird is found along the coastline of the Sultanate of Oman from the far north to the far south.

It is found in large numbers especially in in Bar Al Hikman (Al Wusta Governorate) and Masirah Island (Al Sharqiyah South Governorate), but its numbers are less in other coastal areas.

The Grey Plover is a chunky



plover, larger than the similar golden plover. The grey plover can be found along the coast, preferring sandy and muddy estuaries.

Although a small number of birds stay during summer, this is really a winter migrant, arriving here from July, peaking in autumn, and leaving from April onwards the following year.

Like other plovers, it forages for marine invertebrates and

crustaceans in a particular way: standing and watching, running forward, pecking, then standing still again.

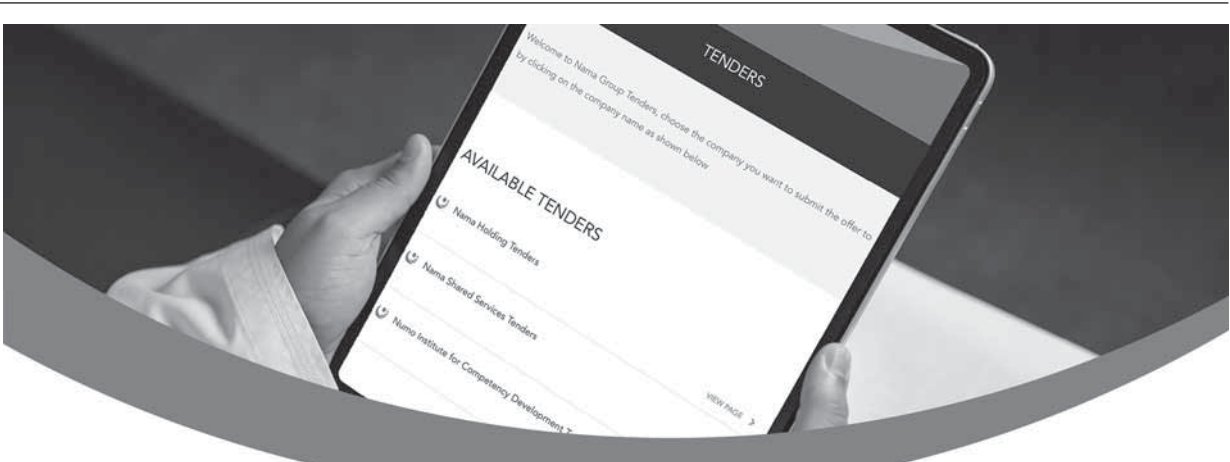
The grey plover is similar to the golden plover, but is bigger and greyer, with a sturdier black bill and long black legs. It has a spotted, white and silvery-grey back, and pale grey and white underparts.

In spring, adults sport a black throat, chest and belly as they make their way north to their breeding grounds.

Researches indicate that the length of this bird ranges from 26 to 29 cm and his wingspan 77 cm and its weight 240 gramme. Its average lifespan 9 years. It has been classified in some countries such as UK an endangered bird.



Grey Plover is found in large numbers especially in in Bar Al Hikman and Masirah Island



TENDERS

Nama Holding invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tenders below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
EHC/2024/14	Comprehensive general liability insurance	24 September 2024	1 October 2024	50 +/- Plus VAT Total amount: 52.5 OMR
EHC/2024/15	Workmen's compensation liability insurance	24 September 2024	1 October 2024	100 +/- Plus VAT Total amount: 105 OMR
EHC/2024/16	Directors & officers' insurance policy	24 September 2024	1 October 2024	50 +/- Plus VAT Total amount: 52.5 OMR

- Interested party may purchase the tender through the company website (www.nama.om). Supplier user guide is available to be downloaded on the same page.
- Payment of the tender fees to be done online through the link available on the website. The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 3.00 pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through I-supplier portal before 3:00 pm time of the Sultanate of Oman, on Tuesday 1st October 2024.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers. Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered. The original hard copy of the bid bond should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception area.
- NH is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



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TO ENSURE A SMOOTH OPERATION, UPDATE YOUR DETAILS

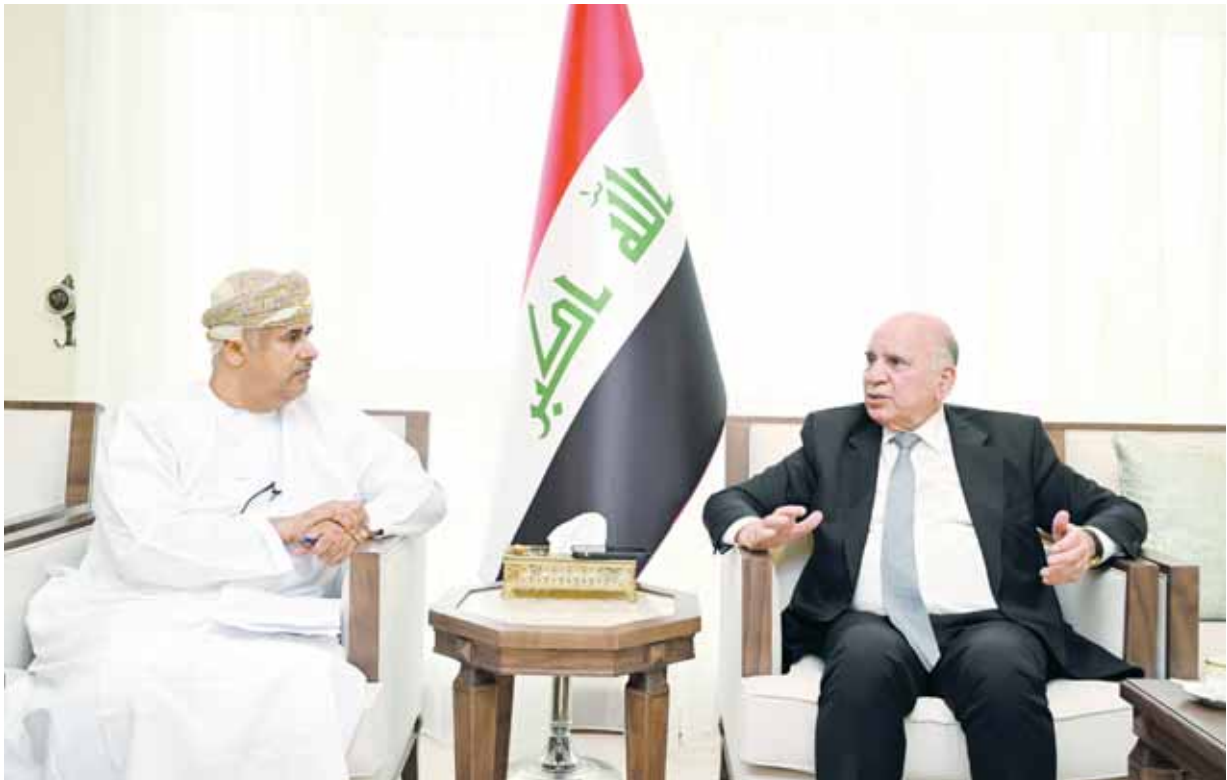


‘We did not sign agreement for withdrawal of coalition’

ASIM AL SHEDI
MUSCAT, SEPT 17

“We did not sign an agreement with America for the withdrawal of the coalition forces and any talk about a deal involving Iran is inaccurate. Iraq is not the only country that has presence of American forces in the region. We are part of the solution to the Iranian-American conflict and we are not a party to it. Iraq is stable and secure and international capital may seek investment opportunities in Iraq Our ‘recovery diplomacy’ has recovered thousands of artifacts stolen from Iraq during the war,” this was stated by Fuad Hussein, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, in an interview with Oman Arabic daily newspaper.

He said that his discussions with Omani officials were fruitful and successful and covered various economic, cultural, military and security aspects. He added: “We agreed to activate the joint



Fuad Hussein (R) said that communication is open to calm tensions that are not in the interest of the region

Omani-Iraqi committee which is expected to hold an important meeting by year-end. Iraq is experiencing a state of security

and stability and this has spurred our economy and opened the door to international capital to invest in Iraq. Iraq is studying mechanisms

to get Iraqi professionals and competencies back to the country to contribute to the construction process.” Fuad Hussein denied

that the news published about the agreement with the American side for the withdrawal of the allied forces came as part of a deal to calm down with Iran to avoid its reaction to the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, pointing out that there is no written agreement with America so far but there are negotiations and viewpoints that are still on the negotiating table.

He noted that communication is open between Iraq and Iran and between Iraq and America to calm tensions that are not in the interest of Iraq or the region, pointing out that Iraq does not agree to all American policies in the region.

Iraq began to play a fundamental role in resolving many issues affecting the region such as the tensions in the Saudi-Iranian, Egyptian-Iranian and Jordanian-Iranian relations and Iraq has played a fundamental role in restoring these relations. We see it as a duty to help calm down regional tensions because Iraq’s security is linked to regional

security, he said.

Asked about the future of the Iraq-US relations in light of the geopolitical transformations the region is witnessing, Hussein said: “The American presence in Iraq is small compared to other countries. The Iraqi-American relations are good and we have an agreement and in light of this agreement taking the Iraqi interests into account.

The Iraqi interests require us to have good relations with the Americans and this does not mean that we agree with all the American policy in the region.

We are starting our relationship from the angle of Iraqi interests as well as the interests of the region.

However, when we talk about our relations with the US, we are not only talking about security relations but rather about broad relations similar to our relations with many countries that are related to the economy, oil, education, health and so on. America is a major country and we have to be realistic.”



Residents leave the flooded areas with their belongings in Maiduguri, Nigeria. – Reuters file photo

Nigerian flood victims waits for medical help

MAIDUGURI: People in Nigeria’s flood-hit northeastern Borno state are struggling to get medical care as overwhelmed aid agencies warn of an outbreak of waterborne disease following the worst floods to hit the region in three decades. More than 30 people have been killed by the floods, which authorities say affected about one million people, most of whom are housed in camps without food and clean water.

The deluge threatens not only the health and safety of the displaced, but puts a strain on aid agencies and government resources, exacerbating an already critical humanitarian

crisis.

The floods in Borno started when a dam burst its walls following heavy rainfall that has also caused floods.

In the last two weeks of August, more than 1.5 million people were displaced across 12 countries in West and Central Africa due to floods, and about 465 have been killed, according to the United Nations humanitarian affairs office.

Over the weekend, an additional 50,000 people were displaced in northeastern Nigeria as the floods intensified, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) said on Monday.

— Reuters

DOHA: Qatar’s foreign ministry said on Tuesday efforts to forge a Gaza truce were “ongoing”, after several rounds of talks aimed at ending the now 11-month war ended without a breakthrough.

“The efforts are still ongoing and channels of communication remain open... the goals and visits and meetings are ongoing,” ministry spokesman Majed al Ansari told reporters.

Months of behind-the-scenes negotiations mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the United States have failed to halt the fighting between Palestinian groups and Israel, apart from a one-week truce beginning in late November.

Recent mediation in Doha and Cairo has been based on a framework laid out by US President Joe Biden and a “bridging proposal” presented to the warring parties in August.

The US State Department said on Monday Secretary of State Antony Blinken would visit Egypt this week to “discuss ongoing efforts to reach a ceasefire”, his tenth trip to the region since the Gaza Strip war began on October 7.

After in-person talks last month in Egypt and Qatar broke up without a final agreement, Washington indicated that mediators were preparing to present another adapted framework for a ceasefire.



Palestinian women mourn people killed in Israeli strikes on the Bureij refugee camp. – AFP

Recent mediation in Doha and Cairo has been based on a framework laid out by US President Joe Biden and a bridging proposal presented to the warring parties in August

US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said on Monday Washington was working “expeditiously” on a new proposal.

Ansari declined to comment on Tuesday on whether any further proposal had been relayed to Israel or Hamas. “When it

comes to the possibility of a deal taking place anytime soon, of course we remain hopeful at every juncture,” he said. “I can’t comment on the prospects of a deal taking place right now but I can tell you that we remain hopeful and we continue with our efforts.”

Hamas said its delegation met Qatari and Egyptian mediators in Doha last week to discuss a truce and potential captives and prisoner exchange, again without indicating that any breakthrough had been reached.

Pressure inside Israel for a deal has intensified after authorities

announced the deaths of six hostages at the start of September after their bodies were recovered from a Gaza tunnel.

But in the face of the external calls for an agreement, both Israel and Hamas have publicly signalled deeper entrenchment in their negotiating positions.

On Tuesday, Israel announced an expansion of its war aims, widening its fight in Gaza to focus on its northern border with Lebanon. Israel’s retaliatory military offensive has killed at least 41,252 people in Gaza, according to the territory’s health ministry. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

YANGON

Myanmar flooding death toll jumps to 226

The death toll from massive flooding in Myanmar in the wake of Typhoon Yagi has doubled to 226 as the UN warned as many as 630,000 people could need help.

Yagi swept across northern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Myanmar with powerful winds and an enormous amount of rain, triggering floods and landslides that have killed more than 500 people, according to official figures.

The broadcaster also said nearly 260,000 hectares of rice



paddies and other crops had been destroyed by floods. The UN’s World Food Programme said the floods were the worst in Myanmar’s recent history, without giving precise details. — AFP

TOKYO

Japan suspends trial removal of nuclear debris

The operator of Japan’s stricken Fukushima nuclear plant said it has suspended an operation to remove a sample of highly radioactive material because of a new technical problem. Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) had to halt the procedure after noticing that remote cameras on the apparatus were not beaming back images to the control centre.

“We are investigating the cause of the problem,” TEPCO spokesman Tatsuya Matoba said.



“We need to find out the cause of the trouble before resuming,” he said. TEPCO originally planned to start on August 22, aiming to collect three grams, but technical problems caused a delay. — AFP

ANKARA

Turkiye, Sweden to hold first security talks

Turkiye and Sweden will hold their first meeting today addressing a security pact the sides agreed to ensure Ankara’s approval of Stockholm’s Nato membership bid, a Turkish diplomatic source said.

The meeting will take place during a visit to Ankara by Swedish Foreign Minister Maria Malmer Stenergard, and it carried “special importance” in terms of improving cooperation on terrorism, the source said.

“Cooperation in the field of security, especially the fight against



terrorism, will be discussed within the framework of the road map,” the source said, Türkiye’s foreign minister, Hakan Fidan, and Stenergard will also discuss bilateral ties — AFP



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In brief

WASHINGTON



TRUMP RETURNS TO CAMPAIGN AFTER ASSASSINATION SCARE

Donald Trump hits the campaign trail again on Tuesday, travelling to Michigan two days after an apparent assassination attempt against him was foiled at his golf course in Florida. The Republican nominee and ex-president was whisked away by the Secret Service after a gunman was discovered on his golf course in Florida on Sunday, in the second such close call for Trump in as many months.

As security officials said they believed the suspect acted alone, Trump sought to blame Harris and President Joe Biden for the scare, citing what he called their rhetoric about him endangering democracy. — **AFP**

THE HAGUE



DUTCH KING VOWS 'STRICTER' ASYLUM POLICY IN KEY SPEECH

The Netherlands will enforce a "faster, stricter, and more modest" asylum policy, King Willem-Alexander said on Tuesday, as immigration "puts pressure on our facilities and way of living together." "The keywords are faster, stricter and more modest," said the king, reading out a speech written by Prime Minister Dick Schoof and his right-wing cabinet.

The "Princes' Day" speech is a major event in the Dutch political calendar, featuring a pageantry-filled procession by the royal family through the streets. The speech came after the ruling coalition unveiled the country's toughest immigration measures ever. — **AFP**

NELAS



3 FIREFIGHTERS DIE AS PORTUGAL BATTLES DOZENS OF WILDFIRES

Three Portuguese firefighters died on Tuesday in one of dozens of forest fires ravaging the country's central and northern regions, bringing the death toll from the latest wildfires to seven people. Portugal is fighting over 50 active wildfires on its mainland and has mobilised around 5,300 firefighters, as well as calling for European Union help.

Authorities have closed several motorways and suspended train connections. Authority commander Andre Fernandes said that three firefighters from the Vila Nova de Oliveira fire brigade had died. — **Reuters**

Russia strikes energy facilities in Ukraine

KYIV: Russia fired missiles at energy infrastructure in the northeast Ukrainian city of Sumy on Tuesday hours after an overnight drone strike on the region, reducing power in some areas and forcing authorities to use back-up power systems.

The Sumy region's governor, Volodymyr Artiukh, citing an initial assessment, said Russia had used at least four missiles in the latest attack on energy facilities.

Ukraine's energy ministry said Russia's attacks had caused a fire at a power substation and cut power to more than 281,000 consumers. Power was later partially restored, it said.

Acting Sumy mayor Artem Kobzar said there were no casualties in the city, but regional officials said the overnight drone attack had damaged the region's Konotop, Okhtyrka and Sumy districts.

Critical infrastructure facilities had to use back-up power systems, regional authorities said on the Telegram messaging app.

The Ukrainian air force said



A woman looks at an installation with a power transformer, damaged by a Russian military strike, in Kyiv. — **Reuters**

Russia had launched 51 drones in Tuesday's attack, of which 34 were shot down.

Russia also dropped three guided bombs on the town of Hlukhiv, Ukraine's northern military command said on Telegram. Two people were wounded and 20 private houses, public transport and a grain silo

suffered damage. Russia has been attacking energy infrastructure in what Kyiv says is a concerted effort to degrade the energy system before winter, when people need electricity and heating most.

Russian forces have been steadily advancing in Ukraine's east, while Ukrainian forces

remain in the Russian region of Kursk following a cross-border incursion last month.

Meanwhile, Russia said on Tuesday it had repelled five new attempts by Ukrainian forces to smash through its border into the Kursk region, bringing the total number of reported attacks on the border to 26 in just the

Ukraine's energy ministry said Russia's attacks had caused a fire at a power substation and cut power to more than 281,000 consumers

past six days.

Russia began a major counteroffensive against the Ukrainian forces in Kursk on Sept. 10, pushing Kyiv's forces back towards the Snagost River. But Ukrainian forces have been trying for about a week to pierce the Russian border towards Veseloe and Medvezhe in an attempt to threaten the Russian counteroffensive about 15 km to the west of the main theatre of battle in Kursk.

"With the support of army aviation and artillery fire, five attempts by the armed forces of Ukraine to pierce the border of the Russian Federation in the direction of Veseloe and Medvezhe were repelled," Russia's defence ministry said in a statement. — **Reuters**

Von der Leyen names new European Commission



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen holds a press conference on the suggested structure and portfolios of the college of European Commissioners in Strasbourg, France. — **Reuters**

STRASBOURG: European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen on Tuesday named a new team to lead the European Union's most powerful institution for the next five years, focused on tackling challenges to the region's security, competitiveness and growth.

Lithuania's Andrius Kubilius will be the EU's first defence commissioner, with the new role designed to build up European military manufacturing capacity in the face of Russian aggression in Ukraine, on the bloc's eastern flank.

Spain's Energy and Environment Minister Teresa Ribera will be the new antitrust chief tasked with reining in the power of Big Tech and also ensuring that the EU achieves its green goals.

"The whole college (Commission) is committed to competitiveness," von der Leyen told a press conference, with the aim being "building a competitive, decarbonised and circular economy, with a fair transition for all." Climate change "is the major backdrop of all what we are doing," von der

Leyen said.

But, compared to her first five-year term, "the topic of security, triggered by the Russian war in Ukraine, but also the topic of competitiveness, have ... much more impact," she said.

All candidates will undergo hearings with lawmakers in the European Parliament who have to sign off on their nomination.

Each of the 27 member states will have one seat at the Commission's table, a role comparable to a government minister, although its political weight varies greatly depending on the portfolio.

The EU's two biggest countries have top jobs in the Commission - von der Leyen is German, and France's outgoing foreign minister Stephane Sejourne will be in charge of the key portfolio of industrial strategy.

All commissioners will report to von der Leyen, who this summer was handed a second term as EU chief executive by member states after her political camp won the most votes in EU elections.

The next EU Commission is expected to take office by the

end of the year, meaning one of its first tasks will be fielding the outcome of the US presidential election in November.

Each new commissioner will need to pass a hearing in the European Parliament, expected in the coming weeks, in which EU lawmakers will attempt to extract promises from the nominees on what they will deliver if they get the job.

— **Reuters**



The whole college is committed to competitiveness, building a competitive, decarbonised and circular economy, with a fair transition for all

URSULA VON DER LEYEN

European Commission chief

The real role of indigenous conservation



Rumaitha al Busaidi

The writer is an Omani climate change activist, women's rights activist, radio presenter, marine scientist, entrepreneur and a footballer

In conservation, data is our foundation, guiding decisions and policies. Recently, a statistics often cited at global conferences — that Indigenous peoples protect 80 per cent of the world's remaining biodiversity — was found to be baseless. After rigorous research, scientists discovered that this figure had no factual support, despite being used in over 180 scientific publications and countless reports. This misinformation not only undermines the credibility of conservation efforts but also risks overshadowing the real and critical role Indigenous communities play in preserving ecosystems.

So, how did such a statistics gain so much traction? Part of the issue lies in how we understand and measure biodiversity. Biodiversity is a complex, multifaceted concept that is difficult to define and quantify. Millions of species remain unclassified, and the interactions within ecosystems are far from fully understood. It's easy to see how a simple, seemingly powerful statistic might be appealing in a world where numbers drive policy. But when those numbers are wrong, they can do more harm than good.

The importance of solid, reliable research cannot be overstated. As we face the twin crises of climate change

and biodiversity loss, our strategies must be grounded in facts, not wishful thinking. Misleading data, no matter how well-intentioned, risks discrediting genuine efforts and can be exploited by those who oppose environmental progress. In the case of Indigenous-led conservation, it's vital that we support their efforts with accuracy and respect for their knowledge.

This brings us to the role of Indigenous peoples, particularly in our region. While the 80 per cent claim may have been debunked, there is no question that Indigenous communities, including Oman's bedouins among other indigenous communities, are vital stewards of biodiversity. Research conducted on the Arabian Peninsula reveals how we have managed to thrive in some of the world's harshest environments, using sophisticated knowledge systems that prioritise sustainability. For instance, we have long-practiced water conservation through the aflaj systems, a tradition that has shaped Oman's landscape for over 2,000 years.

We have also witnessed how scholars turned their attention to utilising Indigenous knowledge to help tackle modern biodiversity challenges. Studies on the Arabian Oryx, for example, highlight how collaboration with local Bedouin communities was essential to the

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOLID, RELIABLE RESEARCH CANNOT BE OVERSTATED. AS WE FACE THE TWIN CRISES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY LOSS, OUR STRATEGIES MUST BE GROUNDED IN FACTS, NOT WISHFUL THINKING

species' successful reintroduction after it was declared extinct in the wild. These efforts underscore the critical role that Indigenous people play, not just in maintaining biodiversity, but in reviving it.

This revival of indigenous practices is not limited to conservation alone. In recent years, there has been a resurgence in traditional architecture across Oman and the Gulf, where modern builders are increasingly turning to age-old techniques to design more sustainable homes. Thick stone walls, wind towers, and natural ventilation methods, long-forgotten in the race towards modernity, are now being revisited as viable solutions to reduce energy consumption and create eco-friendly homes.

For years, we disregarded these traditional methods in favour of more modern, energy-intensive designs. But as climate change continues to challenge us, we are beginning to recognise the wisdom in these ancient practices. Oman's architectural heritage, with its natural cooling systems and resource-efficient designs, holds valuable lessons for building a sustainable future.

In a world grappling with biodiversity loss, we must champion our local knowledge and capitalise on it but do so with the right data.

Where in the world is closest to a '15-minute city'?

DANIEL LAWLER

Paris and Milan are among the cities closest to reaching the urban planning goal of being a "15-minute city," while car-dependent metropolises in the United States and elsewhere lag behind, a worldwide analysis said.

In fact, the central areas of many cities already meet the definition of a 15 minute-city, which means that residents are within a quarter-hour walk or bike ride from everything they need to a lead a good life, the analysis found.

But even within a city, there are often stark differences between the wealthy inner cities and the urban sprawl on their outskirts, according to the Italian researchers behind the new study.

The concept of the 15-minute city gained traction during the Covid pandemic, when lockdowns put more focus on local neighbourhoods. It has since been embraced by dozens of mayors around the world -- and become the target of conspiracy theorists online.

For the new study, published in the journal Nature Cities, the researchers built an online database looking at roughly 10,000 cities globally. They used open source data to map out how far of a walk or cycle residents were from different services, including shops, restaurants, education, exercise and healthcare.

"A lot of people already live in a 15-minute city," study co-author Hygor Piaget Monteiro Melo said.

But it depends on where you look within a city, he said, because of the inequality in access to services between the centre and periphery.

What is clear, the researchers noted, is that population density is a crucial factor -- if enough people are living close enough to each other, it is much easier for them to have easy access to services.

This meant that somewhat smaller yet relatively dense cities such as Italy's Milan or Spain's Barcelona scored well on their map, which was made available online. When it came to the biggest cities, "Paris is an outlier," lead study author Matteo Bruno said.

The mayor of Paris embraced the concept in 2020, and a "considerable fraction" of the city is below the 15-minute mark, the study said. Some European cities have a head start because they were built centuries ago at a time before cars — when basically all towns had to be 15-minute cities, the researchers said. Cities built more recently with cars specifically in mind — particularly in the United States — fared far less well on the map.

Atlanta in particular stood out as being a long way from being a 15-minute city. Future Olympic host Los Angeles also lagged behind most others for walkability, as did several Chinese cities including Chongqing. — AFP

Digital society and combating extremism



Dr Muamar Al Tobi

The writer is Omani academic and researcher

Our ongoing discourse about digital society does not imply that this society is uniquely characterised by intellectual and material properties that surpass previous societal patterns, such as the industrial society. However, current events and their unsettling incidents lead us back to the observations through which we can understand the mechanisms of event formation, their changes, and their relation to societal transformations. These insights enable us to comprehend the accompanying patterns of thought and culture that ultimately determine the collective behaviour of society.

Amidst these societal transformations, the blending of societies, including digital ones in our present, and their interaction with life events and incidents - such as those related to extremism with its various motives and goals - is inevitable according to the laws of life that necessitate the existence of good and evil. Nonetheless, extremism and terrorist incidents are not new phenomena exclusive to the digital age; instead, we are addressing present wounds that are escalating in our digital era.

Extremism manifests in many forms, including general religious extremism, sectarian extremism within the same religion, and racial extremism. We cannot define extremism precisely without considering its comprehensive meaning, which refers to the intellectual dysfunction in human society that calls for fighting against humanity and reducing its right to exist.

Today, in our digital era, which distinguishes itself from previous eras by its ability to remove humans from their spatiotemporal isolation and connect them to the outside world swiftly and accurately through what we know in our digital age as external data or information, one of these communicative capabilities is the rapid interaction of humans in the digital society with global events of all kinds, including incidents of extremism and terrorism that have directly or indirectly affected everyone.

It is evident that digital societal interaction with these events induces an unfamiliar psychological response in individuals, especially in countries

unaccustomed to such scenes, like the Sultanate of Oman. In the wave of digital growth and its rise, we face numerous challenges, including the manufacture of awareness and its movement in terms of positive and negative production. The means of manufacturing societal awareness through digital means are numerous and varied, and they can be harnessed positively to update societal awareness patterns in ways that benefit humanity and its community.

Conversely, there are opposite dangers that threaten societal awareness through the same digital means, which can direct some individuals in societies to become ideologically blind minds working for the interests of terrorist organisations with political and economic interests.

In such cases, it is easy to see the rapid growth of extremist cells that

EXTREMISM MANIFESTS IN MANY FORMS, INCLUDING GENERAL RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM, SECTARIAN EXTREMISM WITHIN THE SAME RELIGION, AND RACIAL EXTREMISM

can be produced quickly under digital developments and their many tools. We face a challenge related to the escalating crisis of extremism and terrorism, which could be a negative consequence of digital advancement if we do not understand its negative operational mechanisms and control them.

The concept of the digital society and its communicative and interactive capabilities surpasses our traditional understanding of the principle of globalisation; in an era of open data, including extremist ideas or news of resulting incidents, it is challenging - if not impossible - to stop their spread, where truth can easily mix with rumour and deliberate falsification. These have become part of the digital warfare system that can be used to undermine public opinion and distract its understanding of events and their processing. This

is another challenge facing the digital society amid unregulated openness, which terrorist organisations strive to achieve to continue their criminal activities through misleading media and digital support.

The role of individuals in the digital society, especially those with intellectual and specialised backgrounds, is crucial. They bear the responsibility to focus on creating intellectual foundations that keep pace with the digital human mind, which cannot rely on traditional means to activate its foundations. Instead, we must first explore the nature of the digital mind, its thinking mechanisms, and access points. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the digital mind, we need to employ abstract thinking connected to the laws of the digital society and its intellectual developments. After that, we should investigate the sources of extremist thought and its trajectories, understanding its mechanisms and means of communication, especially modern ones aligned with digital advancement, like popular and hidden social media.

We possess numerous digital tools that can be harnessed to build societal awareness to confront and destroy any extremism phenomenon before it escalates. The priority lies in establishing societal awareness, which can be considered a safety valve and the first line of defence against extremism and its terrorist attacks. One of the most important aspects of societal awareness is the entrenchment of noble human morals as prescribed by Islam, and the deepening of citizenship and patriotism connected to loyalty to the nation and defending its land and achievements.

Among these digital tools supporting societal awareness projects is the artificial intelligence algorithm capable of precise and rapid analysis of large data sets related to intellectual, cultural, and religious orientations within societies. These data can be easily collected from digital means and platforms, and AI algorithms can analyse them, understand their interaction and activity, and determine priorities for countering harmful elements and building positive awareness that should reside within human societies, replacing any deviant thinking hostile to humanity and its existence.

Peace should come from within

Today we are living in a world stained by wars, conflicts, extremism, violence, and hatred. Though all of us wish peace to be a reality, unfortunately, it remains elusive!

We know peace is not just the absence of war. It is about having real relationships. It is about equality, mutual respect, and kindness with each other. It is about freedom and trust.

For Nelson Mandela, who devoted his life to the service of humanity, “peace is not just the absence of conflict; peace is the creation of an environment where all can flourish, regardless of race, colour, creed, religion, gender, class, caste, or any other social markers of difference.”

Unfortunately, key reasons for the absence of peace in our society are lack of shared values, violation of human rights, and hatred built on the basis of caste, colour, creed, gender, etc.

We hear reports about even close friends and relatives becoming the worst of enemies, seeking the most horrible means to malign and even kill each other and inflicting the most terrible of pain on them in the process!

On the national levels, we see missing of peace on the grounds of linguistic chauvinism, racial and ethnic feud, religious fanaticism, and ideological intolerance. Millions of people die in different countries due to a certain spirit of nationalism.

When it comes to peace at the international front, we find millions caught up in conflicts and wars because of prejudices among nations built on differences in their economic or political systems. Their life is full of miseries. They are without food and shelter.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres told the General Assembly meeting on the priorities of the organisation for 2024 in February last, “Around the globe, and across the range of issues, peace is the missing piece. People want peace and security. People want peace and dignity. And, frankly, they want peace



Samuel Kutty
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The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

THE KEY REASONS FOR THE ABSENCE OF PEACE IN OUR SOCIETY ARE LACK OF SHARED VALUES, VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND HATRED BUILT ON THE BASIS OF CASTE, COLOUR, CREED AND SEX

and quiet.” According to international think tank the Institute for Economics and Peace, currently there are 56 conflicts, the most since World War II. They have become more international, with 92 countries involved in conflicts outside their borders.

There were 162,000 conflict-related deaths worldwide in 2023. This was the second highest toll in the past 30 years, with the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza accounting for nearly three-quarters of deaths. Ukraine represented more than half, recording 83,000 conflict deaths, with estimates of at least 33,000 for Palestine up to April 2024.

In the first four months of 2024, conflict-related deaths globally amounted to 47,000. If the same rate continues for the rest of this year, it would be the highest number of conflict deaths since the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

A 2023 report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reveals that global military spending reached a staggering \$2.1 trillion in 2022. Compare this to the estimated \$100 billion annually needed to end world hunger by 2030, which is one of the UN’s sustainable development goals.

Despite the current state of affairs, the dream of world peace remains a powerful motivator.

We have a number of international days that call for much-needed support to protect refugees, end child labour, stop sexual violence in conflict, and ensure human rights for the innocent children victims of aggression.

Every year September 21 is marked as International Day of Peace around the world. The General Assembly has declared this “a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and peoples.”

Peace starts with each of us. We can promote tolerance in our communities and encourage peaceful solutions to conflicts. Every action, however small, contributes to a more peaceful world. There will be no peace until there is peace for all!

TRAFFIC BLUES!



This overview shows traffic congestion in Kuwait City on Tuesday on the first day of school after summer holidays. – AFP

Helping women adapt to extreme heat

Climate shocks — from heat waves to droughts, floods to wildfires — often hit women the hardest.

New research published this May in *The Lancet* found that even in wealthy European countries, women died at nearly twice the rate as men from extreme heat over the last two decades. According to Marcos Quijal, one of the report’s authors, the findings “reflect a global trend.”

In July, as heat records accumulated, causing even more deaths and economic damage, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called for international action to address what he described as our “global boiling.” But protecting vulnerable communities from extreme heat requires deep commitment and significant funding, both of which seem to be in short supply.

The flow of climate finance has traditionally been skewed towards emissions-reduction efforts and clean-energy projects, because adaptation measures are viewed as being too location-specific and hard to scale, as well as generating low returns. The UN Environment Programme’s 2023 Adaptation Gap Report found that climate-finance flows in 2021 amounted to only about one-tenth of the estimated \$215-387 billion per year that developing countries need to meet their adaptation needs.

Philanthropic foundations, however,



Jess Ayers

The writer is CEO of Quadrature Climate Foundation



Helen Mountford

The writer is President and CEO of ClimateWorks Foundation

are catalysing investment by showing that adaptation is more scalable than previously thought. This summer, Climate Resilience for All, a global NGO focused on helping climate-vulnerable women build resilience, partnered with the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), a trade union for informal workers in India, and local insurance companies Swiss Re and ICICI Lombard. These public- and private-sector groups teamed up with philanthropies to buy low-cost heat-wave insurance for 50,000 members across 22 districts. As temperatures soared above 46° Celsius, every woman received a pay-out, averaging \$12.38 per person.

For women with strenuous and precarious jobs, the money was crucial for weathering the extreme heat. It helped them feed their families and pay their children’s school fees when they couldn’t work, restock their shelves as perishables spoiled faster, and pay for treatment of heat-related injuries and illness. Such an intervention may seem trivial, but it is enough to protect vulnerable individuals from being driven into poverty by climate shocks.

“I enrolled 350 members. When they got ₹400 (just under \$5), they said it was like ₹4,000, as it came at a critical time of life. Some women repaid debts, others paid for their

children’s education and bought fresh goods,” reported Sarojben, a grassroots leader of SEWA, adding, “It brings dignity to us.”

This pioneering insurance scheme is adaptation at its best: directly reaching those most in need when they need support the most. Moreover, the programme is scalable and delivers significant social and economic benefits, enabling women to move up the development ladder and put themselves and their families on firmer financial footing.

Globally, women — including the leaders of SEWA, Climate Resilience for All, and many other organisations — have some of the best ideas for minimising

the effects of climate change, often based on their practical experience. Moreover, many of these solutions can be deployed at scale. But helping millions more women protect their livelihoods and their health in the face of unrelenting heat requires more funding.

Philanthropy is a start. As leaders of two of the world’s largest climate foundations, we are keenly aware of the important role it plays in encouraging effective solutions to the climate crisis. Unlike other investors, philanthropies can pursue and test innovative initiatives such as heat insurance and solar-reflective cool roofs. And this type of work

is expanding: At the UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai, we came together with other philanthropies to launch the Adaptation and Resilience Funder Collaborative. In July, in response to Guterres’s call to action, this group of climate-, development-, and health-focused foundations committed an initial investment of \$50 million to support adaptation measures.

But such an investment, while important, is a drop in the ocean compared to the adaptation-finance gap. All stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, civil-society organisations, and local communities, have a role to play in reducing the risks of extreme heat, protecting human health, and offering economic opportunities for everyone.

Building resilience to extreme heat is no easy feat, especially for the more than 500 million women in the informal economy. Innovative solutions such as heat insurance do exist, but philanthropies, governments, and private investors must work together to scale them up faster to counter the effects of rapidly rising temperatures. The payoff will be worth it, because boosting women’s climate resilience benefits us all.

@Project Syndicate, 2024



For women with strenuous and precarious jobs, the money was crucial for weathering the extreme heat.

sport



Al Nasr come back to beat Al Rustaq

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 17

Al Nasr secured a valuable 2-1 victory over Al Rustaq in a match held on Monday at Al Saada Sports Complex in Salalah as part of the fourth round of the Omantel League.

The first half began cautiously, with both teams exchanging attacks as they attempted to dominate the midfield. Al Nasr applied high pressure early on in search of an opening goal and came close in the 12th minute when Musab al Maamari found himself one-on-one with Al Rustaq's goalkeeper but his shot flew over the crossbar, missing a golden opportunity to take the lead.

On the other hand, Al Rustaq relied on swift counterattacks, capitalising on the speed of their players. They successfully converted one of these counterattacks in the 24th minute when professional player Fiston Abdul delivered a precise header from a pinpoint cross by his teammate, beating Al Nasr goalkeeper Ibrahim al Rajhi. Al



Rustaq continued to perform strongly and almost doubled their lead in the 41st minute when Khalid al Haddabi received the ball inside the penalty box but his shot was brilliantly saved by an outstanding Al Nasr goalkeeper, Al Rajhi, keeping his team in the game. The first half ended with Al Rustaq leading 1-0, while Al Nasr worked to regroup during the half-time break.

At the start of the second half, Al Nasr appeared more organised and effective, with the coach making attacking substitutions, notably bringing on Marwan Taib.

In the 56th minute, the referee awarded Al Nasr a penalty after a clear foul on Yazid al Maashani inside the penalty area. Without hesitation, the referee pointed to the spot. Marwan Taib stepped

up confidently and slotted the penalty into Al Rustaq's net, levelling the score.

Al Nasr continued to push for a winning goal and nearly scored a second in the 70th minute when Awad al Shahri unleashed a powerful shot from outside the box that narrowly missed the post.

As Al Nasr maintained their pressure, they finally broke through in the 72nd minute with a brilliant tactical move. Yazid al Maashani delivered a perfect cross to Marwan Taib, who headed the ball forcefully into the net.

In the final minutes, Al Rustaq tried to fight back by intensifying their attacks but Al Nasr's defence and goalkeeper were up to the challenge. Al Rajhi made several crucial saves to preserve his team's lead. The match ended with a 2-1 victory for Al Nasr, earning them three valuable points.

With this win, Al Nasr raised their total to seven points, advancing to fourth place in the league standings, while Al Rustaq remain on three points, sitting in seventh place.



Al Bashayer take part in Al Wahda International tournament

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 17

Al Bashayer Club will participate in the 2024 Al Wahda International Friendly Basketball Tournament, organised by the UAE Basketball Federation in Abu Dhabi. This tournament will be held from September 19 to 25 at the Mubadala Arena and serves as an important preparatory stage for the team ahead of this season's Omani League.

The tournament features strong teams from various Arab countries, with Al Bashayer competing alongside Al Wahda (UAE), Al Hikma (Lebanon), Kuwait Club (Kuwait), Al Ittihad Al Sakandari (Egypt), Al Fath Rabat (Morocco), Al Karkh (Iraq),



and the UAE national team.

The teams are divided into two groups, each consisting of four teams. In the first round, each team will play three matches, with the top two teams from each group advancing to the semifinals. The winners of the semifinal matches will compete for the championship title, while the remaining teams will play to determine positions from fourth to eighth.

Al Bashayer are placed in Group A, alongside Al Wahda (UAE), Al Fath Rabat (Morocco), and Al Hikma (Lebanon). Group B includes Kuwait Club (Kuwait), Al Ittihad Al Sakandari (Egypt), Al Karkh (Iraq), and the UAE national team.

The tournament kicks off on

September 19, with Al Bashayer playing their first match against Al Hikma. On the same day, Al Karkh will face Kuwait, and Al Ittihad Al Sakandari will play against the UAE national team.

Al Bashayer's second match will be on September 21 against Al Wahda, followed by their third match on September 22 against Al Fath Rabat.

The semifinals will take place on September 24, where the first team from Group A will face the second from Group B, and the first from Group B will face the second from Group A. The tournament will conclude on September 25 with a third-place match, followed by the final match to determine the champion.

Ronaldo misses Al Nassr draw in ACL opener

BAGHDAD: Al Nassr struggled in Cristiano Ronaldo's absence on Monday, when the Saudi Arabian club kicked off the revamped Asian Champions League with a 1-1 draw against Al Shorta in Iraq.

Al Nassr captain Ronaldo did not travel with the squad for the match in Baghdad, with the club issuing a statement a day before stating that the Portuguese superstar had been diagnosed with a viral infection.

Al Nassr, who were knocked out of last season's Asian Champions League in the quarterfinals by eventual champions Al Ain, were given a dream start in the Iraqi capital, when full-back Sultan al Ghannam met Otavio's astute, first-time pass on 14 minutes to finish low past Al Shorta goalkeeper Ahmed Basil.

However, the hosts drew level 10 minutes later.

A mix-up at the back between new signings Salem al Najdi and former RB Leipzig defender Mohammed Simakan allowed Al Shorta forward Mohammed Dawood to steal in and send a superb effort high past Bento in the Al Nassr goal.

Meanwhile, fellow Saudi side Al Ahli eked to a 1-0 victory at home to Iran's Persepolis in Jeddah, with new recruit Ivan



Al Nassr's Sadio Mane in action with Al Shorta's Ahmed Basil during their Asian Champions League match at Al Madina International Stadium, Baghdad, Iraq. — Reuters

Toney making his Asian football debut.

Ivory Coast international Franck Kessie set the home

side on their way in the second minute, rifling home from Riyad Mahrez's assist.

Persepolis were awarded a

penalty four minutes before half-time, when Merih Demiral was deemed to have committed a foul inside the area, however

the decision was overturned following a VAR review.

In the second half, Toney won Al Ahli a spot-kick of their own

— he was felled by rival defender Hossein Kanani — only for Mahrez's penalty to be saved well by Persepolis goalkeeper Alexis Guendouz.

England international Toney, a high-profile signing late last month from Premier League club Brentford, missed a golden opportunity to open his account five minutes from time, but dragged his shot wide.

He had made his debut for Al Ahli last Friday.

AL AIN START WITH DRAW

Elsewhere, Al Ain began their title defence with a 1-1 draw at home to Qatar's Al Sadd.

Akram Afif, 2019 Asian Football of the Year and player of the tournament at the Asian Cup earlier this year, opened the scoring at Hazza bin Zayed Stadium on the hour.

But Al Ain earned a point 10 minutes from time, through Argentine Matias Palacios.

In Monday's other match, Iran's Esteghlal saw off Qatari side Al Gharafa 3-0.

The new format features 24 teams — 12 from West Asia and 12 from East Asia.

With each club playing four matches at home and four away, the top eight in each side of the draw progress to the knockout stages early next year. — AFP

‘Proud’ Raducanu posts gutsy win in Korea Open



SEOUL: Emma Raducanu got her Korea Open campaign off to a winning start with a hard-fought 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7-5) victory over American Peyton Stearns on Tuesday.

Britain's Raducanu is looking to make an impact in Seoul after a string of last-minute withdrawals, including world number one Iga Swiatek, US Open runner-up Jessica Pegula and former Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina.

The 2021 US Open champion Raducanu, ranked 70th in the world, had to dig deep to beat her 48th-ranked opponent in steamy conditions in a match that lasted 2hr 43min.

"I'm proud to have made it through to the next round," said the 21-year-old Raducanu, who is unseeded.

"Thank you to everyone for sticking around and watching us. It was tough, it was very humid, the balls were bouncing around a lot."

Raducanu's next opponent will be China's Yue Yuan, the eighth seed.

"It was a tough match to get

through," added Raducanu.

"I haven't played many matches in the last few months and Peyton is a really good player in really good form, so I'm pretty pleased."

Raducanu, who has failed to build on her stunning US Open success, stormed into a 4-1 first-set lead but let her opponent come back before edging her in the tiebreak.

Raducanu struggled to shake off Stearns in the second set and could not finish the job when serving for the match at 5-3.

She had to battle some more to take the second set to a tie-break but then rode a late surge of momentum to clinch the match in straight sets.

American Hailey Baptiste joined her in the second round after beating compatriot and former US Open champion Sloane Stephens 7-6 (7/4), 6-2.

Sixth seed Yulia Putintseva of Kazakhstan was knocked out after a 6-3, 7-6 (7/5) loss to American Amanda Anisimova.

Play was delayed for 45 minutes at the start of the day for excessive heat. — AFP

Gwangju crush Japan's Marinos in debut

HONG KONG: Yokohama F Marinos crashed to a 7-3 thrashing at the hands of South Korea's Gwangju FC on Tuesday as last year's continental runners-up made a dismal start to their Asian Champions League Elite campaign.

Albanian winger Jasir Asani hit a hat-trick for the tournament debutants while John Hutchinson's side collapsed in the second half at the Gwangju World Cup Stadium.

Asani put Gwangju in front from distance after only two minutes and Oh Hu-seong doubled the lead on the quarter hour before Brazilian Elber pulled one back for Marinos.

But while a second from Asani 10 minutes into the second half was matched by another for Elber four minutes later, the Korean side raced clear with three quick-fire goals in six minutes.

Beka Mikeladze, Lee Hui-gyun and Gabriel Tigrao were all on target against the beleaguered Marinos, who saw substitute Carlos Eduardo sent off 12 minutes from time.

Takuma Nishimura lobbed home from 35 yards with five minutes remaining for the visitors but Asani completed his hat-trick in stoppage time.

Meanwhile, Shanghai Shenhua came back from going behind to a fine 53rd minute finish by Brazilian striker Jorge Teixeira to defeat former champions Pohang Steelers 4-1 in Shanghai.

Andre Luis' header levelled the scores in the 64th minute and Cephas Malele headed in his side's second with 19 minutes remaining.

Malele hit Shenhua's third from the penalty spot to leave Gao Tianyi to put the seal on the win six minutes from time.

Shandong Taishan made it a successful evening for Chinese



South Korea's Gwangju players celebrate after scoring a goal against Japan's Yokohama F Marinos during their Asian Champions League Elite (ACLE) match at Gwangju World Cup Stadium in Gwangju. — AFP



South Korea's Gwangju player (R) shoots the ball past Japan's Yokohama F Marinos goalkeeper during their Asian Champions League Elite (ACLE) stage match at Gwangju World Cup Stadium in Gwangju. — AFP

clubs with Choi Kang-hee's team earning a 3-1 win over Australian champions Central Coast Mariners in Jinan as Valeri Qazaishvili scored twice.

Bi Jinhao had put the hosts in front but a penalty from Mikael

Doka deep into first half stoppage time levelled the scores before Qazaishvili netted twice in the final 16 minutes to claim the points.

Japanese champions Vissel Kobe left Thailand frustrated

as Takayuki Yoshida's outfit were held to a 0-0 draw by Buriram United, with Australian international defender Curtis Good clearing a late Daiji Sasaki effort off the line.

— Reuters

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SIGNIFICANTVISIT

Oman delegation concludes strategic visit to the US



Beginning in New York, Al Yousef and his delegation engaged with partners in financial services, investment and key industries.

MUSCAT: The Omani delegation, led by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, wrapped up a significant visit to the United States.

The delegation engaged in key meetings with US officials and representatives from leading American industries, including manufacturing, energy, healthcare, information technology, tourism, and financial services. Key participants included Ambassador Ana Escrogima, US Ambassador to Oman; Ambassador Dr Mohammed bin Awadh al Hassan, Oman's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York; and Sabra bint Ahmed al Hootiyah, Deputy Head of the Omani Embassy in the US, along with officials from the Oman American Business Council and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The visit aimed to bolster Oman's commercial ties with the US by leveraging regional and international experiences to enhance trade, industry and investment frameworks.

It was part of ongoing efforts to expand investment and trade partnerships, aligning with Oman Vision 2040.

The visit also underscored the importance of the Oman-US Free Trade Agreement, celebrating its 15th anniversary since its 2009 implementation. Beginning in New York, Al Yousef and his delegation engaged with partners in financial services, investment and key industries. They also connected with Omani students in New York and Massachusetts.

In Washington, DC, the delegation met with officials from the State Department, the Office of the US Trade Representative, the Department of Commerce, and Congress members. Discussions centred on maximising the Free Trade Agreement's benefits and enhancing various programmes.

Oman, UK explore trade and investment growth

QAIS BIN MOHAMMED AL YOUSEF, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, met with Douglas Alexander, the UK's Minister of State for Trade Policy and Economic Security, to discuss enhancing cooperation in trade, industry, and investments between Oman and the UK.

The meeting focused on boosting bilateral trade and investment, reviewing current growth indicators, and pushing forward the free trade agreement negotiations between the GCC and the UK. Both sides acknowledged the importance of deepening trade ties and exchanging expertise in various fields of mutual interest.



The meeting focused on boosting bilateral trade and investment, reviewing current growth indicators, and pushing forward the free trade agreement negotiations between the GCC and the UK.

VISUAL PRESENTATION

The discussion included a visual presentation on the long-standing relationship between the two nations, with a particular emphasis on technology transfer, investment opportunities, and economic reforms under Oman Vision 2040. The presentation also showcased

The meeting focused on boosting bilateral trade and investment, reviewing current growth indicators

Oman's efforts to create a favourable investment climate, highlighting recent developments in investment laws and incentives for investors.

Attendees from the Omani side included Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of

Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, and Pankaj Khimji, Advisor to the Ministry for International Cooperation. The UK delegation featured the British Ambassador to Oman and other high-ranking officials. — **ONA**

OMAN ELECTRICITY CONFERENCE FOCUSES ON ENERGY TRANSITION

MUSCAT: The third edition of the Oman Electricity and Energy Conference (IEEE PowerTalks) opened yesterday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, focusing on the mechanisms of energy transformation in Oman. The event brings together local and international participants and is organised by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers in partnership with Raya Services and

Business Company.

The conference, inaugurated by Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, highlights the country's ongoing efforts to diversify energy sources, with a strong emphasis on renewable energy. Nama Group CEO, Ahmed bin Amer al Mahrizi, stressed that while significant progress has been made, challenges such as climate

change and rising energy demand remain.

Engineer Abdullah al Wahaibi, Head of the Electrical and Energy Division at the Institute, outlined that the event will cover topics such as energy efficiency, asset management, renewable systems, and energy storage technologies. Key discussions will centre on Oman's strategies for reducing carbon emissions and securing sustainable energy supplies,

in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The conference features three days of discussions, working papers, and presentations, with workshops focusing on smart grid solutions, hydrogen energy, and electricity generation from turbines.

Additionally, a technology exhibition will showcase the latest innovations in energy and electricity, with a platform for researchers and students to share their work.

Luxury and nature unite at Al Mouj Muscat's Golf Link Residences

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 17

Al Mouj Muscat, Oman's premier lifestyle destination, has unveiled the highly anticipated Golf Link Residences, setting a new benchmark for golf course living. This latest offering, which features a selection of upscale four-bedroom residences and spacious one to three-bedroom apartments, seamlessly integrates luxury with the natural beauty of Al Mouj Golf's fairways. With breathtaking views, premium amenities, and thoughtful design, the development is poised to attract both discerning homebuyers and investors.

Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, described the launch as a step toward creating an exceptional living experience. "The Golf Link Residences epitomises the perfect blend of resort living within vibrant natural surroundings and a well-connected community. This latest offering is unparalleled in the market, catering



The Golf Link Residences epitomises the perfect blend of resort living within vibrant natural surroundings and a well-connected community.

to buyers looking to live or invest in a property that combines elegance and convenience," said Al Sheibani.

Situated within Al Mouj Muscat's prestigious community, Golf Link Residences offers 28 luxurious four-bedroom homes and a range of one to three-bedroom apartments, designed to appeal to a diverse set of buyers.

The residences, which are spread over two floors, cater to medium to large families with living, entertainment, and workspace areas. On the other hand, the apartments provide adaptable, spacious layouts ideal for smaller families, individuals and investors.

Designed to embrace "the luxury of nature," the homes are equipped with numerous high-end amenities. These include a state-of-the-art fitness centre, an infinity pool with views of Al Mouj Golf, a golf simulator room, a mini-golf course, and both indoor and outdoor play areas for children.

In a nod to its exclusive golf-course living theme, residents will also enjoy free membership to the Al Mouj Golf Club's Social Golf Club.

Beyond the residences themselves, the location of Golf Link Residences is one of its key highlights. Residents will have easy access to top-tier hotels such as the St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort and the upcoming 5-star Okura Resort Muscat.

The neighbourhood is designed with interconnected fitness pathways, perfect for walking, running, biking, and even buggy rides, ensuring a healthy and active lifestyle. An on-call transport service is also available to connect residents to the surrounding retail areas, marina, hotels, and golf precincts.

One of the standout features of the development is its sustainability focus. In an interview with *Observer*, Saleh al Siyabi - VP of Sales at Al Mouj Muscat, emphasised that sustainability is central to the design and ethos of Golf Link Residences. "Sustainability is a trade-on, not a trade-off. People are willing to pay for greener houses,

energy-saving homes, and healthy living. Today's launch is a vivid illustration of what is healthy living," he said.

The community's lush green spaces, proximity to the pristine beach, and eco-friendly amenities such as jogging paths, golf carts, and walking trails highlight this commitment to promoting a sustainable lifestyle.

Al Mouj Muscat is also offering a range of attractive payment plans for both Omanis and non-Omanis, with 100 per cent foreign ownership allowed, making it an appealing option for expatriates seeking to invest in Oman. With the launch of Golf Link Residences, Al Mouj Muscat continues to reinforce its reputation as a premier destination, providing a lifestyle that combines the best of nature, luxury, and modern convenience.

As Al Siyabi concluded, "Our commitment to delivering exceptional living experiences remains steadfast, and we look forward to welcoming new residents to our ever-growing community."

BUSINESS/ADVERTORIAL

CFOFORUM



CFO FORUM HIGHLIGHTS INNOVATION, COMPLIANCE AND TAX PARTNERSHIP

MUSCAT: Under the auspices of Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Chairman of the Tax Authority, the CFO Forum kicked off in the Sultanate of Oman, focusing on empowering CFOs to drive innovation and addressing challenges to unlock sustainable growth opportunities in a fast-evolving business landscape.

The event drew over 200 delegates, including senior officials, CFOs, CEOs, and industry leaders from sectors such as oil

and gas, banking, finance and logistics. The forum also honoured outstanding finance professionals through the BT Oman CFO Awards.

Said bin Ahmed al Shanfari, Director of the Second General Directorate of Taxes, participated in a session on “Strategic Responses and Compliance,” emphasising the critical role of CFOs in aligning tax practices with international standards and leveraging tax exemptions to enhance compliance.

NBO’S 24/7 KIOSKS
ENHANCE BANKING
CONVENIENCE



MUSCAT: In its ongoing commitment to digital innovation, National Bank of Oman (NBO) announces its advanced multifunctional self-service kiosks at 11 major locations across Oman. The self-service kiosks enhance financial accessibility and deliver innovative solutions that push the boundaries of traditional banking services. NBO reaffirms its position in the banking industry by constantly enhancing customer touchpoints.

Dr Ali al Shukaili, Assistant General Manager and Head of Digital and E-Channels at NBO, said: “Our self-service kiosks represent a leap towards the future of banking, where convenience and accessibility are at the forefront. This initiative is part of our commitment to enhancing customer experience and providing continuous service, anytime and anywhere.

“These kiosks offer a variety of services, enabling customers to open accounts, apply for new debit and prepaid cards, renew or replace existing cards and top-up prepaid cards — all without needing to visit a traditional branch.

“Moreover, these kiosks are designed to meet the highest security standards ensuring that your banking experience is not only convenient but also safe and secure.”

These new kiosks are installed at key strategic locations, including the Athaiba Head Office, Central Business District (CBD), Bausher, Qurayat, Oman Automobile Association (OAA), Al Khoudh, Barka, Suhar, Ibra, Bahla and New Salalah. These locations were chosen to provide maximum coverage and accessibility for NBO customers. NBO has ambitious plans to expand these kiosks across Oman, ensuring that all governorates have access to this innovative banking solution.

Oman’s ARA Petroleum wins
gas licence in Tanzania

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 17

OMAN UPSTREAM energy firm ARA Petroleum has announced that it has been formally awarded a licence for the development of Tanzania’s Ntorya gas discovery – the largest onshore gas project in the East African nation to date.

Muscat-headquartered ARA Petroleum — part of Zubair Corporation — said the 25-year development licence was presented at a recent ceremony attended by Tanzania’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Energy Dr Doto Mashaka Biteko. ARA Petroleum’s development partner Aminex Plc was also represented at the event.

The award follows a decision by Tanzanian authorities to name ARA Petroleum’s wholly-owned local subsidiary ARA Petroleum Tanzania (APT) as the winner of the Ntorya licence in May this year. The Ntorya gas field lies within the Tanzanian onshore Ruvuma JV licence area, operated by APT with a 75-per cent working interest.

Production from the Ntorya gas field will help ramp up supplies to the domestic Tanzanian market, potentially transforming the country into a regional energy hub in the future.

Under a gas sales pact signed with the Tanzanian Petroleum Development Corporation earlier this year, APT is anticipated to produce 40 million standard cubic feet per day of gas in the first year.

This is projected to increase to 140 million standard cubic feet



The Ntorya field, the largest onshore gas development in Tanzania, is a potential game-changer for the country

The Ntorya gas field lies within the Tanzanian onshore Ruvuma JV licence area, operated by APT with a

75
per cent
working interest

per day within a few years.

“We were honoured to receive this licence from Deputy Prime Minister Doto Biteko at such a prestigious event. This ceremony marks a significant milestone in our commitment to harness Tanzania’s gas resources for the benefit of its people. Our ambition for this serious endeavour is that it results in boosting economic development, alleviating energy poverty and supporting the country’s energy transition,” ARA Petroleum Tanzania General Manager Erhan Saygi said.

Based on seismic data interpretation, Ntorya is believed to hold a matured unaudited

Contingent Resource estimate of 3.45 trillion cubic feet of Gas Initially In Place (GIIP), with an mean unrisked GIIP potential of 16.4 Tcf and a risked mean potential of 6.9 Tcf for the wider Ruvuma JV area.

If suitably developed, these reserves could potentially attract investments in domestic consumers such as fertiliser, cement and plastics production plants, vehicle CNG stations, domestic LPG suppliers and additional gas-fired power stations for industrial and residential use.

First gas from the Ntorya field is expected to flow starting from 2025.

Toyota Camry now comes with exclusive Akeed benefits

MUSCAT: Now is the right time to own the all-new Toyota Camry and enjoy exclusive Akeed benefits. Get service from 2 years / 20,000 kms up to 10 years / 100,000 kms (whichever is earlier), insurance 1 year and chance to win 1 grand raffle — all-new Toyota Prado. The campaign is valid up to October 31, 2024 (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms and Conditions apply. Customers can visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom for exact details.)

Since its debut in 1982 and evolution over nine generations, the Toyota Camry has been embraced around the world for its outstanding performance, alluring design and renowned quality and value. With its advanced yet seamless technology, modern styling and an all-new

The Toyota Camry has been embraced around the world for its outstanding performance, alluring design and renowned quality and value.



Toyota Hybrid System, this model introduces a level of refinement that exceeds expectations, further cementing the Camry’s reputation as a class-leading vehicle.

The new Camry is built around the Toyota New Global Architecture (TNGA-K) platform. This delivers excellent body rigidity and a low centre of gravity, guaranteeing a

more rewarding driving experience. To achieve a more exciting driving style, the new Toyota Camry comes with a choice of two powertrain options, including a 2.5-litre four-cylinder in line VVTi-e engine that produces 201 hp and 240 nm of torque and is paired with an eight-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission; and an electrified

hybrid powertrain, which combines a petrol engine and two electric motors delivering a combined power of 226 hp.

It is also paired with an Electronically Controlled Continuously Variable Transmission (ECVT) delivering heightened driving pleasure. Drivers can also customise their Camry’s drive feel to suit their specific tastes with standard selectable NORMAL, ECO and SPORT driving modes, along with an additional EV mode for HEV drivers. These options allow drivers to customise their Camry’s driving experience, achieving a driving sensation which feels more refined and connected to the road conditions.

The new Camry features a sleek, energetic and eye-catching exterior and feature-rich interior to promise an emotionally engaging driving experience.

Hydrom drives 26 initiatives for green hydrogen

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 17

HYDROM, in collaboration with the Oman Vision 2040 unit and the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, has wrapped up its two-week Ecosystem Readiness Lab, presenting 26 initiatives aimed at meeting Oman's 2030 green hydrogen targets.

These multi-sector initiatives, covering Permits, Contractors, Workforce Development, Logistics and Local Content, are awaiting final approval from a steering committee.

Once ratified, the initiatives will boost private sector investment, foster innovation and enhance Oman's readiness to capitalise on global green energy opportunities.

"This collaborative approach underscores our commitment to sustainability and positions Oman as a leader in the global green energy transition," said Ahmed bin Ibrahim al Abri, Planning and Regulatory Manager at Hydrom.

Key initiatives in the construction and engineering workstream include developing a tender information package, fostering partnerships between local and international contractors and launching a campaign to position Oman as a leader in green hydrogen.

Additionally, a platform will be created to connect developers with local contractors, and industry standards will be established through the National Green Hydrogen Centre.

A pilot green hydrogen project has also been proposed to drive sec-



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tor development.

Workforce development is another focus, with initiatives to align with labour market needs, establish skill incubators and create dedicated housing for workers.

The workstream also proposes setting international safety and welfare standards and improving qualifications for local consultants to ensure Oman's workforce is prepared for green hydrogen projects.

Regulatory reforms, particularly in permits, were also addressed, with a "single permit" system proposed to streamline the approval process. This will facilitate faster execution of green hydrogen projects.

Logistics is another crucial area, with proposals including a comprehensive study of roads, ports and transportation networks, assigning Asyad Group to manage

hydrogen logistics and establishing a platform to monitor supply chain flow for green hydrogen projects.

Local content initiatives aim to enhance the involvement of Omani businesses in the hydrogen value chain.

Proposed measures include incentive programmes, financing mechanisms and the creation of a National Green Hydrogen Centre for research and innovation. Other initiatives include local manufacturing of supply chain components and risk mitigation studies for securing raw materials.

These 26 initiatives are expected to solidify Oman's leadership in green hydrogen production and export, driving both domestic growth and international competitiveness in the clean energy market.

OMAN'S PRODUCER PRICE INDEX SEES 3.3% INCREASE

MUSCAT: The producer price index in Oman experienced a 3-per cent rise in the second quarter of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023, as reported by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Key contributors included a 5.2-per cent increase in the mining and quarrying sector, driven by a 5.4-per cent rise in crude oil and natural gas prices and a 6.2-per cent increase in mineral ore prices.



Conversely, stone and sand product prices fell by 1.6 per cent. In manufacturing, prices rose by 0.5 per cent, with food, beverage and textile products up by 2.4 per cent, and transportable goods by 1.1 per cent.

However, metal products, machinery and equipment saw a 1-per cent decrease. Additionally, electricity prices climbed by 2.2 per cent, while water production prices surged by 5.5 per cent. — **ONA**

TOURISM DATA



The forum coincides with the selection of Sur as the Arab Tourism Capital for 2024.

OMAN TO HOST 2ND ARAB FORUM ON TOURISM STATISTICS

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will host the Second Arab Forum for Tourism Statistics in October 2024, organised by the National Centre for Statistics and Information in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the League of Arab States. The event will run from October 14 to 16, aiming to enhance collaboration among Arab nations in tourism data collection and analysis.

The forum coincides with the selection of Sur as the Arab Tourism Capital for 2024, further boosting Oman's tourism profile.

Dr Khalifa bin Abdullah al Barwani, CEO of the National Centre for Statistics and Information, emphasised that the event is a key opportunity to improve tourism statistics across the Arab world. He noted that accurate tourism data is crucial for understanding visitor behaviour, enabling governments and investors to make informed decisions to boost tourism.

The forum will gather experts from across the globe, as well as representatives from regional and international organisations, to discuss challenges, share knowledge and present new trends in tourism statistics. This will provide vital insights into improving infrastructure and services, as well as fostering collaboration between participating countries. — **ONA**

OMAN OIL PRICE RISES 84 CENTS

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman oil for delivery in November reached \$73.28. The price of Oman oil witnessed an increase of 84 cents compared to Monday's price, which was \$72.44.

The monthly average price of Omani crude oil for delivery in September reached \$83.85 per barrel, up by \$1.35 compared to the price for delivery in August.

Meanwhile, international oil prices edged up in choppy trade on Tuesday as focus turned to the US Federal Reserve's policy meeting that concludes on Wednesday, while fears of weaker demand in China curbed gains.

Brent crude futures for November were up 12 cents, or 0.16 per cent to \$72.74 a barrel, as of 1153 GMT. US crude futures for October gained 27 cents, or 0.39 per cent, to \$69.09 a barrel. — **Agencies**

MSX workshop highlights pathways to sustainable growth

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 17

A workshop hosted by the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Tuesday, September 17, 2024, focused on strategies to position companies for sustainable growth. The event highlighted the critical role of environmental, social and governance (ESG) frameworks. Speakers included Monaem ben Lellahom, Group CEO, and Rach el Golli, Senior Adviser at Sustainable Square Consultancy.

During the presentation, the speakers delved deeply into how regulators and stock markets are increasingly pushing listed companies to report on their ESG practices. This push is designed to promote transparency, align with both national and international sustainability agendas, and attract investment. Market regulators are encouraging companies to integrate ESG into their reporting frameworks, which is becoming a global trend.

The speakers highlighted how, in 2024, ESG-focused exchange-traded funds (ETFs) attracted \$5.54 billion in inflows by February alone, contributing to a total asset pool of \$530.64 billion.

This movement reflects the growing significance of ESG in the investment landscape. While the exact percentage of inflows into ESG ETFs relative to total ESG fund inflows is unclear, the speakers noted that this trend is smaller than the 24 per cent seen in 2020. Nevertheless, this marks a significant step towards the mainstreaming of ESG investments, as investors increasingly prioritise sustainability and ethical practices.

This global shift underscores the vital role of ESG in enhancing a company's attractiveness to investors, improving access to capital, and aligning with future economic regulations.

Monaem ben Lellahom explained that MSX's initiative aims to enhance awareness within listed companies about the benefits of



Speakers delved deeply into how regulators and stock markets are increasingly pushing listed companies to report on their ESG practices.

ESG.

"We tried to focus on the business case and the economic impact of ESG to demonstrate its value to listed companies," he shared.

Ben Lellahom emphasised that ESG frameworks not only ensure compliance with regulations, but

also improve investment prospects.

"You can attract capital from banks at lower rates and avoid future costs, such as carbon taxation, by embracing ESG," he added.

He outlined two key strategies to amplify the role of SMEs in a sustainable economy: prioritising

local vendors and fostering social entrepreneurship. "By building the capacity of local SMEs and creating financial products for impact-driven businesses, such as those in circular economy, sustainable tourism, and agriculture, financial institutions can significantly contribute to Oman's sustainable development," he noted.

Rach el Golli addressed Oman's ambitious goals towards decarbonisation and the transition to sustainable finance.

"The Sultanate of Oman is establishing multiple visions to align with net-zero, climate change and sustainable development," she remarked. El Golli highlighted the need for capacity building and improved local disclosure metrics to support these efforts.

"There is great room for improvement in the disclosure metrics, which are crucial for achieving Oman's sustainability targets," she said, adding that the country is already moving in the right direction.

OPINION

Drought of crypto firms continues amid FCA criticism



ANDY JALIL
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The author is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

THE Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has gone six months without registering a crypto firm amid criticism that its tough approach to regulation poses a risk to the UK's competitiveness in digital assets. FCA, the 'City' (the financial district) watchdog has not approved a crypto firm under anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorist financing (CTF) rules since the end of February, according to its list of registered businesses. These controls must be approved by the FCA for companies to provide most crypto-asset services in the UK. Separate figures show the vast majority of firms that apply for registration under the regime fail to pass through, with the regulator recently seeing a drop-off in application volumes. Since it began supervising the process in January 2020, the FCA has received 356 applications for registration under the AML and CTF regulations introduced by the government in 2017. However, just 47 (14 per cent) of the 336 applications it has determined have been successful in the 12 months to the start of August, the regulator received just 34 applications. Of the 29 it considered during this time, 86 per cent failed. More than half (55 per cent) were withdrawn, while the watchdog rejected

and refused 21 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. While the FCA's figures raise questions over corporate governance within the crypto industry – which has long been associated with illicit activity – some argue the regulator could do more to support these companies. In April 2022, the prime minister at the time, Rishi Sunak, laid out his ambition for the UK to become a "global hub for crypto-asset technology". But a conservative party MP and chair of the Crypto and Digital Assets All-Party Parliamentary Group, Lisa Cameron, said in April that firms were moving to places like the United Arab Emirates and European Union after becoming "very bogged down" with the FCA's process. Other jurisdictions are doing things very quickly, and they are providing a lot more support than the FCA seems to be," she said. The newly elected Labour government has yet to outline any policy proposals on the area. An FCA spokesperson said: "We expect firms to be fit and proper and have adequate systems to identify and prevent flows of money from crime. These standards that we hold firms to are essential to help protect people and the integrity of our financial system."

Highlights

Since it began supervising the process in January 2020, the FCA has received

356 applications for registration under the AML and CTF regulations introduced by the government in 2017

Apart from matters regarding crypto, The Financial Conduct Authority is also dealing with regard to unregulated crowd investment. It has begun a crackdown on crowdfunding investment schemes that see investors diving into unregulated offers. Odin, a service that helps private companies pool investments, has revealed that the regulator had told it to stop taking on new customers until it changes its operating model. "The FCA has come to the view that deal syndication on a software platform like Odin's requires a specific regulatory permission (arranging deals with retail investors) that we do not have," the company said. "Neither to our knowledge, do any of our primary competitors in the UK." The UK Crowdfunding Association, which represents regulated investment platforms, said there had been "an alarming rise in the number of founders seeking to raise finance directly from the public via what appear to be unregulated share offers". A founding director, Bruce Davis said: "Investments worth potentially millions of pounds are being sought from small investors who run the risk of investing without the protections available via regulated investment platform".

STORING ENERGY TODAY FOR A STABLE TOMORROW

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

OUR WORLD is rapidly evolving, with energy at the core of its innovation. Energy storage has played a key role in our transition to renewable sources, supporting a more reliable, stable, and efficient energy grid. Oman's ambitious steps in harnessing solar and wind resources for low-carbon electricity generation have allowed it to move forward, developing its energy storage capacity and maintaining stability as it develops renewable energy sources such as solar and wind. However, solar and wind power, while effective, present inherent intermittency issues — the sun doesn't always shine, and the wind isn't constant. Energy storage is the key to balancing supply and demand, ensuring a consistent power flow, and enabling the widespread adoption of renewable energy. Rising demands for reliable, sustainable power sources have made energy storage systems (ESS) an increasingly prominent solution. ESS includes diverse technologies to capture and store excess energy, so that we can use it when we need it most. With benefits that extend far beyond serving as a backup power source, ESS plays a critical role in stabilising grids and alleviating strain by storing excess energy during periods of high production and releasing it during peak demand. By facilitating the integration of renewable energy sources into the grid, ESS mitigates the intermittency of renewable energy, ensuring that energy harnessed from solar panels or wind turbines during peak production hours isn't wasted but instead stored for later use when demand surges. ESS contributes to enhancing energy efficiency by optimising generated power, reducing transmission losses, and creating a more harmonious flow between supply and demand for a more efficient energy system overall. Pumped hydro storage, compressed air energy storage, and hydrogen-based storage technologies are also gaining popularity for their potential to store immense amounts of energy for longer duration. As Oman and the world at large continue to embrace renewable energy as the way forward, the role of energy storage systems will become increasingly vital.



MOHAMMED ALBADI

The author is Rector of Arab Open University Oman



PPPs can address the challenge of acquiring and maintaining state-of-the-art equipment and facilities.

OMAN has made significant progress in expanding its higher education sector, particularly in information and communication technology (ICT). However, a persistent challenge remains: the disconnect between the skills taught in educational institutions and those demanded by industry. This skills gap poses a significant obstacle to Oman's economic diversification efforts and its aspirations to become a knowledge-based economy, as outlined in its Oman Vision 2040 strategy. The rapid pace of technological change heightens this challenge, with emerging technologies like blockchain, quantum computing, and AI reshaping industries faster than traditional educational curricula can adapt. This dynamic environment necessitates a more agile approach to ICT education. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) offer a compelling solution to this complex problem. By fostering collaboration between academic institutions, government bodies, and private sector entities, PPPs can create a more dynamic and industry-aligned educational ecosystem. These partnerships can address various aspects of the skills gap through several key focus areas. Curriculum development is a critical area where PPPs can make a significant

impact. Involving industry practitioners in designing and updating course content ensures programmes remain relevant and aligned with current industry needs. For example, a partnership between a university and a leading cybersecurity firm could result in a curriculum incorporating real-world case studies and hands-on experience with the latest security tools. Moreover, integrating industry-recognised certifications into academic programmes allows students to graduate with both a degree and valuable credentials. The Huawei ICT Academy programme, which offers specialised training and certification in various ICT domains, serves as an excellent example of such an initiative. Expanding and replicating such programmes across different technology areas and partnering with multiple industry leaders could significantly enhance the employability of graduates. Similarly, internships and cooperative education programmes, like Eidaad in Oman, demonstrate the potential of providing students with real-world experience. Expanding these opportunities allows students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings and develop essential soft skills. Research collaboration through joint projects between universities and private companies can also drive innovation,

contribute to intellectual property development, and keep academic staff at the forefront of technological advancements. Additionally, PPPs can address the challenge of acquiring and maintaining state-of-the-art equipment and facilities by enabling private sector partners to contribute financial resources, equipment, and expertise. While the potential benefits of PPPs are clear, implementing them effectively requires careful planning and coordination. Clear governance structures, well-defined objectives, and mechanisms for ongoing evaluation are essential for success. All stakeholders must commit to investing time, resources, and effort into making these collaborations work. The government plays a crucial role in facilitating and incentivising these partnerships. Policy frameworks that encourage and support PPPs in education, potentially including tax incentives or matching fund programmes, could significantly accelerate their adoption. The government can also act as a catalyst by creating platforms for dialogue and collaboration between educational institutions and industry. It's important to note that PPPs must be implemented thoughtfully, maintaining academic integrity and ensuring that educational objectives are not compromised in the pursuit of industry relevance. A balance must be struck between practical skills and the foundational knowledge that enables long-term career adaptability. As we look to the future, it's clear addressing the ICT skills gap is not just an educational imperative but an economic necessity. In an increasingly digital world, Oman's economic competitiveness will depend on its ability to produce a skilled workforce capable of driving technological innovation and digital transformation across all sectors. Public-private partnerships offer a promising path forward amidst this challenge, enabling the creation of an educational ecosystem that is more responsive, relevant, and aligned with industry needs. By embracing these partnerships and committing to their successful implementation, Oman can ensure its graduates have the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in the digital economy. The time for action is now. Educators, industry leaders, and policymakers must come together to forge these vital partnerships. Only through a collaborative effort can Oman bridge the ICT skills gap and pave the way for a prosperous, technologically advanced future.

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CULTURE

A picture shows a view of the 7th century BC King Taharqa of the 25th Kushite empire dynasty as workers move it from the entrance of the Sudan National Museum to a new location within, during an official ceremony as part of the museum's ongoing renovations in Khartoum. Sudan's priceless archaeological heritage is being stripped from museums, with looters loading statuettes and fragments of ancient palaces onto lorries, smuggling them out of the war-torn country, and selling them online. — AFP



FASHION

Creations by fashion designer Guo Pei, one of China's leading couture artists, are seen on display during the 'Guo Pei: Fashioning Imagination' exhibition at the M+ art museum in Hong Kong. — AFP

TRAVEL TALES

ENDANGERED PYGMY HIPPO GOES VIRAL FROM THAI ZOO



The morning sunlight bouncing off her sleek hide, Moo Deng the pygmy hippo plops to the ground in her enclosure, seemingly unfazed by her rapid rise to social media stardom.

The two-month-old pint-sized creature went viral this week after her handlers posted videos of her on TikTok and Instagram from her home at a zoo in Chon Buri, Thailand.

Her cheeky expressions and playful frolicking racked up millions of views and have lured thousands of visitors wanting to witness her antics.

Moo Deng — whose name in Thai means “bouncy pork”, a popular snack — is now an unwitting poster child for the endangered pygmy hippo.

The fame has not gone to Moo Deng's head, as she sticks close to her mother, sharing a meal of carrots, bananas, corn and runner beans.

Native to West Africa, the pygmy hippo is threatened by human activities, such as logging, mining and poaching, and there are only 2,000 to 2,500 left in the world, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Hundreds of visitors queued at the zoo for five minutes in the enclosure.

One group said they woke up at 5:00 am to make the two-hour drive from Bangkok to see the celebrity.

A visitor said she hoped more Thais would come and “post about Moo Deng online so that more people will come to see her”. Moo Deng's caretaker and social media manager Atthapon Nundee, 31, said the rise of short-form videos has turbocharged the pygmy hippo's fame and hopes it will be a boon for biodiversity preservation.

“With more and more images of pygmy hippos online, more people fell in love with them. They are poached in the wild, so with more people caring about them, it might prevent their poaching,” he said. A 2022 study published by the Royal Society of Canada's Academy of Science shows that social media can play both positive and negative roles in wildlife conservation.

Public attention may help raise awareness about endangered wildlife but can increase the risk of species exploitation as more people try to come in contact with them. — AFP

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MILAN FASHION WEEK OPENS AMID HEADWINDS, AND WITHOUT GIORGIO

Milan transforms once again into the world’s fashion capital starting on Tuesday, with Spring-Summer 2025 women’s shows rolling out amid a global slowdown in luxury apparel — and without longtime local icon Giorgio Armani.

A challenging environment for fashion won’t stop the shows, however, which run through Sunday and kick off with Fendi.

The best in women’s fashion benefits this year from the addition of one more day, the better to squeeze in 57 live catwalk shows attended by buyers, reporters and other industry professionals.

Highlights of the week include Italy’s best-known luxury fashion labels, from Prada and Gucci to Bottega Veneta, Versace and Dolce & Gabbana. But Fashion Week stalwart Giorgio Armani will not be showing his namesake line, having chosen New York for his women’s collection on October 17, timed to coincide with the inauguration of a new building on Madison Avenue.

His mid-level Emporio Armani line, however, will get two shows in Milan, followed by a party

on Thursday in the futuristic theatre located at his fashion headquarters. Moncler has also shunned Milan this season, opting for Shanghai for its show on October 19, with MSGM, Blumarine and Tom Ford also absent from the calendar.

LESS ROSY

In presenting Milan Fashion Week’s lineup to the press, the general director of Agenzia ICE, a division of Italy’s Trade Agency that promotes Italian companies abroad, highlighted the industry’s 108 billion euros (\$120 billion) in turnover and exports of 81.6 billion euros.

In Italy, “the fashion system is the one that contributes more than others to consolidating the image of our country’s excellence abroad,” he said.

A crucial sector that represents five percent of Italy’s gross domestic product (GDP), the health of Italy’s fashion industry is currently less rosy than the coming glamorous catwalk shows would suggest.

So far this year, turnover is down 6.1 per cent, according to figures from the National Chamber for Italian Fashion, with the trend expected to continue in the second half of the year. — AFP



Booker Prize 2024 shortlist features five female authors

THIS YEAR’S Booker Prize shortlist will feature the biggest number of women authors in its 55-year history. Five women and one man will feature on the shortlist for the prestigious literary prize.

The list, whittled down from a long list of 13, also includes the first Australian author in a decade, as well as the first Dutch writer to be shortlisted.

British, Canadian and American authors comprise the rest of the six-strong list, with two authors making the shortlist for the second time.

One of the books featured is “Orbital,” by English novelist Samantha Harvey, which centres around six astronauts on the International Space Station (ISS), with Harvey previously explaining: “I wanted to write about our human occupation of low earth orbit for the last quarter of a century — not as sci-fi but as realism.

“Could I evoke the beauty of that vantage point with the care of a nature writer? Could I write about amazement? Could I pull off a sort of space pastoral? These were the challenges I set myself.”

Harvey was long listed for the Booker Prize in 2009 for “The Wilderness,” and previously published a memoir about her insomnia, “The Shapeless Unsease: A Year Of Not Sleeping,” in 2020.

Two American authors features on the list — Percival Everett for James and Rachel Kushner for Creation Lake.

In 2022, Everett made the Booker shortlist for “The Trees” and this year he is shortlisted for “James,” which is a powerful retelling of “The Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn” by Mark Twain, from the perspective of the enslaved Jim.

In 2021 Everett’s “Telephone” was

FIVE WOMEN

and one man will feature on the shortlist for the prestigious literary prize. The list, whittled down from a long

LIST OF 13,

also includes the first Australian author in a decade, as well as the first Dutch writer to be shortlisted.

a Pulitzer Prize finalist, and his 2001 novel “Erasure” was adapted into the film “American Fiction,”starring Sterling K Brown and Jeffrey Wright, and which won director Cord Jefferson the best adapted screenplay Oscar earlier this year.

Fellow American Kushner is shortlisted for “Creation Lake,” having previously been shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2018 for “The Mars Room.”

Kushner, whose other works include “The Flamethrowers,” said of “Creation Lake”: “I had long wanted to tell a story about a group of young people who decamp from Paris to a rural outpost in France,where they are set on a collision course with the French state.

“At the same time, I became interested in prehistory, both what can be known about ancient people and what the longing to know actually is, a sense that we have taken a wrong turn, that our ancestors hid messages from us that we don’t know how to read.”

Charlotte Wood is the first Aus-

tralian author to be shortlisted in a decade, with “Stone Yard Devotional,” which follows a middle-aged woman who leaves Sydney for the small religious community in the middle of the outback where she grew up — but instead of finding quiet refuge, increasingly haunting visitors drop by the rural town.

Australian author Richard Flanagan won the Booker prize in 2014, for “The Narrow Road To The Deep North,” which was set on the notoriously cruel Thailand-Burma railway where his father was a prisoner of war.

Dutch author Yael van der Wouden features with debut novel, “The Safekeep,” and is also the first Dutch author to make the Booker shortlist.

Additionally, her other work includes having written an online, David-Attenborough themed advice column, answering people’s problems posing as Sir David.

Canadian Anne Michaels, known for her poetry and 1996 novel “Fugitive Pieces,” is shortlisted for Held, described on the official Booker Prize website as “a narrative that spans four generations, moments of connection and consequence ignite and re-ignite as the century unfolds”.

This year’s judging panel is chaired by artist and author Edmund de Waal, who is joined by award-winning novelist Sara Collins, *The Guardian’s* Fiction Editor Justine Jordan, and writer and professor Yiyun Li.

Musician, composer and producer Nitin Sawhney, who has collaborated with Sir Paul McCartney, Sting and Pink Floyd and won an Ivor Novello Lifetime Achievement award in 2017, is also on the judging panel.

The judges said of Michaels’ “Held”: “Starting with a wounded soldier on a French battlefield, this lyrical kaleidoscope of a novel is created in our tracks by the power of the contemporary fiction that we have been privileged to read. And here are the books that we need you to read.

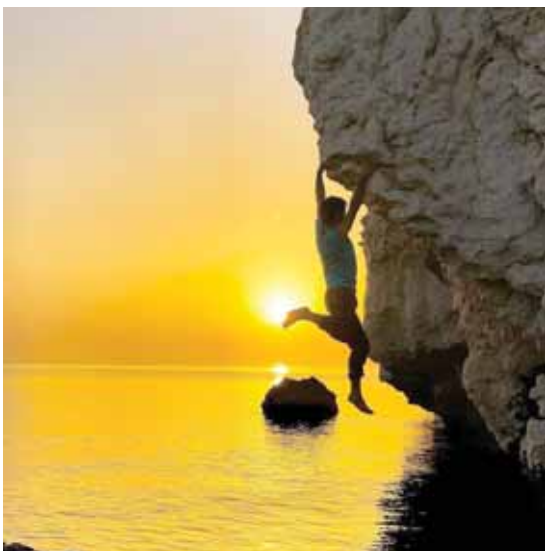
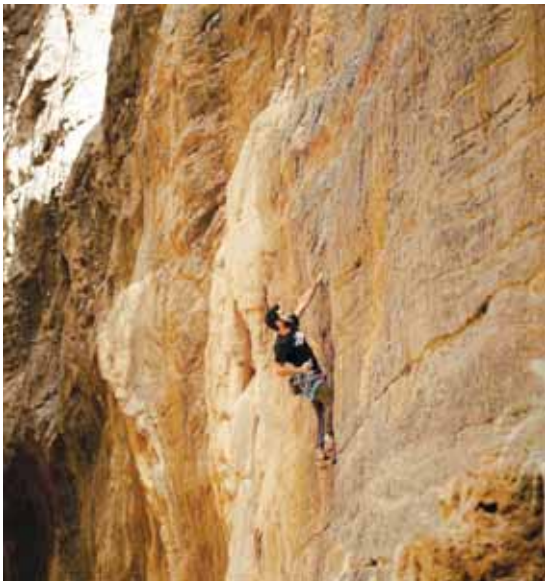
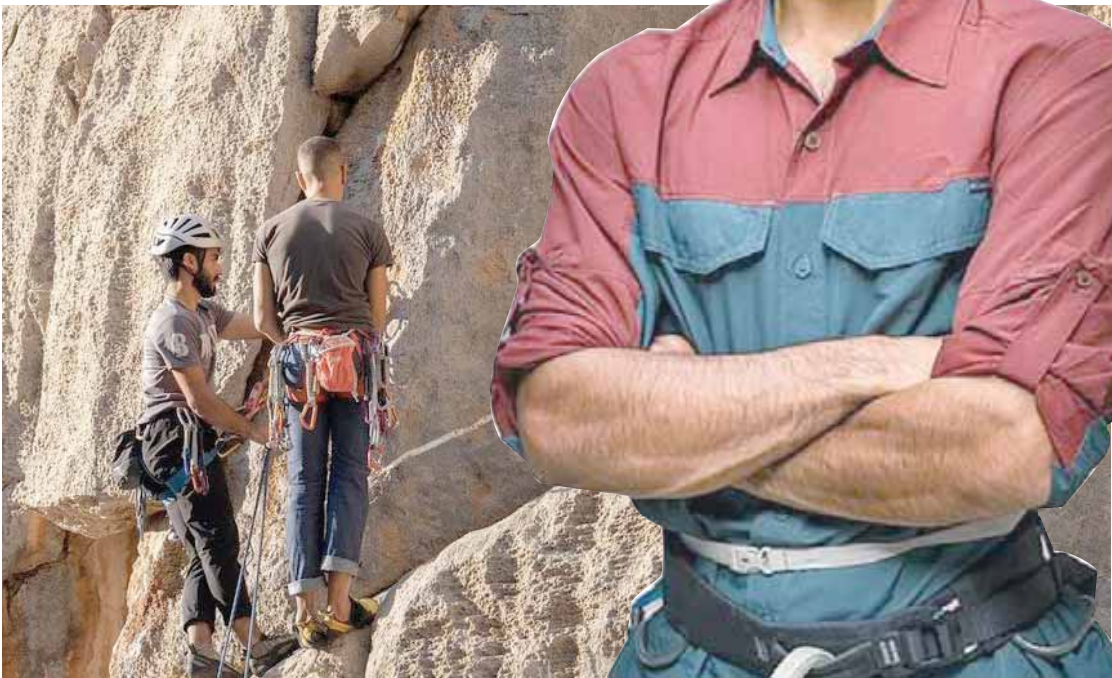
“Great novels can change the reader. They face up to truths and face you in their turn.”

He added: “The fault lines of our times are here. Borders and time zones and generations are crossed and explored and are brought into renewed focus through memorable voices.

“The people who come alive here are damaged in ways that we come to know and respect, and we come to care passionately about their histories and relationships.”

This year’s Booker Prize ceremony is being held on November 12, and the winning author will receive £50,000 (\$66,000) and a trophy.

Last year’s winner was Irish author Paul Lynch and his Dystopian novel “Prophet Song.” — PA Media/dpa



FROM P18

Embracing the thrill of sport climbing

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

AT A YOUNG AGE, he was aware of the beauty of the mountains surrounding his village. Living in Balad Seet in Al Rustaq, he has admired those mountains, and being one of the most fertile places in Oman, he has seen families, relatives, and friends till the soil so it can yield crops that are not only used at home but also sold in nearby markets.

Beyond farming, Al Rustaq is also known for its beautiful hiking trails and tourist attractions. And for Saud al Thuhli, his passion allowed him to reimagine how he could enjoy those towering mountains even more.

Oman offers a diverse range of exceptional locations for expert climbers, whether they are interested in rock climbing or abseiling. Its striking mountainous terrain has long captivated adventurers, particularly during the winter months, when climbers can experience the exhilaration of ascending various types of peaks. The most renowned climbing destinations are Jabal Shams and Majlis Al Jinn Cave.

Like many other climbing enthusiasts, Saud's fascination with the towering peaks began in childhood, and he embarked on his climbing journey in 2006, at the age of 13, alongside foreign climbers visiting Oman.

In the early days, climbing was simply a hobby for Saud, something he pursued when time and circumstances allowed. However, his growing passion soon transformed the mountains into an integral part of his life. To enhance his skills, Saud turned to fitness, recognising that improved physical conditioning would lead to more effective and enjoyable climbing experiences. Gradually, he learned the essential techniques and safety measures necessary for more advanced climbs.

Saud specialises in sport climbing, a discipline that requires ropes and specialised equipment, such as anchors secured into the rock for safety. The cost of the necessary gear, including ropes, carabiners, harnesses and climbing shoes, initially posed a significant challenge.

In countries like Oman, sport climbing is gaining popularity due to its growing infrastructure, stunning natural landscapes and increasing awareness of the sport. As interest in outdoor and adventure sports rises globally, Oman's unique terrain and relatively untapped climbing potential have made it a hotspot for those looking for new and exciting climbing experiences. Additionally, the sport's structured and safety-focused approach makes it appealing to a wider audience, contributing to its rapid growth in the region. While the sport required investing in gear, Saud managed to partner and network with other enthusiasts, which allowed him to be able to afford to pursue the sport.

Another difficulty Saud faced was the lack of climbing companions, as climbing is typically done in pairs or groups to ensure safety, enjoyment and motivation. Over time, his connection has gotten wider, and the rise in interest has allowed him to find the right people.

"With the growth of climbing in Oman, the experience has become much

more accessible," Saud explained.

"I believe the Arab region has incredible natural features that make it ideal for climbing, attracting enthusiasts from around the globe," he added.

"Countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt have already established climbing federations. We hope to create a similar federation in Oman, led by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, to unite Omani climbing enthusiasts who have excelled in the sport," he shared.

Saud shared that he is also seeing hope as investments are being made into building indoor climbing facilities, which play a crucial role in the development and training of sport climbers, offering a controlled environment where climbers can hone their skills, practice techniques and build strength year-round, regardless of weather conditions.

These facilities provide climbers with the opportunity to simulate outdoor routes, improve their physical fitness and practice safety techniques in a safe and accessible setting. For beginners, indoor climbing gyms offer an introduction to the sport in a more approachable and manageable way, while experienced climbers can use them to stay sharp between outdoor climbs and push their limits on advanced routes. Saud shared that one promising initiative is Adventure World in Muscat, which showcases their talents and innovative ideas.

"They have a nice facility, and for climbers, it's like plug and play where you can come in and enjoy the amenities. There are also varying levels of challenges, and they come with the gear essentials," Saud shared.

Saud is also happy to note that there have also been numerous efforts being made to make the sport more enticing, with different organisations organising sport climbing tournaments that allow enthusiasts to showcase their learnings and techniques.

Saud believes that these are crucial in creating a more robust community of climbers and encouraging further investment for climbing enthusiasts like him to enjoy.

For those who would like to venture into this sport, Saud emphasised that it's not a sport for everybody. He reminded us that climbers need to develop a mix of physical and technical skills.

"Strength and endurance are key for scaling challenging routes, while flexibility enhances mobility on the rock. Core strength, balance and footwork are equally important, allowing climbers to navigate holds more efficiently. Technical skills, such as proper belaying, rope management, and using equipment like carabiners and harnesses, are essential for both safety and performance," he said. He also advocated that safety is paramount in sport climbing. Climbers should always check their equipment, including harnesses, knots and anchors, before starting a climb.

Wearing a helmet, using appropriate shoes and double-checking rope systems are critical safety measures. It's also important to climb with a partner for belaying and to communicate clearly throughout the climb. Understanding weather conditions and knowing your physical limits will help prevent accidents and ensure a successful climb.