

P14

AL SHARQIYAH NORTH GOVERNORATE SEES RISE IN SMES



P12

POGACAR ACHIEVES FIRST GIRO/TOUR DOUBLE SINCE 1998



P20

BEAT THE HEAT WITH THESE SUMMER ACTIVITIES



SUNRISE - 05:32 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:08 AM

DHUHR - 12:18 PM

ASR - 03:40 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:59 PM

ISHA - 08:19 PM

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MUSCAT

HM RECEIVES THANKS CABLE FROM EMIR OF KUWAIT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable on the death of Shaikha Suhaira Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah. In the cable, Shaikh Mishal expressed his utmost thanks for His Majesty's sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the deceased's soul in peace and protect His Majesty against all harm.

HM CONGRATULATES PRESIDENT OF EUROPEAN COMMISSION

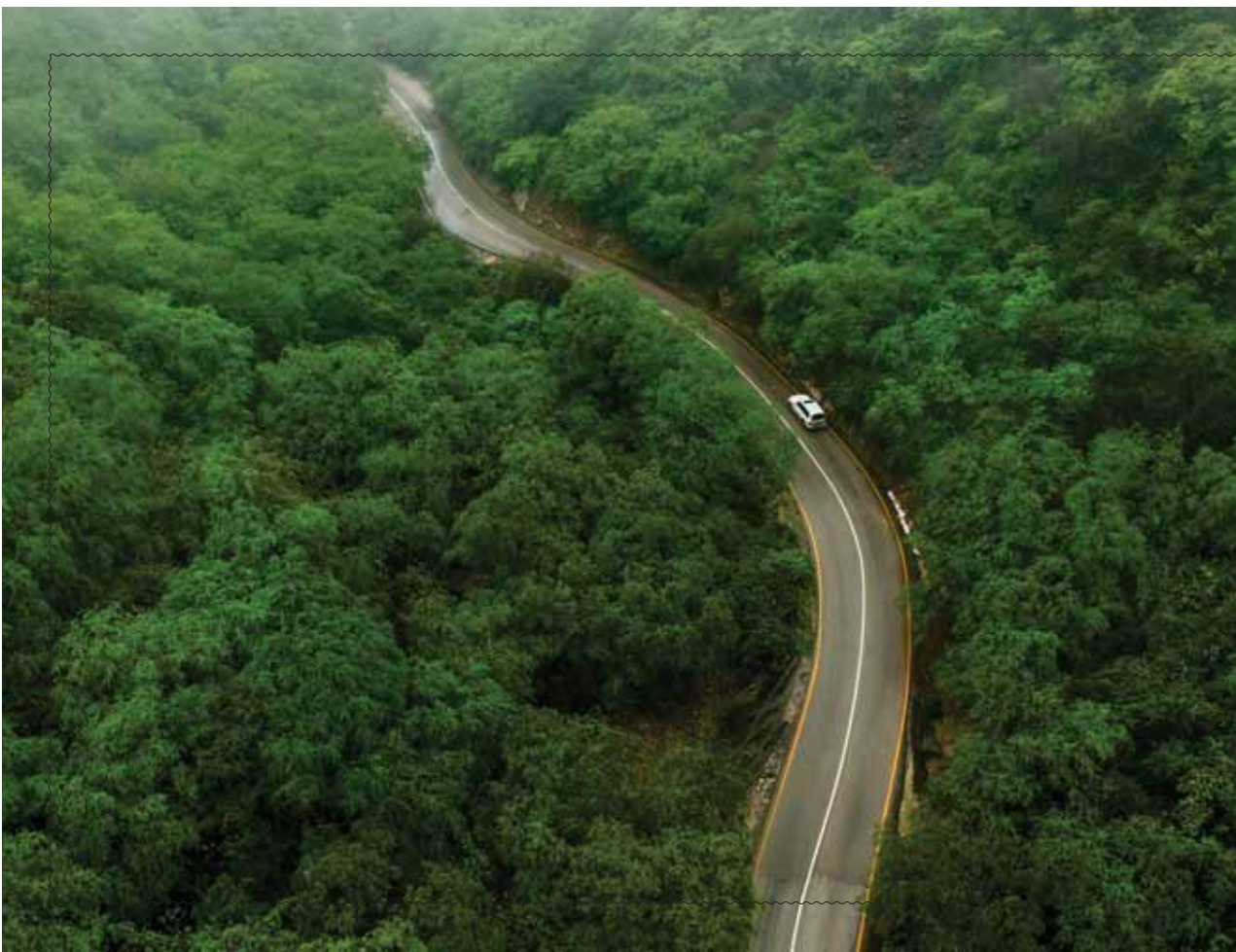
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Ursula von der Leyen on the occasion of her re-election as President of the European Commission. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his best wishes of success to the President of the European Commission. He also wished the peoples of the European Union, further progress.

HM CONDOLES PRESIDENT OF VIETNAM

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Dr Tu Lam of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on the death of former president Nguyen Phu Trong. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and heartfelt sympathy to President Dr Tu Lam, the family of the deceased and the people of Vietnam. — ONA

NEW HOUSING SCHEMES FOR RUSTAQ, AL MUDHAIBI, NIZWA

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning intends to roll out 3 sites for investing in integrated residential quarters in October 2024 as well as studying the establishment of four residential schemes in 4 wilayats. The projects are part of the National Initiative for Quarters and Residential Schemes which aims to provide suitable housing for citizens. The projects aims to fulfil citizens' aspirations to own houses and are in line with the ministry's efforts to implement housing projects. DETAILS ON P2



WADI AGHIR: A SCENIC ROUTE THROUGH DHOFAR'S GREEN FORESTS

SALALAH: Wadi Aghir Road in the Wilayat of Salalah is one of the most picturesque routes and tourist attractions in Dhofar Governorate. This paved road winds through lush, intertwined forests, leading travellers to the verdant highlands. SEE ALSO P3



US President Joe Biden

Biden, 81, pulls out of presidential race

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden ended his reelection campaign on Sunday after fellow Democrats lost faith in his mental acuity and ability to beat Donald Trump, leaving the presidential race in uncharted territory.

Biden, in a post on X, said he will remain in his role as president and commander-in-chief until his term ends in January 2025 and will address the nation this week.

"It has been the greatest honour of my life to serve as your President. And while it has been my intention to seek reelection, I believe it is in the best interest of my party and the country for me to stand down and to focus solely on fulfilling my duties as President for the remainder of my term," Biden wrote.

By dropping his reelection bid, he clears the way for Vice President Kamala Harris to run at the top of the ticket.

It was unclear whether other senior Democrats would challenge Harris for the party's nomination, who was widely seen as the pick for many party officials — or whether the party itself would choose to open the field for nominations.

Biden's announcement follows a wave of public and private pressure from Democratic lawmakers and party officials to quit the race after his shockingly poor performance in a televised debate last month against Republican rival Donald Trump.

— Reuters

Oman condemns attacks on Yemen

CALLS ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO ASSUME ITS RESPONSIBILITIES

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has denounced the Israeli military attacks on the sisterly Republic of Yemen saying that it constitutes a new escalation and adds more tension in the region as well as complicates the regional situation, hinders efforts to end conflicts and impede peace efforts especially with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict and achieving justice for the Palestinian people.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Sunday, the Sultanate of Oman called on the international community to assume its responsibilities to preserve regional and international security and peace and to take decisive action to protect civilians and ensure the delivery of urgent humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.

The Foreign Ministry stressed the importance of addressing the root causes of the conflict and focusing on dialogue and negotiation as a means to achieve sustainable solutions based on



Flames and smoke rise from the site of Israeli air strikes at the port of Hodeidah, Yemen on Sunday. — Reuters

international law that should be applicable to all parties without discrimination or double standards.

The death toll from an Israeli strike on the port of Hodeidah climbed to six, Ansar Allah health authorities said on Sunday, as the rebel group's leader threatened an escalation in attacks.

Saturday's strike on the port, a key entry point for fuel and humanitarian aid to war-ravaged

Yemen, is the first claimed by Israel in the Arabian peninsula's poorest country, about 2,000 kilometres (1,300 miles) away.

It killed six people and injured 83, many of them with severe burns, the rebel-run health ministry said in a statement carried by Ansar Allah media. Three people remain missing, it said.

Israel said it carried out the strike in response to a drone attack by the Ansar Allah on Tel

Aviv which killed one person on Friday.

On Sunday, Ansar Allah chief Abdul Malik al Huthi said the strikes would lead to "further escalation and more attacks targeting Israel".

Friday's Ansar Allah drone strike on Tel Aviv has changed the rules of engagement and opened "a new phase" in operations against Israel, he added.

Ansar Allah military spokesman Yahya Saree said the rebels' "response to the Israeli aggression against our country is inevitably coming and will be huge".

On Sunday, the Israeli military said it intercepted a missile fired from Yemen towards the Red Sea resort town of Eilat, noting that "the projectile did not cross into Israeli territory".

Saree said the rebels had fired ballistic missiles towards Eilat, the latest in a string of Ansar Allah attempts to hit the port city.

— ONA/AFP

Maternity leave essential for mother's mental health

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

Appropriate maternity leave significantly contributes to a mother's mental health, as highlighted by the Ministry of Health. This leave is crucial in maintaining a mother's well-being before and after childbirth.

Studies indicate that maternity

leave serves as a protective measure against postpartum psychological issues, including depression and general mental health problems. It also reduces the need for mental health care services.

Huda bint Humaid al Jardaniyah, Director of the Maternity Leave Benefits Allowance Project at the Social



Protection Fund, stated that maternity leave insurance covers the mother from pregnancy to post-birth. This insurance is pivotal in providing social protection for families, reinforcing principles of partnership and justice.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) emphasises that neglecting women's mental

health during the perinatal period can threaten their overall well-being and impact the physical and emotional development of their children.

Before childbirth, maternity leave helps mothers adapt to the physical and emotional changes of pregnancy, fostering comfort and happiness. It provides them with sufficient time to prepare

for childbirth, create a conducive home environment for the newborn and reduce the risk of psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety.

Post-childbirth maternity leave aids in the mother's physical and psychological recovery, allowing her to focus on caring for her child without the stress of returning to work.

TURN TO P2





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New housing schemes for Al Rustaq, Al Mudhaibi and Nizwa



The projects are part of the National Initiative for Quarters and Residential Schemes which aims to provide suitable housing.

YOUSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning intends to roll out 3 sites for investing in integrated residential quarters in October 2024 as well as studying the establishment of four residential schemes in 4 wilayats.

The projects are part of the National Initiative for Quarters and Residential Schemes which aims to provide suitable housing for citizens.

Engineer Wasama bin Nasser al Harbi, Director of the Integrated Residential Quarters Department at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, said that the ministry will offer new sites in the wilayats of Al Suwaiq, Samayil and Sur in October.

The ministry also intends to study integrated housing schemes in the wilayats of Ibri, Al Buraimi, Nizwa and

Izki. The projects aims to fulfil citizens' aspirations to own houses and are in line with the ministry's efforts to implement housing projects.

He noted that the ministry also intends to open a sales centre within the Al Shurooq quarter project in Dhofar Governorate next month with sales in the neighbourhood reached 58 per cent while sales in the Al Luban quarter project in the Halban area in the Wilayat of Nakhal reached 10 per cent which represents the largest project of the National Initiative for Integrated Quarters and Residential Schemes with 1,442 housing units.

The implementation rate at Hisn Al Zain project in the Wilayat of Bidbid has reached 77 per cent whereas the first phase of the Al Naseem neighbourhood project in the Wilayat of Barka has exceeded 60 per cent complete.

The implementation rate

at the Majd neighbourhood project in the Wilayat of Suhar has reached 11 per cent. Design work has begun on the integrated residential plan projects in the wilayats of Al Rustaq, Al Mudhaibi and Nizwa.

The National Initiative for Integrated Neighbourhood and Residential Schemes provides integrated services and facilities that keep pace with the latest trends in development and sustainability standards.

It provides many advantages such as reducing the time to access facilities and services, adopting healthy lifestyles and recreational facilities that enhance communication, and strengthen social ties and this reflects in the prosperity and development of societies.

The integrated quarters and residential schemes projects is one of many housing options launched by the ministry with the aim of achieving family

stability and diversity in the options offered, shortening waiting times and accelerating the ownership process, Al Harbi said.

The initiative also offers various housing options such as residential lands, detached and semi-detached villas, townhouses, apartments, and various recreational options and facilities

The Palm Hills project in Musandam Governorate has a qualitative value as it includes the premises of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Khasab as a facade for the project. The project involves a commercial district, a cultural centre, a religious centre and approximately 500 housing units.

The Al Majd neighbourhood project in Suhar is located near Sohar Port. It involves a large number of residential apartments, and 25 per cent has been earmarked to foreign ownership.



MARITIME COOPERATION DISCUSSED WITH TÜRKİYE

MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), welcomed Rear Admiral Eren Gunay, Commander of the Istanbul Strait Naval Zone, at his office in Al Murtafa'a Camp on Sunday. Rear Admiral Gunay is currently visiting the country.

During the meeting, Rear Admiral Al Rahbi and Rear Admiral Gunay, along with their respective delegations, engaged in friendly discussions and exchanged views on various maritime issues of mutual interest. The meeting was also attended by the Military Attaché at the Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye in Muscat. – **ONA**

Summer programme for students begins

SALALAH: The 'Summer of Ambitions and Values' programme for school students kicked off on Sunday at the Directorate General of Education in Dhofar Governorate. This initiative, organised by the Directorate in collaboration with Dhofar Municipality, will run until August 1.

Over 325 students from various schools across the governorate are participating in the programme, which is supervised by a team of educators and administrators. The activities are hosted at five summer centres: Dhofar Centre for Boys, Osama bin Zaid Centre for Boys, Manbaa Al Hikma Centre for Girls, Al Noor Centre for Girls, and Durrat Dhofar Centre for Girls.

Dr Maizoon bint Bakhit al Shahariyah, Acting Director General of the Directorate General of Education in Dhofar, highlighted that the programme aligns with the Ministry of Education's efforts to provide students with new skills and valuable knowledge. It aims to nurture students' talents, guide them towards personal growth, and enhance their learning values.

The programme features a range of innovative activities designed to engage the current generation, including social, voluntary, artistic, cultural, literary, media, and sports events.

These activities are intended to develop students' skills, expand their knowledge, and complement



the cultural, scientific, and entertainment events coinciding with the Dhofar Autumn tourism season.

The summer programme focuses on using students' free time productively, broadening their horizons, and developing their cognitive, scientific, intellectual, artistic, and life skills. It also aims to instill moral and social values, strengthen national identity, and introduce students to various institutions, facilities, and tourist destinations within the Sultanate of Oman. — **ONA**



MATERNITY LEAVE ESSENTIAL FOR MOTHER'S MENTAL HEALTH

FROM PAGE 1

This enhances the emotional bond between mother and child.

Dr Jean Jabour, the WHO representative in Oman, stressed the importance of the mother's presence during the first months

of a child's life, as this period is critical for the child's emotional and social development.

Securing maternity leave for working mothers is a wise investment in their health and that of their children. Maternity leave allows for adequate rest

and care for the newborn, promoting higher rates of breastfeeding initiation and continuation. Breastfeeding is vital for the first six months, and maternity leave supports mothers in this choice, ensuring they have the necessary time

and comfort.

Moreover, maternity leave provides mothers with the opportunity to organise their personal and professional lives after childbirth and enhance their ability to balance work and family responsibilities.

Al Ashkharah Festival draws 60,000 visitors, boosts tourism

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

Al Ashkharah Atmosphere Festival saw an impressive footfall of over 60,000 visitors over the weekend, marking a significant boost to tourism in the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South. This vibrant event in Al Ashkharah district of Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali featured a variety of heritage, tourism, and entertainment activities, drawing tourists to its scenic beaches and cooler temperatures.

The festival's venue hosted a range of engaging events, including entertainment and cultural competitions.

The Al Shahd troupe performed the play 'Alzheimer's Bakhitouh,' with a blend of comedy and social themes. In another event, police dog demonstrations provided an exciting and educational experience for children, showcasing the dogs' skills and their role in community protection.

A highlight of the festival was the 'Drag Race Sand Challenge,'



The festival's venue hosted a range of engaging events, including entertainment and cultural competitions.

which began on Friday evening at Al Ashkharah beach. This event, part of the Al Ashkharah

Atmosphere Forum, featured over 40 racers from Oman, UAE, and Saudi Arabia.

The sand drag races, held over two days, attracted a large crowd of motorsport enthusiasts and offered a competitive and safe environment for the participants.

The event organising committee ensured the festival's smooth execution and high level of competition, particularly in the thrilling drag races. The forum also included beach soccer and volleyball competitions, with local and visiting teams competing. Matches saw exciting results, such as Al Suwaih vs Shabab Al

Ruwas (4-4) and Al Bandar Al Jadid vs Al Nojoom (5-5).

Wednesday's activities focused on women and children, featuring a women's folk band from the 'Al Zohour Popular Band' and traditional folk arts.

Other highlights included the best photo competition, reels from visitors, daily heritage competitions, and the 'Untying the Knot' marine competition. The festival stage also hosted a captivating fire show and interactive competitions, ensuring a memorable experience for all attendees.



Wadi Aghir: A scenic route through Dhofar’s green forests

SALALAH: Wadi Aghir Road in the Wilayat of Salalah is one of the most picturesque routes and tourist attractions in Dhofar Governorate. This paved road winds through lush, intertwined forests, leading travellers to the verdant highlands. Both locals and tourists flock to Wadi Aghir to revel in the natural beauty that flanks the road. This route connects Salalah to the mountainous areas of Zik, Sher, Rithout, and Shehit, offering stunning vistas perfect for picnics and family outings. Hiking enthusiasts are particularly drawn to this road and its surrounding mountains due to its captivating curves and elevations, providing clear views of the surrounding peaks. Moreover, Wadi Aghir’s proximity to the renowned tourist spot, Ain Sahalnout, adds to its appeal. Visitors can enjoy scenic overlooks of the spring flowing through the valley from the hills at the road’s beginning. — ONA

TOURISTS FLOCK TO KHAREEF TO ESCAPE THE HEAT

ROADS IN ALL DIRECTIONS ARE BUSY DAY AND NIGHT AS VISITORS TRY TO EXPLORE ALL PARTS OF THE MONSOON INFESTED AREAS, THUS CREATING ROAD JAMS

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Salalah is witnessing a significant influx of tourists this khareef season due to the excellent monsoon from east to west. Since the monsoon is becoming intense with each passing day, visitors are flocking to the city from all parts of the GCC to beat the extreme heat in their respective countries. The temperature in Salalah ranges between a comfortable 26 and 29 degrees Celsius, a stark contrast to the 40-48 degrees in other Gulf countries. It is no wonder Salalah has become a popular escape for all. Roads in all directions are busy day and night. Visitors are trying to explore all parts of the monsoon infested areas, thus creating road jams at certain bottlenecks and entry and exit points of the tourist spots like Wadi Darbat, Ain Garziz, Ain Razat, Ain Hamran, Tomb of Nabi Ayoub. “The whole of Salalah has turned into a tourist spot. No need to look for specific places. You need to enjoy the moment and magic of nature,” said Ahmed, a tourist from Dubai. This year, a substantial number of visitors are arriving from Muscat and other cities in Oman. George, who travelled from Sur with his brother, friends and their families, described the arrival as “magical.” “As we entered Salalah at Qairoon Hiriti, it was raining heavily, and the temperature dropped from 39 degrees to just 20. We were all feeling cold and regretting not bringing warm clothes,” he shared. Despite the low visibility due to rain and mist, George’s friend in Salalah reassured them that the town itself had pleasant weather and no need to worry about cold except continuous drizzling. George and his family had originally planned a two-day trip but decided to extend their stay for a full week to enjoy Salalah’s weather. Officially, the khareef season runs from June 21 to early September. Although the season started late this year, the weather began to improve



PICTURES BY AJI GEORGE



from the first week of July, much to the delight of tourists and the local tourism sector. Visitors to Salalah’s mountainous areas have witnessed the true beauty of khareef, with drizzles and the gradual transformation of brown mountains to green. This change signals the onset of the season when the entire landscape is blanketed in greenery, attracting long queues of cars and enthusiastic tourists. From July to September, the summer monsoon brings delicate drizzling fog to the mountain slopes and coastal areas. The plateaus and flanks of Jabal Qara appear covered in a tender green carpet of grass adorned with flowers. For three months, dry wadis fill with fresh flowing water, drawing tourists from across the Gulf region to enjoy the mild, foggy weather and picnic on dew-covered grass, far from the scorching heat of their home countries. Roadside fruit vendors have already set up their stalls with tropical fruits like coconuts, papayas, bananas, almonds, and various local fruits. Popular tourist spots such as Wadi Darbat, Nabi Ayoub’s Tomb, Ain Hamran, the Frankincense Museum, Tomb of Nabi Imran, Mughsail Beach, and Ain Razat have been bustling with tourists over the past few days. “This is a good decision on the part of the government to extend the khareef season till September. This will allow the prospective visitors to plan and avoid the seasonal rush,” said Salalah resident Awadh, who is the owner of an apartment in Dahariz area.

Al Baleed Beach Project: An attractive tourist destination

SALALAH: The Al Baleed Beach Project, one of the new initiatives in Salalah, was established by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) within the Al Baleed Archaeological Park. It serves as a family-friendly outlet for citizens, residents, and visitors to Dhofar Governorate, especially during the khareef season, which attracts a significant influx of tourists from both inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman. This project, a positive addition to the tourism sector in the governorate, features a 1,200-metre walkway on a suspension bridge and includes 8 cafes and restaurants with stunning sea views. Ali bin Salim al Kathiri, Director of Frankincense Land Sites at the Directorate-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, told ONA: “In line with the



The Al Baleed Beach Project serves as a family-friendly outlet for citizens, residents and visitors to Dhofar



Ali bin Salim al Kathiri, Director of Frankincense Land Sites at the Directorate General of Heritage

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism’s commitment to leveraging heritage components and empowering the local community for mutual benefit, an investment agreement was signed with the Royal International Company. This partnership aims to activate cultural heritage sites as part of our broader goals to develop a sustainable tourism sector.” He emphasised that this agreement is expected to draw more visitors to this significant site, listed on the World Heritage List (Land of Frankincense Sites). This initiative showcases the rich Omani heritage and authentic culture, marking it as one of the strategic projects that bolster the tourism sector in the

governorate and at this particular site. Haitham bin Salim al Hadhari, owner of the investing company, highlighted the project’s importance for regional development. “The Al Baleed Beach Project significantly enhances economic and social life, offering an inviting environment for citizens, residents, and tourists to enjoy shopping, dining, and exploring the project’s various attractions along the bridge,” he said. He described the Al Baleed Beach Project as a unique architectural marvel, with shops and restaurants suspended on a bridge overlooking the sea, providing visitors with an exceptional experience.

Al Hadhari added that initial visitor numbers indicate the project’s potential to significantly boost tourism, benefiting the community and solidifying the region’s status as a premier tourist destination. He also mentioned that future developments are planned to attract visitors of all ages, ensuring the project’s ongoing positive impact. — ONA

Muttrah

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

Picture yourself walking or jogging along a three-kilometre-long corniche by the sea. As you exercise, you can see Oman's harbour on one side and the mountains on the other, with a fort visible at the far end. The atmosphere is serene and the gentle sea breeze feels especially refreshing in the early morning or evening when the place is less crowded.

This is what Muttrah Corniche offers, stretching for three kilometres along the waterfront of Muscat, lined with restaurants, cafes and markets.

This promenade offers not only a visual feast of Oman's harbour and the striking rock formations of Al Hajar Mountains but also the rich cultural heritage of the region. The northern end of the Corniche boasts a fish market and a marina, while Muttrah Fort dominates the eastern end of the Corniche.

The best times to visit the Corniche are early in the morning or evening, when it's less crowded. The enchanting sea breeze invigorates the spirit as you explore the many amenities and services offered. Take leisurely walks, breathe in the fresh air and relax on one of the many benches scattered along the promenade. The Corniche also features numerous shops and stalls where visitors can purchase various products and souvenirs. Additionally, there are mobile food carts offering local snacks and ice cream. A dedicated play area is where you can find the beautiful Riyam Park and Kalbooh Park.

Muttrah Corniche is a paradise for sports enthusiasts. Walking, jogging, or renting a bicycle for a leisurely ride along the promenade are popular activities. The serene surroundings make it an excellent spot for relaxation and enjoying the natural beauty.

While walking around Muttrah Corniche, wear comfortable clothing, plus it would be a good idea to take water and some snacks with you.

A highlight of visiting Muttrah Corniche is dining at one of the sea-facing restaurants. Enjoy traditional Omani dishes and a variety of cuisines with family and friends, or simply relax with a drink at one of the cafes offering breathtaking views.

Krupa Abhirup, a visitor from India, said: "Walking along the Corniche in Muscat was a wonderful experience for me and my husband. We visited it frequently. We walked the entire stretch, starting from the fish market to the Al Alam Palace. It was a long walk, but it was worth the effort. The Corniche is always buzzing with activity. The wide pedestrian path was quite clean, lined with benches and gazebos and the walls were adorned with fish carvings and other decorations reflecting the pride of the government and people in showcasing their culture."

IT'S A PARADISE FOR SPORTS ENTHUSIASTS. WALKING, JOGGING, OR RENTING A BICYCLE FOR A LEISURELY RIDE ALONG THE PROMENADE ARE POPULAR ACTIVITIES

MUTTRAH CORNICHE: OMAN'S SCENIC WATERFRONT

THERE ARE



- Muttrah City
- Greater Muttrah
- Al Wattayah
- Ruwi
- Wadi Adai
- Aynat
- Al Qurm
- Mina Al Fahal

VILLAGES IN
MUTTRAH



PHOTOS BY: SAMI AL HINAI

THE WILAYAT OF MUTTRAH

It is one of the most important cities in Omani history, as it dates back to more than 3,000 BC. It is located within Muscat, the capital of the Sultanate of Oman. It overlooks the shore of the Sea of Oman that made it an important commercial centre throughout history. It is a place to exchange goods from different countries.

There are eight villages in Muttrah:

Muttrah City, Greater Muttrah, Al Wattayah, Ruwi, Wadi Adai, Aynat, Al Qurm and Mina Al Fahal. It has many distinctive tourist attractions, including ancient castles and towers, in addition to narrow alleys and a market filled with a fragrant history. Muttrah Souq is famous as the oldest market in the Sultanate of Oman, which dates back approximately two hundred years. One of the most important tourist facilities is the Al

Bustan Palace Hotel.

There are two types of museums in Muttrah: Bait Al Baranda and the Ghalya Museum of Modern Art. Bait Al Baranda Museum features several exhibitions focusing on Omani maritime and archaeological history. It is open from Saturday to Thursday, with timings from 9 am to 1 pm and then from 4 pm to 6 pm.

The climate in Muttrah is generally characterised by heat and dryness,

with high humidity levels throughout the year. Temperatures can reach around 40 degrees Celsius during the summer but drop to approximately 25 degrees Celsius in the winter, making the weather cooler and somewhat warm during the winter months.

Muttrah has not changed much from before, as the smell of the past and old stories still remain with the passage of time.



The committees and teams are set to play a vital role in promoting Omani values and identity



SDCS, VOLUNTEER TEAMS TO PLAY VITAL SOCIETAL ROLES

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

A new ministerial decision has been made to regulate 63 social development committees (SDCs) and 64 volunteer teams across the governorates in the Sultanate of Oman.

These committees and teams are set to play a vital role in promoting Omani values and identity, fostering community cohesion, and supporting efforts to mitigate emergencies through coordinated local initiatives.

Each wilayat will have an SDC formed by ministerial decision, headed by the governor.

Members include representatives from the Departments of Social Development, Education, Health, Housing and Urban Planning, Awqaf and Religious Affairs, the municipality, the Omani Women's Association, local sports clubs, and volunteer teams.

These committees will be tasked with proposing and implementing social projects,



supporting volunteer work, improving living standards, and addressing negative social phenomena.

The SDCs will collaborate with municipal councils, associations, and civil institutions to identify and execute programmes that benefit the community.

They will also focus on income-generating projects for low-income individuals

and those with disabilities. Community representatives can be nominated to the committee, with membership lasting four years and the possibility of re-nomination.

The Committee members must be Omani citizens, at least 25 years old, and of good standing. They should have a clean legal record, not hold memberships in other

committees or councils, and possess a suitable cultural background and practical experience. They are also expected to have a history of social initiatives and an interest in volunteer work.

The financial and regulatory aspects of the committees' work have been addressed in the new regulations. The committees will support the Ministry of Social Development in overseeing social construction projects funded by the private sector.

Additionally, each wilayat can establish one volunteer team, which will operate under the SDC's supervision and adhere to an internal system approved by the ministry. The team's board of directors, selected by the committee, will manage its activities within the wilayat's geographical scope.

These regulations aim to enhance community involvement and ensure that social development efforts are well-coordinated and effectively implemented across Oman.

MoE's emergency management strategy training begins in Salalah

SALALAH: The Ministry of Education's Emergency Management Strategy training programme commenced on Sunday at the Crowne Plaza Salalah Resort. The three-day event, organised by the ministry, aims to enhance the capabilities of the Central Committee for Emergency Management, heads of sub-committees in educational directorates, and general managers of the General Diwan's directorates.

The event was inaugurated by Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality. In his opening remarks, Dr Ali bin Humaid al Jahwari, Director-General of the Directorate General of Education in Muscat Governorate and Chairman of the Central Committee for Emergency Management at the Ministry of Education, highlighted the ministry's dedication to developing robust mechanisms and systems to handle emergency situations.

Dr Al Jahwari emphasised the ministry's proactive measures, including issuing a ministerial decision on the Crisis Management Guide for schools, the formation of the Central Committee for Crisis Management, and the reconstitution of the Central Committee for Emergency Management along with sub-committees in various governorates. He also noted the recent formation of a working group tasked with reviewing and improving procedures for managing emergency situations caused by climate conditions, aiming to refine and govern all related documents and evidence issued by the ministry.

The opening session included a comprehensive review of



the Ministry of Education's emergency management strategy. This encompassed the general policy for risk management, emergency situations, the central and educational directorates' emergency management plans, and procedural guides for handling various emergencies, including weather conditions and school bus accidents.

The ministry's emergency management philosophy aligns with both the national system of the Sultanate of Oman and international best practices. This approach operates on three levels: the school level for manageable incidents, the governorate level for more significant emergencies requiring the activation of the emergency management centre, and the central committee level for mobilising additional resources to support the educational directorates.

The training programme, conducted by consultant Nasser bin Khalid al Yaarubi from the Dara International Foundation, covered various topics, including the ministry's emergency management strategy, philosophy, and the detailed roles and responsibilities within the emergency management framework. — **ONA**



The Ministry of Education's Emergency Management Strategy training programme begins in Salalah

The National Library of Oman: A pillar of heritage and knowledge

MUSCAT: In the capital Muscat, a monumental cultural project is taking shape, embodying Oman's aspirations to preserve its intellectual heritage and advance its knowledge system.

This project is the Oman Cultural Complex, which includes the National Library of Oman.

The National Library of Oman is a crucial cultural institution with a mission to collect, catalog, and organise Omani intellectual production in all its forms, whether printed or digital, and make it accessible to all segments of society.

Dr Musa bin Nasser al Mufarji, the supervisor of the Oman National Library project, notes that the idea of establishing the Oman National Library dates back to the late 1970s.

Article 2 of Royal Decree 70/77 mandated the creation of the National Library with international standards based on technical expertise. Dr Al Mufarji emphasised that the Oman Cultural Complex project, with all its components, is of significant interest to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin 'Tarik a2l Said (may God protect him), and



The National Library of Oman

it is expected to be completed between 2027 and 2028.

The National Library's mission, with its various specialisations and systems, is to safeguard Omani intellectual production in all its traditional and modern forms. The library will house

all publications about the Sultanate of Oman, including classifications, government publications, and scientific theses, as well as records from conferences and seminars discussing Oman.

The project supervisor

highlighted that a dedicated team is working to collect all national intellectual output, including visits to book fairs in Doha, Abu Dhabi, Muscat, Sharjah, and Tunis, among others.

The team has also visited various national libraries

worldwide, including those in Korea, Singapore, Qatar, and the Mohammed bin Rashid Library, to learn from their experiences.

Designed to accommodate one million volumes, the National Library will also house electronic resources, audio-visual media,



Dr Musa al Mufarji, supervisor

films, and maps. A dedicated children's library will be located in an independent building, featuring a variety of books, publications, games, and other child-friendly resources.

The library will include several halls for researchers and students, equipped with electronic services, and platforms for audio and visual media, enabling researchers and enthusiasts to access and utilise locally, regionally, and globally classified information.

Moreover, the library will feature sections for manuscripts and rare books, Omani and Arabian Peninsula studies, and studies related to the Imams and Sultans of Oman. It will also offer a reference service for both printed and digital encyclopedic works. — **ONA**



EU Middle East envoy vows to push for the two-state solution

TEL AVIV: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's stubborn opposition to a Palestinian state does not deter the European Union's Middle East peace envoy from believing a two-state solution remains achievable. Sven Koopmans, in an interview with AFP, said with the Gaza war ongoing and Israel needing international support, Netanyahu's government cannot indefinitely disregard European views on resolving the conflict.

Netanyahu and some ministers in his right-wing government staunchly oppose the creation of a Palestinian state, which many argue has become even more urgent since October 7 attacks sparked the devastating war.

"I think that recently he was very explicit about rejecting the two-state solution," Koopmans said. "Now, that means that he has a different point of view from much of the rest of the world."

The Dutch diplomat said one side's rejection of "the outcome that we believe is necessary" does not mean efforts to seek a solution should cease.

Last month the European Union invited Israel to discuss Gaza and human rights.

Israel agreed to a meeting after July 1, when Hungary, which supports Netanyahu's government, assumed the EU presidency.

"It is important that we have that discussion," said Koopmans. "I am sure that in such a meeting, there will be very substantive discussions about what we expect from our partner Israel. "And that relates to things that we do not see at present."

Koopmans said it was "completely unacceptable" for there to be thousands of aid trucks waiting at the Gaza border. The envoy also raised concerns about Israeli settler violence in the occupied West Bank, saying some attacks amounted to "genuine terrorism".

Named as special representative for the peace process in 2021, Koopmans said the European Union was one of the most energetic institutions pushing for a two-state solution.

Koopmans said his work was guided by the EU's 1980 declaration recognising the "right to existence and to security" for Israel and "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people".

The declaration called Israeli settlements on Palestinian land "a serious obstacle to the peace process".

The European bloc was only nine members then and Koopmans acknowledged divisions within the 27 existing members on the Middle East strife. — AFP



Relatives mourn members of the Qadih family in front of the morgue of the Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis. — AFP

Yemenis pledge huge response as Gaza violence spreads



Smoke rises from a building hit by an Israeli strike in Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

HODEIDA: The death toll from an Israeli strike on Yemen's port of Hodeida climbed to six, health authorities said on Sunday, with firefighting teams battling a blaze at the harbour.

Saturday's strike on the port, a key entry point for fuel and humanitarian aid to war-ravaged Yemen, is the first claimed by Israel in the Arabian peninsula's poorest country, about 2,000 kilometres away. It killed six people and injured 83, many of them with severe burns, the rebel-run health ministry said in a statement carried by Ansar Allah media. It said three others remained missing. Earlier, military spokesman Yahya Saree said the rebels' "response to the Israeli aggression against our country is inevitably coming and will be huge".

Residents said a major operation was underway in the Saudi district west of Rafah in the south, reporting heavy artillery and clashes

Israel said it carried out the strike in response to a drone attack by the Yemenis on Tel Aviv which killed one person on Friday. More operations against the Ansar Allah will follow "if they dare to attack us", Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said.

Yemenis promised a "huge" retaliation against Israel on Sunday following a deadly strike on the port of Hodeida, as violence sparked by the Gaza war gripped the region.

Saudi Arabia urged restraint

on Sunday in the wake of an Israeli strike on the Yemen's port. It "called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and to distance the region and its people from the dangers of war." Sunday's foreign ministry statement affirmed the kingdom's "continuous support for peace efforts in Yemen to spare its people more suffering."

Despite Washington asserting that a deal to end more than nine months of devastating war between Israel and Palestinian groups was near the "goal line", the Israeli military said it intercepted a missile fired from Yemen as it pressed on with its offensive in the besieged Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, dozens have been killed since Saturday across Gaza, the civil defence agency said, including in strikes on homes in the central Nuseirat and Bureij

areas and displaced people near southern Khan Yunis. Residents said a major operation was underway in the Saudi district west of Rafah in the south, reporting heavy artillery and clashes.

The war has also unleashed hunger and health crises in Gaza, with Israel and the United Nations trading blame for vital aid supplies failing to reach those in need.

After the detection of poliovirus in Gaza sewage, though no individual cases, the World Health Organization said there were "monumental" constraints to mounting a timely response.

WHO spokesman Christian Lindmeier said on Friday the agency believes many more diseases are "spreading out of control" inside Gaza. — AFP

■ AN IMAGE OF COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT



Palestinians walk past the rubble of buildings and as piles of rubbish, as garbage collection and any other municipality services come to a halt due to the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip, in the Jabalia refugee camp. — AFP

Hezbollah fires rockets after Israel strike on Lebanon

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Hezbollah on Sunday said it fired Katyusha rockets at northern Israel in response to an overnight Israeli strike that, according to state media, hit a weapons depot and wounded six people.

Hezbollah has traded near-daily cross-border fire with Israeli forces in support of Palestinians since the October 7 attack on southern Israel triggered war in the Gaza Strip.

The Lebanese Hezbollah said it targeted northern Israel's Dafna area with Katyusha rockets "in response to the Israeli enemy's attacks that targeted civilians in the town of Adloun, injuring several of them".

This comes after the Israeli military said its air force "struck two Hezbollah weapons storage facilities in southern Lebanon, containing rockets and additional weaponry".

Late on Saturday, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency



Lebanese army soldiers check the wreckage of a vehicle after an Israeli air strike near the village of Burj Al Muluk. — AFP

said "the Israeli enemy launched a raid" on the town of Adloun, about 30 kilometres from the border with Israel, later saying the target was "an ammunition depot". "Six civilians sustained moderate injuries," the NNA said on Sunday, revising the figure up from three the night before.

Rockets were still exploding about an hour after the strike was first reported, the NNA said, with

videos circulating online showing several large explosions in Adloun. "Shrapnel from the explosions flew to surrounding villages," the NNA said.

Last week, an Israeli strike on a house near the southern village of Jmaimeh killed three people and wounded several more. Hezbollah said two of its members were among the dead, including Ali Jaafar Maatouq. — AFP



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In brief

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES, CHINA REACH 'ARRANGEMENT' FOR RESUPPLY MISSIONS

The Philippines and China have agreed on an "arrangement" for resupplying Filipino troops stationed on a South China Sea reef, Manila said on Sunday.

The announcement follows talks between the Philippines and China this month when they agreed to increase communication channels.

"The two countries have reached an understanding on the provisional arrangement for the resupply of daily necessities and rotation missions to the BRP Sierra Madre in Ayungin Shoal," the Philippine foreign ministry said both sides recognised the need to "de-escalate the situation in the South China Sea". — **AFP**

■ NAIROBI



RUTO SAYS KENYA DEMOS MUST STOP, OPPN URGES 'JUSTICE'

Kenyan opposition leader Raila Odinga on Sunday insisted "justice" was a prerequisite for talks with the government after deadly clashes, as President William Ruto warned unrest could "destroy" the country. "Justice must come first before any talks," said Odinga. He demanded "compensation for every victim of police brutality" during the rallies.

The opposition has called for fresh demonstrations next week. "I want to promise it is going to stop. Enough is enough," Ruto said. Ruto vowed to stop "looters" and "killers" who he said "risk destroying our country". "We want a peaceful, stable nation." — **AFP**

■ ISTANBUL



ERDOGAN SAYS TÜRKİYE READY TO BUILD CYPRUS NAVAL BASE

Türkiye's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said on Sunday that his country was ready to build a Cyprus naval base "if necessary", 50 years after Turkish forces attacked the now-divided island.

"If necessary, we can construct a base and naval structures in the north" of the divided island, the official Anadolu news agency reported him as saying.

"We also have the sea," Erdoğan said. "We do not think it is possible to start a negotiation process without establishing an equation whereby both parties sit down and leave the table as equals," Erdoğan added. — **AFP**

Zelenskiy calls for long-range weapons

KYIV: Ukraine needs long-range weapons to protect its cities and troops on the frontline from Russian bombs and drones, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Sunday after a massive overnight drone and missile attack.

Russia launched its fifth drone attack on Kyiv in two weeks overnight, with Ukraine's air defence systems destroying all the air weapons before they reached the capital, Ukraine's military said.

Ukraine's air force said on Telegram that its air defence systems destroyed 35 of the 39 drones and two cruise missiles that Russia had launched overnight. The weapons, the air force said, targeted 10 of Ukraine's regions.

It was not immediately clear how many drones were launched at Kyiv. There were no casualties and no significant damage reported, Serhiy Popko, head of the Ukrainian capital's military administration, said on the Telegram.

"During last night alone, the Russian army used almost 40 drones against Ukraine. Importantly, most of them were shot down by our defenders of the sky," Zelenskiy said on Telegram, referring to the drones. He said it was necessary to destroy Russian bombers at Russian air bases to protect Ukraine from air raids.

"Our sufficient long-range capabilities should be a fair response to Russian terror. Everyone who supports us in this supports the defence against terror," Zelenskiy said.

Zelenskiy renewed his call for Western allies to allow long-



Ukrainian servicemen fire towards Russian troops at a front line, near Kupiansk in Kharkiv region. — **Reuters file photo**

range strikes on Russia on Friday in London, saying Britain should try to convince its partners to remove the limits on their use.

Nato members have taken different approaches to how Ukraine can use weapons they donate. Some have made clear Kyiv can use them to strike targets

inside Russia while the United States has taken a narrower approach, allowing its weapons to be used only just inside Russia's border against targets supporting Russian military operations in Ukraine.

Russia launched three Iskander ballistic missiles, Ukraine's air

force said, without saying what happened to them.

The military administration of the Sumy region in Ukraine's northeast bordering Russia said on Telegram that a Russian missile damaged critical infrastructure in the Shostkynskyi district of the region.



During last night alone, the Russian army used almost 40 drones against Ukraine. Importantly, most of them were shot down by our defenders of the sky

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKIY

Ukrainian President

The administration did not provide detail on what infrastructure was hit.

There was no immediate comment from Russia about the attacks. Moscow says it does not attack civilian targets in Ukraine.

"These systematic attacks ... with drones, once again prove that the attacker is actively looking for an opportunity to strike Kyiv," Popko said. "They're testing new tactics, looking for new approach routes to the capital, trying to expose the location of our air defence." — **Reuters**

Bangladesh top court scraps most job quotas

DHAKA: Bangladesh's Supreme Court on Sunday scrapped most of the quotas on government jobs that had sparked nationwide protests by students that have killed at least 114 people in recent days. Dismissing a lower court order, the Supreme Court's Appellate Division directed that 93% of government jobs in the country should be open to candidates on merit, Bangladesh Attorney General AM Amin Uddin said.

"Students have clearly said they are in no way part of the violence and arson that have taken place in Bangladesh since Monday," he said. "I am hoping normalcy will return after today's ruling and people with ulterior motives will stop instigating people," Amin Uddin said. "I will ask the government to find out the culprits behind the violence and take strict action against them."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government scrapped the quota system in 2018, but the lower court reinstated it last month, pegging total quotas at 56%, sparking the protests and an ensuing government crackdown.

Soldiers have been patrolling the streets of capital Dhaka, where army check points have been set up, after the government ordered a curfew late on Friday.

Streets near the Supreme Court were quiet immediately after the decision, a witness said.



Bangladeshi soldiers and Rapid Action Battalion stand guard at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, in Dhaka. — **AFP**

The Supreme Court's Appellate Division directed that 93% of government jobs in the country should be open to candidates on merit

A military tank was stationed outside the court's gate, television footage showed.

Local media had reported scattered clashes earlier in the day between protesters and security forces. Overseas telephone calls mostly failed to connect while websites of Bangladesh-based media organisations did not update and their social media accounts remained inactive.

The government extended the curfew as authorities braced for the Supreme Court hearing on

the job quotas. The curfew until 3 pm on Sunday was to resume for an "uncertain time" after a two-hour break for people to gather supplies. The Supreme Court directed the government to cut the job quotas for families of independence fighters to 5%, the attorney general said.

The remaining 2% of jobs still subject to quotas are for people from so-called backward groups and the disabled, he added.

The demonstrations have also been fuelled by high unemployment among young people, who make up nearly a fifth of the population.

High living costs sparked deadly protests in Bangladesh last year, months after it turned to the International Monetary Fund for a \$4.7 billion bailout.

— **Reuters**

South Korea steps up propaganda broadcasts after North's balloons

SEOUL: South Korea will ramp up propaganda broadcasts to the North in response to Pyongyang sending more trash-carrying balloons across the border, Seoul's military said on Sunday.

The two Koreas have engaged in a tit-for-tat campaign, with the North sending nearly 2,000 trash-carrying balloons southwards since May, saying it is retaliation for propaganda balloons launched by South Korean activists.

In protest at a latest wave of North Korean balloons, the South Korean military said it was widening the scale of its front-line propaganda broadcasts.

"Effective from 1300 our military will conduct a full scale broadcasts along the borders as we have warned repeatedly," said a statement on Sunday from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "The North is launching another batch of

rubbish-carrying balloons," an earlier statement said, noting they were flying towards the northern part of Gyeonggi. "Please report them to the military or police and refrain from direct contact with the objects."

The latest batch of balloons comes three days after Seoul announced it had resumed loudspeaker propaganda broadcasts directed at North Korea and warned that it would broaden their scope if the North persisted in sending the trash.

In declaring the start of the full-scale propaganda broadcasts, Seoul warned the North Korean army will "bear the brunt of decisive damage from its tension raising acts committed in the border area".

"We gravely warn that all responsibility lies squarely with the North Korean regime." — **AFP**



A balloon carries what appeared to be trash sent by North Korea, at the sea off Incheon, South Korea. — **Reuters file photo**

Travelling from home is a learning experience



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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As the cool breeze of Salalah stands in stark contrast to the searing heat in northern Oman, many across the country are opting to spend a few days in the lush verdant beauty of Dhofar.

But not all of us have the luxury of time to spend away from home and responsibilities.

That should not be disappointing as we can now travel digitally to any place of our choice from the comfort of our homes, and become wiser for it.

The travel industry jumped to unprecedented heights after the Covid pandemic. In fact, data around tourism shows that there has been a rise in leisure travel around the world by 69 per cent, according to Forbes.

This is true for the luxury, cruise, and even backpacking travel – no form has been spared from the gush of tourists.

But what has also risen, along with physical travellers, is showcasing travel by digital content creators.

In fact, more than 60 per cent of travellers aim to convert their experiences into some form of online

content, with Instagram and Pinterest being the most popular platforms.

These vloggers offer much more than sales of package tours and local restaurant recommendations. Good sites focus on historical and archaeological sites, unique cultural practices, and even long forgotten ingredients and recipes. There is something for everyone in the digital travel space.

If a picture paints a thousand words, imagine what a short series of pictures in a video form would do. There is practically nothing that cannot be learnt from a good quality travel vlog. They make us visualise a place, customs, traditions and lifestyles in a way that would be almost physically impossible for most of us.

From watching the northern lights to cruising with penguins in Antarctica, travel vloggers take us anywhere we want. But it is more than just the voyage itself – we also get immersed in the storytelling, the depth and quality of the experiences shared, as well as the immense opportunities it opens for us to read and learn more about a particular place or experience.

INTERACTIVE TRAVEL DIARIES USING AVATARS HAVE ALSO BECOME VERY POPULAR AS THEY HAVE FASTER NARRATION, BETTER REPRESENTATION AS WELL AS MORE ENGAGING MODES OF STORYTELLING

The digital travel industry has also been converted into gaming, with digital avatars replacing real people.

This also allows gamers to take on any personality they like to explore the world, in fact, at any historical time of their choosing.

Interactive travel diaries using avatars have also become very popular as they have faster narration, better representation as well as more engaging modes of storytelling. Artificial Intelligence is only making these formats easier to produce.

Of course, all this can potentially turn into income generation, with successful travel vloggers earning well through commercial deals, brand endorsements as well as travel associated product promotions.

Attractive as this may sound, it is a time consuming commitment to convert a passion for travel into a career. Definitely not for the faint hearted.

Meanwhile, as we continue to scroll through 30-second reels of random products and trivia, it is also a good opportunity to discover new and interesting places around the world. Maybe one such place could become a physical destination soon.

Insect infestation ravages N African prickly pear

AYMEN JAMLI

Amor Nouira, a farmer in Tunisia’s Chebika village, has lost hope of saving his prickly pear cacti, ravaged by the cochineal insect spreading across North Africa. The 50-year-old has seen his half-hectare of cactus crops wither as the invasive insect wreaked havoc on about a third of the country’s cacti after an outbreak in 2021.

“At first, I wanted to experiment with prickly pear production and gradually develop investments while looking for customers outside the country, especially for its natural oil,” said Nouira.

“But... as the cacti became damaged, I abandoned the idea of investing and stopped thinking about it altogether.”

Prickly pear is consumed as food and used to make oils, cosmetics and body-care products.

In Chebika, as in other rural areas in central Tunisia, many farmers’ fields of prickly pear — also known as Opuntia — have been spoiled by the cochineal, which swept through North Africa 10 years ago, beginning in Morocco.

The insect, like the prickly pear, is native to the Americas and feeds on the plant’s nutrients and fluids, often killing it.

The infestations have resulted in significant economic losses for thousands of farmers reliant on prickly pear, as authorities struggle to combat the epidemic in a country where its fruit is widely consumed as a summertime snack.

Tunisian authorities estimate that about 150,000 families make a living from cultivating Opuntia.

The North African country is the world’s second-largest producer of its fruit, after Mexico, with about 600,000 hectares of crops and a yield of about 550,000 tonnes per year, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Only production allocated for export — about a third of overall crops — has remained in good condition, said Rabeh Hajlaoui, head of the department of plant health at Tunisia’s agriculture ministry.

“We’re making every effort to save these plants, which are an important source of income to some locals,” he explained, as one litre of extracted Opuntia oil can be sold for as much as \$4,200.

Farmers also plant prickly pear cacti for their resistance to drought and desertification, and sometimes use them to demarcate and fence property in Tunisia and neighbouring Libya.

In Morocco, where the first cases of cochineal were found in 2014, Opuntia is cultivated over a total of 160,000 hectares. — AFP



Musallam Al Ma'ani

The writer is Dean of Al Zahra College for Women

Unwavering loyalty: Oman stands strong against envy and adversity

THE brave men and women of the Omani police, military and security services declared that the situation in Wadi Al Kabir in the Governorate of Muscat is peaceful and proved to the world a whole that Oman is protected by efficient services capable of achieving the desired results with little or no waste of time.

The high training of servicemen is evident in the way the situation has been handled, which is a display of the mental and moral strength to face situations involving undesirable or unpleasant choices, and venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, and difficulty.

The Omani police, military, and security services do not resort to the use of force unless necessary. But if the situation necessitates it, they will not hesitate to use it, no matter the cost.

Oman has remained and shall continue to do so in the future, far distant from terrorism, fundamentalism, extremism, and acts of violence. Unusual by all standards, the incident struck the Omanis and the whole of the world. Innocent Shite worshippers gathering in a mosque to perform the rituals of Ashura were captured by an unexpected attack.

In Oman, Ibadis, Sunnis and Shiites live together, eat together and pray together. The government grants the freedom to people to embrace any Islamic school of thought and perform rituals in the form of a series of acts regularly repeated in a precise manner set by the Islamic school of thought they take up readily and gladly.

There are no restrictions on people to follow and adhere to the system of rites. Muslims in Oman adopt a moderate attitude without a pronounced or excessive degree. People from different Islamic schools of thought live in the same neighbourhood and are given equal opportunities for jobs, education, and services provided by the state.

The government has never taken unlawfully the personal property of people because of their race, language,



ALL OMANIS ARE VOLUNTEERING THEMSELVES IN THE SERVICE OF THEIR COUNTRY, PROCEEDING FROM THEIR OWN WILL AND CHOICE. NO ENVIOUS ONE CAN GAIN ENTRANCE TO THE HEARTS OF OMANIS OR DETRACT THEM FROM THEIR LOVE FOR THE COUNTRY

or religion. Nothing in the Omani dictionary of politics includes any form of prejudiced outlook, action, and treatment.

The rule of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is characterised by the maintenance and administration of what is just, especially by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims and the assignment of merited rewards and punishments.

Oman is perhaps the only country where one can keep your house door open and your unattended car unlocked without feeling or experiencing concern or anxiety of being broken into. This is due to the inherited characteristic of Omanis, who bring up their children through nurturing the principles of right and wrong in behaviour.

It is the Omani inherited code of

morals that has self-observing force and effect, through which the customs of a stable society are settled. With the death toll reaching 9, Omanis are deeply distressed and sad. The loss of lives is a cause of grief and sadness to every Omani.

In social media, Omanis, as one family, pay tribute to each other for those who lost their lives. Countless messages express the great sorrow Omanis are going through.

The loss of a courageous young policeman in the incident has thrown all Omanis into a state of distress. His photo and condolences are uploaded by Omanis in their WhatsApp status.

You cannot find a single Omani who does not express solidarity with their government, based on a community of interests, objectives, and standards.

All Omanis are voluntarily themselves in the service of their country, proceeding from their own will and own choice.

They are willing to sacrifice their lives for their country and its leadership.

No envious one can gain entrance into the hearts of Omanis or detract them from the good quality of their love for their country.

Omanis are determined to stand by the side of their leadership and render their service. They are all ready to take arms, sacrifice their lives, and unite themselves in defence of their country.

Shouldering the burden of peace making

Having a peaceful and stable life is undoubtedly everybody's wish worldwide. However, it is not everyone's earn, especially these days with the world witnessing conflicts, clashes and wars here and there.

The social and political instability in some countries stand as the key reason behind people escaping from their homelands. Instead, some have even lost their identity and sense of belonging.

Chasing their own freedom forced them to sacrifice their homes, properties, jobs and wealth. Out of this struggle, all what they are after is just to have a peacefully decent life.

Nothing matters to them, but to be a live like all other human beings in this universe. This concern is recurring very often with people who have no choice; either to stay at homeland or endure the hard times and challenges or to leave everything behind and find another nest somewhere else!

Though, both options are certainly hard to even think of, yet the latter could be preferred, so they can have another chance to live. It is all because they lack the blessing of peace and security at homeland!

Albert Einstein attributed that peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding. Peace does not mean the absence of conflicts as differences will always be there.

It means solving these differences through peaceful means; through dialogue, education, knowledge; and humane ways.

As a matter of fact, peace lies in the hearts and minds of all humans. It is a shared responsibility to build peace, a desire for peace, a willingness to work towards achieving peace for all.

In this regard, Mother Teresa stated that if we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other. Unfortunately, people have forgotten that they need one another in a way or another.



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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

THE ROP ARE HEROES SUSTAINING THE PEACEFUL LIFE TO CITIZENS, RESIDENTS AND VISITORS AROUND THE COUNTRY. THEY GET INTO HEROIC INCIDENTS AND BRAVE SACRIFICES WHILE ON THEIR SACRED MISSION OF SHOULDERING THE BURDEN OF PEACE MAKING FOR ALL

This results in causing disorder in some countries, which leads to losing the whole nation with all its identity, history, culture and people too.

Hence, it ends up being episodes of war where rebellions show their muscles and people are being humiliated for no reasons sometimes. Their luck just turned them to be part of those unstable nations; they have no choice, but to tolerate all sorts of torture and insult which they might experience.

Lacking the blessing of peace and stability is very scary indeed. Thanks to the Almighty Allah for blessing us with a peaceful homeland where people are enjoying a peaceful and prosperous life around the clock.

To tell the truth, this is the most important thing people ever need in their lifetime. Wealth and health are not even worth thinking of when peace is missed! We all agree that peace comes on top of the list of life necessities.

Thanks to the concerned security authorities, mainly the Royal Oman Police, in the Sultanate of Oman for sparing no effort to safeguard man and nation. Those heroes are sustaining the peaceful life to citizens, residents and visitors alike in every corner around the country.

They get into heroic incidents and brave sacrifices while on their sacred mission of shouldering the burden of peace making for all.

Staying awake day and night on every corner around the country while others are enjoying their life is not a responsibility of everybody's interest to shoulder. It is a profession in which they could sacrifice their time, effort and life.

They are always there standby on every diverse weather condition; day and night, hot and cold, rainy or sunny helping and protecting people.

With all respect and gratitude to other armed forces in the country, Royal Oman Police are everyone's heroes! May Allah bless you all Royal Oman Police personnel. Our hats are on for you; our gratitude and salute to you all peace makers.

PALESTINIAN PRIDE PARADE



Participants wearing Palestinian flags look on during a parade marking the Islamic new year in Banda Aceh. – AFP

Can we ‘Make America affordable again’? Should we?

The third item on the 2024 Republican Party platform, after promises to seal the border and engage in mass deportations, is a pledge to ‘End inflation, and make America affordable again.’

On the first part of that pledge, I don't know whether the platform's drafters — who mainly seem to have copied and pasted their items from former President Donald Trump's posts on Truth Social — are aware that inflation is already way down. But the second part is more interesting. What do they mean by making America affordable again? Depending on the interpretation, that's either something that has already happened or a really bad idea.

Before I get there, a word about falling inflation. I get many comments to the effect that whatever official statistics may say, Americans don't see inflation coming down. Such claims about public perceptions are, however, false.

Surveys that ask Americans how much they expect prices to rise over the next year show a sharp fall in inflation expectations, roughly back to what they were in 2018-19.

So Americans do know that inflation — the rate at which prices are rising — is way down. What is true is that we had a burst of inflation in 2021-22, which has left the level of prices considerably higher than it was a few years ago. A dollar doesn't buy as much as it used to. On the other hand, American workers are taking home more dollars: Recent years have seen a surge in wages as well as in prices.



Paul Krugman
The writer is a regular columnist for The New York Times

AMERICA IS MORE AFFORDABLE NOW THAN IT HAS EVER BEEN; MOST WORKERS' WAGE GAINS OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS HAVE COMFORTABLY EXCEEDED THE RISE IN CONSUMER PRICES

So, has America become unaffordable?

In normal life, when we ask ourselves whether we can afford something, we compare its price to our income. And if we use that normal-life standard, America is more affordable now than it has ever been; most workers' wage gains over the past five years have comfortably exceeded the rise in consumer prices.

But many people get upset, even angry, if you point this out. That's not really surprising.

Recent research confirms an old observation, going back at least to the 1970s, that very few people think of inflation as a process that raises both prices and wages. Instead, most believe that they have earned whatever income gains they've experienced, and that inflation has snatched away those gains.

So are the people who drafted the Republican platform saying that we should try to reverse the post pandemic rise in prices? My guess is that they haven't thought it through. But I think it's worth going through the reasons no economist I know believes that trying to reverse past inflation, as opposed to controlling future inflation — which we've already more or less done — would be a good idea.

The thing is, getting prices back to what they were in, say, 2019 would require putting the US economy through a major episode

of deflation — falling prices. And the historical evidence is clear: Imposing significant deflation on a modern economy leads to very high unemployment. Most of that historical evidence is quite old.

Aside from Japan, which is a special case in ways that would take too long to explain, deflation has been very rare in modern economies since World War II. Before the war, however, there were a few deflationary episodes. The United States experienced sharp deflation after World War I and huge deflation in the early years of the Great Depression.

Of course, you know what happened in the Great Depression, but even after World War I there was a large, though temporary, rise

in unemployment as a percentage of the non-farm labour force.

An even more relevant example is Britain in the 1920s.

Like many nations, Britain went off the gold standard during World War I and experienced substantial inflation. After the war, however, the Chancellor of the Exchequer — a guy named Winston Churchill — decided not only to restore the gold standard but also to restore the prewar gold value of the pound. He rejected vigorous arguments by John Maynard Keynes that this would be a terrible idea, arguments Keynes laid out in a classic essay, “The Economic Consequences of Mr Churchill”

Keynes was right. Getting back to the old gold value of the pound

required, in effect, making Britain affordable again — that is, putting Britain through a sustained period of deflation. And as a result, while America was going through the Roaring Twenties, Britain remained persistently depressed.

Why is deflation so hard to achieve? The most important reason is that any large decline in prices also requires a big fall in wages — and wages are very difficult to cut, even if workers aren't unionised.

Economist Truman Bewley explained why in his book ‘Why Wages Don't Fall During a Recession,’ based on interviews with hundreds of business and labour leaders. Basically, everyone agreed that cutting wages would damage worker morale, and that the costs of this damage to morale would outweigh cost savings except in extreme conditions. So wages and hence prices tend to exhibit “downward nominal rigidity.”

The exceptions prove the rule. The most conspicuous modern example of deflation is Greece, which was forced by the combination of a debt crisis and its membership in the euro area to engage in “internal devaluation” — cutting wages and prices to gain competitiveness against its neighbours. Greece did in fact achieve substantial wage cuts, but only at the cost of incredibly high unemployment.

— The New York Times



An attendee lays on top of balloons at the end of the last day of the 2024 Republican National Convention at the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. – AFP

Sport



AL NOOR TRIUMPHS OVER KUWAIT IN GOALBALL CHALLENGE OPENER



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

The Al Noor blind goalball team, representing Oman, kicked off their campaign in GoalBall Challenge of Gulf Clubs and Associations for the Blind Championship with a resounding 18-8 victory over Kuwait's Al Basira Team.

The championship is being hosted by Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Al Noor Association for the Blind, in cooperation with the Oman Paralympic Committee, from July 20 to 24 at the main hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. In other opening matches, Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli defeated the UAE's Association 16-6, while Qatar defeated Bahrain's Al Sadaqa 11-5.

HH Sayyid Adham bin Turki bin Mahmoud al Said, in his opening speech, praised the role of the Al Noor Association for the Blind and the Oman Paralympic Committee in organising the championship.

He said, "It is clear that such gatherings represent social and humanitarian empowerment for different segments of society, not just the blind. They strengthen Gulf ties and enable individuals to reach the global level".

"The tourism and economic sectors can benefit from the increasing size of these sports gatherings, pointing to the importance of the participation of non-disabled individuals in

these events in a friendly and participatory manner", he added.

HH Sayyid Adham also highlighted the importance of hosting this championship in preparation for the West Asia Championship, which will be hosted by Oman. He stressed that participation in regional and local competitions contributes to preparing teams, evaluating the technical staff, and the team's ability to deal with changes.

Dr Raed al Farsi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Al Noor Association for the Blind and Chairman of championship committee, expressed his pleasure on hosting of this major event. He stressed the importance of cooperation among Gulf countries and supporting the blind segment in societies.

He also pointed out that the organisation of the championship came at the request of talented athletes after the Al Noor Association team won first place in the Torch Championship held in Jordan last year.

For his part, Dr Mansour bin Sultan al Touqi, President of the Oman Paralympic Committee and Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Organising Committee of the Championship, in his welcome speech expressed his happiness at the Sultanate of Oman's hosting the championship.

He also pointed to the importance of the championship in achieving 'Oman Vision 2040' and promoting sustainable development. Al Touqi stressed

the application of international technical standards in organising the championship, praising the efforts of the technical committee to organise a distinguished sporting event.

Al Noor Team dominates Al Basira in opening match:

The blind goalball match between the Al Noor and Al Basira teams began with high excitement. Jasem Khalaf of Al Basira Kuwait made the first shot, saved by Emad al Haji of Al Noor. Al Haji nearly scored but missed. The excitement continued, and Al Noor's Saqer al Qasmi scored a penalty in the third minute.

The action heated up with Qasmi scoring again in the sixth minute, making it 2-0 for Al Noor. Al Haji saved a Kuwaiti penalty and then scored twice, bringing the score to 4-0. The Kuwaiti team managed to score 5 points, but Al Noor ended the first half leading 9-5.

In the second half, an own goal by Hassan Bohan extended Al Noor's lead to 10-5. A substitution brought in Ahmed Al Tobi for Emad Al Haji. Bohan scored for Kuwait, but Qasmi and Younis Khatibi added goals for Al Noor. The match ended 18-8 in favour of Al Noor.

Six teams from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries are competing in a round-robin format. The top four teams will advance to the semifinals, with winners competing for the championship.

Shihab to lead volleyball programme in Chinese Taipei

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

Oman's Dr Shihab Aldin bin Ahmed al Riyami and American international lecturer Gordan Mayforth will deliver a national programme and development strategy for the Chinese Taipei Volleyball Federation titled 'CTVBA Coach Course'.

The course will be divided into three phase as the initial programme will be held at National Changhua University of Education from Monday and will run until Thursday. The following sessions will be held during July 27 to 30, while the concluding programme will take place from August 1 to 4.

The course will target to elevate the level of national coaches at Chinese Taipei and to keep them updated with the latest in the world of volleyball in various sports sciences, physical aspects, modern technical



Dr Shihab Aldin bin Ahmed al Riyami

and tactical aspects of global volleyball.

The Chinese Taipei Volleyball Federation and for its second consecutive year has invited many international lecturers with significant technical experience in training and education, as well as global coaching figures in volleyball.

"Many thanks for the Chinese Taipei Volleyball Federation for their confidence and trust to present this essential course to the national coaches beside International lecturer Gordan

Mayforth from USA. The programme will include the establishment of many sports workshops and seminars, both practical and theoretical, aimed at developing knowledge and enhancing the technical skills of coaches in the training field. The lectures cover many important topics including modern tactics in men's and women's volleyball, training planning, physical preparation in volleyball, various warm-up types in volleyball, modern educational theories, and advanced training in basic volleyball skills like serving, receiving, blocking, and attacking," he said.

The Chinese Taipei Federation is ranked 46th in the International Volleyball Federation and among the top 15 teams in Asia, making a distinguished presence in all championships and competitions of the Asian Volleyball Confederation," he added.

Royal Cavalry wins 2nd place at British Open Polo



London: Oman's Royal Cavalry team won second place at the British Open Polo Championship, held at the stadium of the Aspect Knepp Castle Polo Club.

The champion saw four teams, including Royal Cavalry, vying for the precious trophy. The three other competitors were the teams

of the English Aspect Polo Club, the Irish Polo Club and the Czech Republic Polo Club.

The final match brought together the teams of the Royal Cavalry and the Irish Club. The latter club scored five goals, against three for the Royal Cavalry. Yet, Royal Cavalry player

Mazin bin Mohammed al Zadjali won the Best Player's Award in the championship.

The final match was attended by Badr bin Mohammed al Manthri, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. — ONA



Oscar Piastri reacts after the race. — AFP

PIASTRI TAKES FIRST WIN AMID TEAM ORDERS ROW

BUDAPEST: Australian Oscar Piastri took his first Formula One win in a McLaren one-two at the Hungarian Grand Prix on Sunday after Lando Norris reluctantly handed back the lead on team orders three laps from the end on an afternoon of high drama.

Lewis Hamilton took third for Mercedes, his 200th Formula One podium coming despite a late collision with Red Bull's championship leader Max Verstappen, who came off worse and finished fifth.

"Very, very special. This is really the day I dreamed of as a kid, standing on the top step of an F1 podium," Piastri said before the ceremonies.

"Obviously, a bit complicated at the end, but I put myself in the right position at the start, and thank you to the team for an amazing effort and an amazing car."

He apologised over the radio



(LtoR) second winner Lando Norris, Oscar Piastri, third winner Lewis Hamilton. — AFP

at the chequered flag for it being more "painful" than necessary.

The fifth Australian to win a grand prix seized the lead from pole-sitter Norris at the start as Verstappen took second with a short-cut after being forced wide.

Verstappen had to give the place back as stewards' investigated and Piastri was ahead until Norris

came in for his second stop to cover against Hamilton, with Piastri staying out and losing out.

McLaren told Norris to re-establish the order "at his convenience" with more than 20 laps remaining but the gap between only grew larger and the Briton showed no sign of complying.

"I know you'll do the right thing," Norris was told with 14 laps to go after the team repeated that they wanted Piastri to win. "Well you should have pitted him first," he replied.

"Lando, he can't catch you up. You've proved your point," the Briton was told when he moved six seconds clear with six laps remaining.

"The way to win a championship is not by yourself. You're going to need Oscar, and you're going to need the team," Norris was told, before eventually complying.

"The team asked me to do it, so that's it," he said in his pre-podium interview, making no attempt to hide his unhappiness.

Behind them, Verstappen was also turning the air blue on the radio to the Red Bull pit wall as he struggled with his car's brake balance and questioned the strategy. — Reuters

Nadal defeated in first tour final in two years

BASTAD, SWEDEN: Rafael Nadal lost his first final in two years on Sunday as the Spaniard went down 6-3, 6-2 to Portugal's Nuno Borges at the clay-court Bastad Open.

The Spanish tennis great had shown signs of a return to form in Scandinavia as he made an impressive run to the final, just one week before tennis at the Olympic Games gets underway on the clay in Paris.

But Nadal, rather than celebrating his 64th title on the surface and first since Roland Garros 2022, was dominated by seventh seed Borges as he struggled to find fluency with his serve and ground strokes.

"Many congratulations to Nuno," said Nadal.

"You've been playing great during the whole week, so you deserve it more than anyone else here.

Congratulations and enjoy your moment, it's always special winning a title."

"Today wasn't my best day, but all the credit to Nuno. He played very well and it was so difficult for me, so well done."

Borges was the first to make headway in the match when he broke the Spaniard's serve to go 3-1 up, with Nadal saving break points before overcooking a forehand down the line.

But the 14-time French Open winner struck back immediately on the Borges serve, earning two break-back points before the Portuguese dumped a forehand into the net from inside the service box.

But neither player could quite grab the ascendancy in the first set as Borges quickly ran up a 0-40 lead in the next service game, converting his second break point with a perfectly executed drop shot.

Nadal was struggling to find his first serve but managed to hold just his second service game of the opening set to force Borges to serve one more time. The world number 51 kept his nerve to do just that.

The 38-year-old showed signs of his old self serving at deuce in the first game of the second set with a booming forehand winner down the line, before he eventually held but that was one of the few highlights for Nadal on the day.

Borges then struck at 2-2 as he broke Nadal's serve for the first time in the second set and fourth time overall to edge ahead.

The 27-year-old followed it up by winning the next three games, sealing a maiden career title in his first-ever match-up against the former world number one with an ace. — Reuters



Portugal's Nuno Borges kisses the trophy. — Reuters

Root and Brook tons leave West Indies with tough chase against England

NOTTINGHAM, UNITED KINGDOM: Joe Root and Harry Brook hit hundreds to leave the West Indies needing an imposing 385 to win the second Test against England at Trent Bridge on Sunday.

England were dismissed for 425 in their second innings to force an early tea on the fourth day after Root had made 122 and Brook 109.

It was the first time in 147 years of Test cricket that England had scored at least 400 in both innings of the same match after they made 416 first time around.

But with West Indies having made 457 in reply, the tourists still had some hope of victory.

Nevertheless, they would still have to surpass the highest successful fourth innings chase in a Test at Trent Bridge — England's 299-5 against New Zealand in 2022 — if they were to level this three-match series at 1-1.

Root's innings saw him leapfrog the West Indies' Shivnarine Chanderpaul into eighth place in the list of Test cricket's all-time leading run-scorers.

His century also left Root one shy of the England record of 33 Test hundreds held by the retired Alastair Cook.

Together with Brook, whose quickfire hundred was his first Test century in England, he shared a fourth-wicket stand of 189 in 41 overs.

The Yorkshire duo came together on Saturday when



England's Harry Brook celebrates with Joe Root after. — Reuters

England were just 99 runs ahead at 140-3 after the loss in quick succession of Ollie Pope (51) and Ben Duckett (76).

England started Sunday's play on 248-3, already 207 runs in front. Brook was 71 not out and Root unbeaten on 37, with England bidding to take an unassailable 2-0 lead after a dominant innings and 114 run-win in the first Test at Lord's.

Brook's straight-driven four off Seales saw him into the 90s before two more boundaries off Alzarri Joseph took him to 99.

The 25-year-old's quick single off Alzarri Joseph ensured Brook got to three figures, his fifth hundred in 14 Tests coming in just 118 balls, including 12 fours.

— AFP

OCEC unveils summer sports spark

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) announced the launch of its summer Sports Spark event with logistical support provided by Sabco Sport. The event will run from July 25 to August 24 with various indoor (Air-condition) activities for locals to enjoy during summer months.

The activities will run every day from 9 am until midnight. There will be children's activities in the morning, while afternoons and evenings are exclusive for adult and two days cater for women on August 3 and 17.

Eng Said al Shanfari, CEO of OCEC, explained to the *Observer*, "The 'Sports Spark' event is the first of its kind to be held at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre. It comes as part of the Centre's efforts to diversify its events and attract the interest of various sectors of the community. The event aims to fill the void of entertainment during the summer season when many



people indulge in exercising and training."

Al Shanfari added, "Sports Spark features wide, open air-conditioned areas with state-of-the-art facilities, making it a perfect setting for various sports and recreational activities in a comfortable atmosphere."

The Sports Spark event offers different types of games and sports for all ages and interests, including football, basketball, badminton, a Ninja course, cricket, e-gaming a fitness area, and children's games. Some of these games will also include special tournaments, with fun competitions for participants

taking part.

Sports Spark is positioning itself as a complete, one-of-a-kind alternative to spending the summer at shopping centres or at home, providing a huge space of 9,000 square metres to practice over 10 types of sports under one roof.

Al Shanfari highlighted the event's expected success, "The OCEC is an ideal location to host this event, as it is centrally located in Muscat, just 15 minutes from any part of the city. The centre is easily accessible via major highways and provides 4,000 parking spaces, many of which are



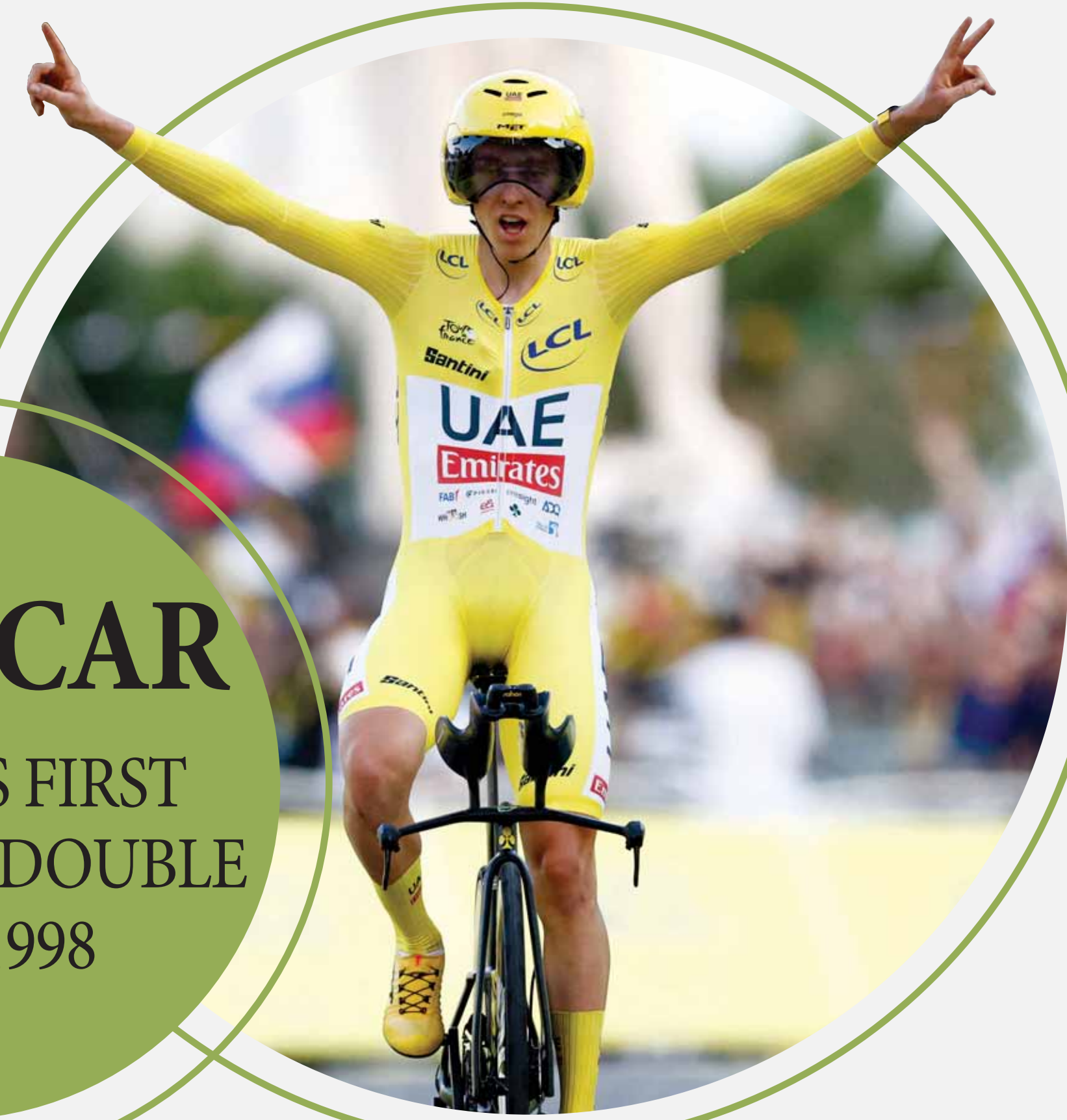
Eng Said al Shanfari, CEO of OCEC

covered. We know this is the type of event our local communities are looking for and is easily accessible for all."

The programme at Sports Spark is diversified with events and activities suitable for all ages. Visitors can look forward to watching different kinds of sports games, enjoying various entertainment, or just relaxing in the cafes dotting the exhibition halls. A summer camp for children aged 6 to 14 will also be available daily with packages offered on the Sports Spark website, to access privacy and enjoy the range of

POGACAR

ACHIEVES FIRST GIRO/TOUR DOUBLE SINCE 1998



NICE: Tadej Pogacar became the first rider to achieve the Giro d'Italia/Tour de France double since 1998 when he claimed his third Tour title on Sunday, cementing his domination by winning the final stage for his sixth stage success.

The Slovenian beat defending champion Jonas Vingegaard of Denmark, and Belgian Remco Evenepoel, who were second and third overall and on the final stage, respectively, with a winning margin of six minutes and 17 seconds.

Pogacar won the 33.7-km individual time trial from Monaco

to Nice in a time of 45 minutes and 24 seconds, destroying his rivals with a gap of one minute and three seconds over Vingegaard, winner of the last two Tours.

The winner could easily have played it safe having started the final day with a commanding lead over Vingegaard, but once again he showed no mercy and from the off he went for the stage win, his third in a row, to finish the Tour in style.

Eritrea's Biniam Girmay won the green jersey for the points classification with Richard Carapaz of Ecuador taking the

polka dot jersey for the mountains classification.

Pogacar's UAE Team Emirates won the team's classification, while Evenepoel, who won stage seven, the other time trial stage, won the white jersey for the best young rider in his first participation in the Tour, finishing 9:18 behind the winner.

The Tour finished outside of Paris for the first time in its 121-year history, due to the upcoming Olympic Games and it was the first time the Tour ended with a time trial since 1989 when Greg LeMond overtook Laurent Fignon on the final day.

But this was never going to be as dramatic given Pogacar's emphatic lead and domination of this year's race.

Pogacar has led since winning stage four, extending the gap to over three minutes after taking stages 14 and 15 before another two successive stage victories on stages 19 and 20 all but confirmed his overall win.

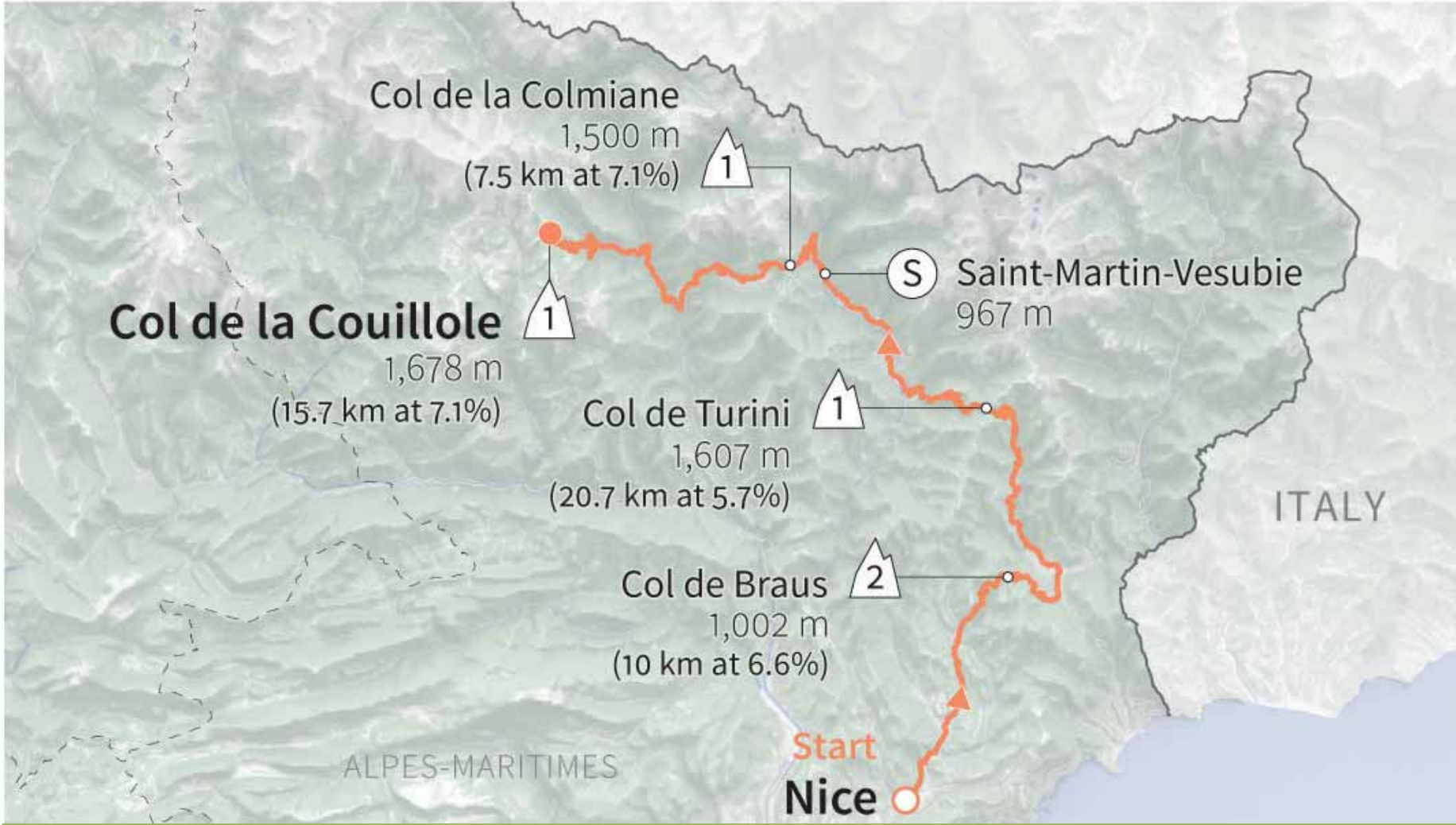
Vingegaard came into this year's event having not raced for three months after suffering a collapsed lung and fractured rib at the Tour of the Basque country, and while he never looked like retaining his title, he did manage a stage win.

On stage 11, Vingegaard held off Pogacar to take the victory, and moved ahead of Evenepoel into second place after finishing runner-up to Pogacar on stage 14.

Evenepoel had hoped to repeat his earlier time trial stage win, but was soon overtaken by Vingegaard at the first intermediate checkpoint, but once Pogacar set off it was clear he had the stage victory in mind, to show his utter domination of the Tour.

No rider has completed the Giro/Tour double since the late Marco Pantani, and Pogacar becomes only the eighth rider to achieve the feat. — Reuters

TOUR DE FRANCE **STAGE 20** Saturday, July 20 132.8 km 2024



LIST OF TOUR DE FRANCE CHAMPIONS

- 2024 Tadej Pogacar (Slovenia)
- 2023 Jonas Vingegaard (Denmark)
- 2022 Vingegaard
- 2021 Pogacar
- 2020 Pogacar
- 2019 Egan Bernal (Colombia)
- 2018 Geraint Thomas (Britain)
- 2017 Chris Froome (Britain)
- 2016 Froome
- 2015 Froome
- 2014 Vincenzo Nibali (Italy)
- 2013 Froome
- 2012 Bradley Wiggins (Britain)
- 2011 Cadel Evans (Australia)
- 2010 Andy Schleck (Luxembourg)
- *** 2009 Alberto Contador (Spain)





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Oman launches emergency financing programme for SMEs



The initiative aims to ensure the sustainability of these businesses and enhance their response to emergency situations.

MUSCAT: The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) has announced the launch of an emergency financing programme to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) during crises.

This initiative aims to ensure the sustainability of these businesses and enhance their response to emergency situations.

The Authority explained that the financing programme targets existing SMEs located within the geographical area affected by the emergency, as identified by relevant authorities.

It provides rapid and effective financial support to these institutions during emergencies to reduce the economic impacts resulting from such situations.

According to the Authority, to qualify for this financing, the business owner must possess

an entrepreneurship card and meet specific financial and credit criteria.

The grace period for beneficiaries ranges from the date of the last disbursement payment and extends up to two years.

The repayment period of the financing loan is a maximum of five years, starting from the end of the grace period, with the duration determined by the nature of each project.

The Authority indicated that the launch of this programme was prompted by the effects of the tropical depression “Al Matir” on SMEs.

The goal is to develop a new financing framework that guarantees the sustainability of economic activities for SMEs during various emergencies and ensures the continuity of their economic and social contributions. — **ONA**

National ICV policy to support employment growth in Oman

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

The recently approved national policy of local value addition (also known as In-Country Value - ICV) is expected to boost employment rates, according to Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT).

Speaking to a local news Arabic newspaper, the Under-Secretary shared that the national local value addition policy has been approved by the Council of Ministers and is being implemented by the Government Tender Board.

“Local added value is very important,” Dr Al Shaithani said. “As everyone knows, the esteemed Council of Ministers has approved a national policy for local added value.

The Tender Board is leading the implementation of this policy through a guide for local added value procedures and ensuring



“We are implementing the local added value guide issued by the General Secretariat of the Tender Board. This guide is comprehensive for every government project.

DR ALI AL SHAITHANI
Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology, MoTCIT

that various government institutions benefit from local added value through government projects.”

In line with this goal, “the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is currently implementing various ICV initiatives,” he pointed out.

“There are significant initiatives we are currently working on. First, we are implementing the local added value guide issued by the General Secretariat of the Tender Board. This guide is comprehensive for every government project.”

According to the Under-Secretary, all companies will be required to adhere to several commitments, including training, employment, and job creation.

Furthermore, the Ministry will continuously monitor projects to ensure their adherence to the guide.

“The Ministry will monitor all major projects related to its work, which are assigned through the General Secretariat of the Tender Board.

This monitoring involves selecting companies that achieve higher Omanisation rates.

Companies that implement higher Omanisation rates and offer better job opportunities will have a greater chance of being awarded projects.”

Dr Al Shaithani further added, “After projects are awarded, companies must fulfil their commitments to implementing local added value. This includes sourcing materials from within the Sultanate of Oman, supporting small and medium enterprises, employing Omanis, and providing training.

All of this contributes to increasing the number of Omanis employed. The ministry, led by the Minister and all ministry employees, is prioritising employment as a key focus.”

Spanning the 2024 – 2030 timeframe, the recently approved Local Value Addition Policy will focus on four main pillars: supply chains, workplace development, job creation and training opportunities and innovation.

PDO trials use of nanospheres to unlock difficult oil

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 21

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the country’s biggest oil and gas producer, is preparing to trial the use of nanospheres – microscopically small particles – to unlock difficult oil from its Yibal assets during the current quarter.

The landmark initiative is an example of novel technologies being leveraged by the majority state-owned energy company to support its operations across critical areas, including Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR), well construction and production management, artificial lifting, and Produced Water and Energy Management.

Nanospheres are nanoscale (one billionth - 10–9) particles made from polyacrylamide (PAM), a class of long-chain synthetic and water-soluble polymers.

In industries, polyacrylamide is used in water management or wastewater treatment because of its ability to encourage the coagulation of particles present in water.

In oil and gas industries, the

polymer is seen as promising in its ability to contribute to reducing the water cut, increasing sweep efficiency and improving oil recovery.

Effective deployment of the technology can result in significant output and commercial benefits, according to PDO.

“A potential improvement in the unit operating cost of \$2-3 per barrel is expected through the implementation of the technology in water-flooded carbonate reservoirs.

The technology will further improve the commerciality of growth volumes by up to six million cubic metres of oil from the water-flood carbonate portfolio in our northern fields,” the company stated in its 2023 Sustainability Report.

PDO hopes to unlock around 25 million barrels of oil upon the commencement of the field trial at Yibal in Q3 2024.

The company’s EOR team is also assessing possible nanosphere-based chemical EOR projects in Qarn Alam, starting with a pilot in 2025.

A sizable number of novel technologies currently being



PDO’s Rabab Harweel Integrated Project.

THE LANDMARK INITIATIVE IS AN EXAMPLE OF NOVEL TECHNOLOGIES BEING LEVERAGED BY THE MAJORITY STATE-OWNED ENERGY COMPANY TO SUPPORT ITS OPERATIONS ACROSS CRITICAL AREAS, INCLUDING ENHANCED OIL RECOVERY (EOR), WELL CONSTRUCTION AND PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT, ARTIFICIAL LIFTING, AND PRODUCED WATER AND ENERGY MANAGEMENT.

tested at PDO pertain to the goal of sustaining EOR-based production.

EOR is pivotal to sustaining the company’s oil and gas production due to its maturing asset base and the challenging nature of Oman’s geology.

EOR is anticipated to account for a significant 28 per cent of PDO’s total oil production in 2031, up from 12 per cent in 2020.

The company currently operates a range of commercial-scale EOR schemes, including

chemical EOR, miscible gas injection (MGI) and thermal applications.

“In the last five to 10 years, various EOR technologies have been further developed and several EOR projects and trials have been successfully conducted,” said PDO in its report.

“This has generated valuable information from a field testing and performance perspective, including operational learnings.

It has also allowed for a much wider window of application and contributed to our aspirational target of exceeding our 700,000 bpd production plateau aspiration,” it added.

PDO achieved a combined oil, gas and condensate production of 1.1 million barrels of oil equivalent per day (boepd) in 2023, generating in excess of \$22 billion in revenue for the country.

Crude oil production averaged 657,599 barrels per day (bpd) in 2023. Condensate output averaged 97,426 bpd, while gas production was 58.26 million m3/d, consistent with lower customer demand.

Al Sharqiyah North Governorate sees rise in SMEs

IBRA: The number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate has risen to 9,912, with 1,783 holding the “Riyada” card.

These enterprises are primarily involved in tourism, agriculture, mining, and technology. Salem bin Ali al Hajri, Director of the SME Development Department in Al Sharqiyah North, confirmed the increase in the number of SMEs in the governorate over the past three years.

He added that in 2023-2024, 995 beneficiaries received craft support, including the supply of machinery, equipment, raw materials, and the rehabilitation of craft sites.

Al Hajri highlighted that the governorate’s unique comparative advantage lies in tourism, agriculture, technology, and mining, driven by passionate



These enterprises are primarily involved in tourism, agriculture, mining, and technology.

young entrepreneurs. The Authority organised numerous programmes and initiatives this year in consulting, financing, and training. Individual specialised advisory services were

provided in finance, feasibility studies, marketing, and business development. This year, the Authority funded five projects through its portfolio in the governorate, following the Entrepreneur Readiness Programme, which was organised in three batches across two tracks: the establishment track and the “project expansion” track. A total of 83 beneficiaries

participated in these programmes.

Additionally, three marketing exhibitions were held for SMEs, artisans, and productive families to empower these institutions, and six workshops aimed at promoting the culture of entrepreneurship were conducted, benefiting 247 individuals.

The Authority’s administration in Al Sharqiyah North, in collaboration with the Governor’s Office and other government institutions, created about 12 investment opportunities for “Riyada” card holders, including land allocated for grape cultivation.

The administration is also working on implementing a supplier development programme later this year to raise SME capabilities in obtaining tenders, contracts, and purchases from government and private agencies. Al Hajri noted that the

department has been recognised as the best service provision outlet in the governorate.

Entrepreneurs like Salem bin Saeed al Yazidi, Rahma bint Nasser al Muslihiyah, and Mohammed bin Rashid al Yazidi shared their success stories.

Salem bin Saeed al Yazidi expanded his construction project with the Authority’s support, creating local employment opportunities. Rahma bint Nasser al Muslihiyah started her educational project after retiring from her government job and later established another project for people with disabilities.

Mohammed bin Rashid al Yazidi chose entrepreneurship for its societal benefits and uses modern technologies to manage his furniture-related project, emphasising Omani youth involvement and local customer engagement. — ONA

New hotel investments underline Duqm’s summer tourism appeal

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 21

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) has bolstered its position on the summer tourism map of the Sultanate of Oman by inaugurating new hotel facilities and increasing hospitality-related investments through the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

This year saw the opening of three new hotel establishments, increasing the number of hotel options in Duqm to 15, including 4-star hotels. The total number of available hotel rooms in the zone has now exceeded 2,461.

Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak (pictured), Acting CEO of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), stated that the zone’s location midway between Muscat and Salalah makes it an important stop for travellers heading to or coming from Salalah.

“Visitors can take a break at one of the hotels, resorts, or serviced apartments available in Duqm, which cater to the needs of tourists and families,” he said: “This year saw the opening of three new hotel establishments: Duqm Express Hotel, Al Madina Express Hotel Duqm, and Royal Plaza Hotel Duqm.

Last year also witnessed the opening of Grand Orchid Hotel Apartments and Duqm Plaza Hotel. These hotels represent a significant addition to the hotel sector in Duqm.”

Akaak pointed out that the hotel sector in Duqm offers various options for visitors, including 4-star hotels such as Crowne Plaza Duqm and Park Inn Resort Duqm, both located on Duqm Beach.

Other options include 3-star hotels like Al Madina Hotel and Asian Hotel. The hotel establishments in the zone also feature a range of serviced apartments, such as Ocean Hotel Apartments, Royal Land Suites, Discovery Hotel Apartments, Dar Al Jawhara, Dar Al Dhiyafa, and Duqm Suites.

Additionally, there are youth



hostels and heritage camps like Azbat Al Maha and Duqm Camp.

Duqm enjoys mild weather year-round, including summer time when temperatures range between 25 and 32 degrees Celsius.

This makes it a prime destination on the domestic summer tourism map. Also, Duqm’s location on the Arabian Sea, open to the Indian Ocean, and its sandy beaches attract tourists to engage in beach sports.

The zone features several tourist attractions, such as the Rock Garden in the heart of the Wilayat and the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary, which is less than a two-hour drive from Duqm. Travel agencies organise trips to these sites and offer a variety of activities tailored to tourists’ preferences.

Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak stressed that the rise in tourism investments and improvements in infrastructure within the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) have significantly increased tourist arrivals. This growth is especially supported by the direct flights available from Muscat International Airport to Duqm Airport everyday of the week.

He explained that the SEZAD is currently implementing service projects to enhance tourism aspects, such as main and secondary roads, electricity and water services, and drainage systems.

Moreover, OPAZ is set to construct a coastal road serving the tourist area up to the multi-purpose fishing port, while redeveloping the zone to align with modern urban planning standards.

Ooredoo, Oman Academy for SMEs launch innovative content creator training programme

MUSCAT: In collaboration with the Oman Academy for SMEs, Ooredoo has announced a ground-breaking programme aimed at training, supporting, and guiding aspiring content creators.

This initiative is designed to empower job-seekers, university and college students, and beginner content creators by helping them reach a wider audience and enrich Omani content on social media platforms.

This programme is structured to make a significant impact by offering participants the opportunity to earn a sustainable income, receive ongoing support and guidance, and market Omani brands, particularly during the khareef season.

Feras al Shaikh, Director of Branding and Communications at Ooredoo, said, “Our goal is to discover and nurture local talent



in the field of content creation, helping them become prominent names in their respective areas.

This partnership will not only benefit Ooredoo and the Oman Academy for SMEs but also support the promotion of Omani brands and the establishment of emerging companies in the field of social media marketing.

Together, we are committed

to upgrading the world of our participants, fostering innovation, and contributing to the growth of Oman’s digital economy.”

The programme received significant attention from individuals and major brands, and the competition to participate in the programme was high. The Academy has

already started the programme workshops, following the announcement of chosen participants and brands.

Fair and transparent voting methods will be employed to select the top 10 brands, and the public and participants will then vote to choose the top three, who will be honoured at an official ceremony which will also recognise and celebrate all those taking part.

The Oman Academy for SMEs will manage the programme, including content, marketing, and branding, stakeholder engagement, and participant management.

Ooredoo will also be offering the top participants an internship training programme upon completion, to provide invaluable training and workplace experience, to further bolster their forward prospects and success.

The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort redefines exquisite summer staycations

MUSCAT: Prepare to indulge in the ultimate luxury staycation this summer at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort where opulence meets tranquillity. Nestled in the prestigious Al Mouj Muscat community, the resort stands as a beacon of sophistication offering locals and residents a chance to escape the ordinary and embrace the extraordinary.

The “Exquisite Getaway” package and the “Unwind and Dine” package both promise a memorable getaway experience with exceptional room rates.

Guests will savour a breakfast buffet for two at Karibu, enjoy 20% savings at select restaurants, and have access to the resort’s world-class facilities, including a state-of-the-art gym.

The packages also include special welcome amenities, dedicated butler service,



complimentary pressing and late check-out subject to availability

The “Unwind and Dine” offer sets itself apart by including a dinner for two at Karibu, where flavours from Zanzibar, India, and Oman come together in a delectable culinary symphony.

“We are absolutely delighted to

present these exclusive summer packages at our newly revealed heaven of glamour in the beating heart of Muscat,” said Tarek Mourad, General Manager of The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort.

“Our aim is to create an unforgettable rejuvenating experience that combines

the epitome of luxury accommodations with unparalleled personalised service and outstanding amenities. We invite our guests to unwind from the hustle and bustle of life and immerse themselves in the majesty of Omani hospitality, all while indulging in the highest standards of opulence and comfort.”

The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort stands as a pinnacle of luxury in Al Mouj Muscat, Oman’s premier lifestyle destination.

With its breathtaking beachfront location, spacious rooms, diverse culinary venues, and world-class amenities such as the soon-to-open Guerlain Spa and the Al Mouj Golf course, the resort offers an immersive luxury experience that seamlessly blends local charm and global sophistication.



Abraj leads way in ICV and sustainability initiatives in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, JULY 21

Muscat-based Abraj Energy Services — a subsidiary of integrated Omani energy group OQ — has firmly established itself as a leading provider of onshore drilling and well services in Oman, distinguished by its unwavering commitment to the In-Country Value (ICV) programme and sustainability initiatives.

Through strategic efforts in local procurement, job creation, and environmental stewardship, Abraj Energy Services (Abraj) has set a high standard in the energy market.

In its recently published report, Abraj Energy Services, since its inception in 2006, has focused on enhancing its ICV performance by forging strong partnerships with local suppliers, investing in local talent, and maximising the utilisation of local resources.

This commitment is evident in the company's impressive track record of deploying rigs for prominent local and international clients such as PDO, OILEX, Naftogas UAE, and OQ.

These efforts have significantly contributed to Oman's socio-economic development, aligning with the nation's broader ICV goals.

Abraj's advanced fleet, comprising 25 drilling rigs, 5 workover rigs, 9 integrated cementing units, and a powerful 35,000 HP hydraulic fracturing fleet, exemplifies its commitment to excellence.

The company drills approximately 250 wells annually, pumping over 35,000 tonnes of cement and 9,000 cubic metres of rock fracturing fluid.

These operations are supported by cutting-edge drilling systems



Abraj's advanced fleet exemplifies its commitment to excellence.

that enhance efficiency, safety, and mobility while reducing fuel consumption.

In addition to its operational achievements, Abraj Energy Services has been at the forefront of sustainability initiatives within the energy sector.

The company has pioneered the use of modern technologies such as Slickline units, Coiled Tubing Services, and well logging operations, all aimed at minimising environmental impact.

The inauguration of flowback and drilling fluids services further underscores Abraj's proactive approach to environmentally friendly practices.

A significant highlight of Abraj's sustainability efforts is the industry-renowned Competency Development Tool - TRACCESS CI, which focuses on developing a skilled workforce with a strong emphasis on sustainability principles.

This initiative aligns with Abraj's broader commitment to health, safety, and environmental

standards, which are rigorously upheld at all worksites through the Abraj Eyes Centre.

Abraj Energy Services' dedication to sustainability extends to strategic business planning and partnerships.

The successful public subscription via an Initial Public Offering (IPO) in 2023 reflects strong investor confidence in Abraj's sustainable business model and growth prospects.

Moreover, the company's historic operational partnership with Total Energies signifies its alignment with global sustainability goals and best practices.

Looking forward, Abraj Energy Services continues to innovate and excel in the energy market while maintaining its ICV and sustainability commitments.

The recent expansion of rig capabilities for clients like BP, Petrogas, and PDO, along with upcoming international operations with Wafra Joint Operation (WJO), highlights the company's ambition to lead

change not only in Oman but also on a global scale.

Abraj Energy Services is also dedicated to a comprehensive Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) framework, aligning with His Majesty Sultan bin Tarik's vision for carbon neutrality by 2050.

The company is building a sustainability road map and strategy, complete with a greenhouse gas calculation and monitoring system, ensuring preparedness for a sustainable future.

The company's diverse workforce, comprising 25 nationalities with over 90 per cent Omanis, fosters a culture of learning and growth, further solidifying Abraj as a trusted partner for oil and gas operators in the region.

Through its diverse services and robust customer relationships, Abraj Energy Services consistently delivers reliable results to its clients, shareholders, and the communities it serves.

Global cyber outage hits air travel, leaving passengers in limbo

EDINBURGH/MADRID/BALTIMORE: Air passengers worldwide faced delays, flight cancellations and headaches checking in as airports and airlines were caught up in a massive IT outage that has affected numerous industries ranging from banks to media companies.

A software update by global cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike triggered systems problems for Microsoft customers that turned into hours of delays for airlines using their software. Some travellers were issued handwritten boarding passes with software inoperative.

All told, out of more than 110,000 scheduled commercial flights on Friday, 5,000 have been cancelled globally with more expected, according to global aviation analytics firm Cirium. By comparison, 2,000 flights were cancelled on Thursday, before the software issues.

The aviation sector is particularly sensitive to interruptions due to its reliance on closely coordinated schedules run by air-traffic control. Delays can throw off schedules for airports and airlines for the rest of the day.

US carrier Delta Air Lines was one of the hardest-hit, with 20% of its flights cancelled, according to flight tracking service FlightAware.

Across the United States, Asia and Europe, carriers such as Ryanair, United and Air India said they had faced delays or disruption.

"Nobody was around to tell us where we could check in when we arrived ... so different groups

queued in different places and then in the end someone, after a bottleneck of people was formed, told us to come here," said Ana Rodriguez, a tourist from Mexico, while waiting for a flight in Madrid's Barajas Airport.

Even airlines that were not directly affected said they would have to grapple with delays due to the global nature of the disruption. Transportation system issues appeared to be resolving and would be hopefully be back to normal by Saturday, said US Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, adding that the US Federal Aviation Administration did not appear affected.

FLIGHT DISRUPTIONS

Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson airport, one of the world's busiest and a hub for Delta Air, had the worst disruptions globally, according to FlightRadar24, with 36% of scheduled departures cancelled.

Delta resumed some flight departures but warned of additional delays and cancellations.

FAA data showed Delta's operations in Atlanta, Minneapolis and New York were still affected.

Customers who had flights cancelled were issued travel waivers, the airline said.

United said the disruption affected systems used for calculating aircraft weight, check-ins, and its call centres.

In Europe, Spanish carrier Iberia said it had managed to avoid flight cancellations. Ryanair had cancelled 2% of its flights, while 38% of its scheduled flights were delayed. — **Reuters**



Stranded passengers on being stuck in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

Indian refiner sees further cuts in oil OSPs as fuel margins drop

NEW DELHI: Bharat Petroleum Corp, India's third-biggest refiner, expects Middle Eastern producers to cut the official selling prices (OSPs) of their crude in coming months to reflect lower margins on fuel sales, its head of finance said on Saturday.

Lower fuel cracks — the difference between the cost of crude oil and refined product sales — are hitting the profitability of

A man paints the logo of oil refiner Bharat Petroleum Corp on a wall on the outskirts of Kochi, India. — **Reuters**

refiners globally. Complex refining margins in Asia have dropped by half to \$4.10 per barrel as of July 19 compared with about \$8.20 per barrel in February.

"Compared to April-May the OSPs are moderate and these OSPs will be further moderated because cracks are on lower side," Vetsa Ramakrishna Gupta told an analysts call.

"I don't think OSP premiums will

be on higher side when cracks are on lower side," he said.

BPCL on Friday said its net profit for the three months ended on June 30 fell 71% from a year earlier to 30.15 billion Indian rupees, partly due to lower margins.

Saudi Aramco cut prices for crude to Asia a second straight month, with its flagship Arab Light crude price for August loadings at its lowest since March. — **Reuters**

Pakistan to push Chinese utilities to switch to domestic coal

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan this month will ask Chinese power plants operating in the country to shift to using coal from Pakistan's Thar region rather than imported coal, the power minister said on Sunday.

Islamabad may also begin talks on re-profiling Pakistan's energy sector debt during the visit to Beijing, Awais Leghari, head of the energy ministry's Power Division, told Reuters.

Leghari will be part of the delegation to discuss structural reforms to the power sector suggested by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which last week agreed on a \$7 billion bailout for the heavily indebted South Asian nation.

Neighbouring China has set up

over \$20 billion worth of energy projects in Pakistan. "One of the key purposes of going along is the conversion of our imported coal units to the local coal.

That would have a huge impact on the cost of energy, of power in the near future. So that is one of the biggest (items on the) agenda," Leghari said in an interview.

Such a transition would benefit the Chinese-owned plants in Pakistan by reducing pressure on Islamabad's foreign exchange reserves, he said, making it easier to repatriate dividends and offering a better return in dollar terms.

The transition could save Pakistan more than 200 billion Pakistani rupees (\$700 million) a year in imports, translating

Dump trucks work in an open-pit coal mining site in Tharparkar, Pakistan. — **Reuters**

to a decrease of as much as 2.5 Pakistani rupees per unit in the price of electricity, Leghari said.

In April a subsidiary of conglomerate Engro agreed to sell all of its thermal assets, including Pakistan's leading coal producer, Sindh Engro Coal Mining to Pakistan's Liberty Power.

Liberty said the decision stemmed from Pakistan's foreign exchange crunch and its indigenous coal reserve potential. The minister declined to elaborate on the possible talks with China over re-profiling energy debt.

Pakistan's power sector has been plagued by high rates of power theft and distribution losses, resulting in accumulating debt across the production chain — a concern raised by the IMF.

The government is implementing structural reforms to reduce "circular debt" — public liabilities that build up in the power sector due to subsidies and unpaid bills — by 100 billion Pakistani rupees (\$360 million) a year, Leghari said.

Poor and middle-class households have been affected by a previous IMF bailout reached last year, which included raising power tariffs as part of the funding programme that ended in April.

Annual power use in Pakistan is expected to fall consecutively for the first time in 16 years as higher tariffs curb household consumption, despite summer temperatures surging, which typically boosts air conditioning and fan use. — **Reuters**

Khareef a critical driver of economic growth in Dhofar



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The author is head of the business section at Oman Daily Observer

Every year, Oman's Dhofar Governorate experiences a unique natural phenomenon known as khareef, a season during which the mountains transform into lush green landscapes due to monsoon winds from the Indian Ocean, accompanied by heavy rains and fog.

This exceptional climate not only draws tourists from around the globe, but also serves as a significant economic boon for the governorate, particularly benefiting small and medium

enterprises (SMEs).

The influx of tourists during the khareef season leads to a surge in demand for various goods and services, presenting a golden opportunity for SMEs in Dhofar.

The arrival of tourists doubles the local population, substantially increasing the demand for consumer goods and local products.

Handicrafts, food items and souvenirs become hot commodities, driving up sales and boosting the income of local artisans and shop owners.

The heightened need for accommodation during the khareef season revitalises the rental property market.

Hotels, guesthouses and furnished apartments see higher occupancy rates, enabling property owners to achieve significant financial returns.

This seasonal demand often prompts real estate developments, contributing to the overall growth of the sector.

For SMEs, the khareef season is a prime time to expand operations and diversify offerings. Businesses can capitalise on the increased



tourist footfall by providing specialised services such as guided tours, catering and transportation.

The surge in demand also encourages local entrepreneurs to innovate and improve their products and services.

The economic benefits of the khareef season extend beyond individual businesses, significantly impacting the broader economy of Dhofar.

The seasonal boom in tourism attracts investors looking to capitalise on the thriving market. Increased investment

in hospitality, retail and entertainment sectors further stimulates economic growth and development in the governorate.

The khareef season creates numerous job opportunities, particularly in tourism, hospitality and service industries.

This seasonal employment not only supports the local workforce, but also helps reduce unemployment rates and improves the standard of living for residents.

Revenue generated from the khareef season contributes to

Dhofar experiences the Serab (post-khareef) season (late September to early November) and winter season (November to February).

Each season brings its own set of tourists and economic opportunities.

The Serab season's mild weather and blooming landscapes attract nature enthusiasts, while the tranquil winter months appeal to those seeking relaxation.

These varied climatic conditions ensure a steady flow of visitors, supporting continuous economic activity and stability.

The khareef season in Dhofar is more than a natural wonder; it is a critical driver of economic growth and development.

By significantly boosting tourism, consumer spending and investment, the season provides unparalleled opportunities for SMEs and the local economy.

Furthermore, Dhofar's diverse climate ensures that these economic benefits are not confined to a single season but extend throughout the year, making it a resilient and thriving economic hub.

China's EU-made EVs are in pole position — for now

KATRINA HAMLIN

Chinese electric-car makers like BYD and Chery are charging up production in the European Union to dodge tariffs.

On paper, they have an edge, but how long they keep their pole position will hinge on Brussels.

Some home advantages don't travel well. Labour costs add around \$500 per car if BYD's pure-electric Seal sedan is made in Eastern Europe, UBS calculated last year. A factory in Germany would more than quadruple that figure.

Additional energy costs are harder to measure, and could be even higher. Using international suppliers costs a further \$4000 for this specific model.

But what's under the bonnet counts. China Inc's early push into electric vehicles means it can make an EV's chassis and electronics more cheaply.

Some players, like BYD, develop batteries and components as well. It helps that research dollars go far further in the Middle Kingdom: Both Geely Auto and BYD launched multiple models last year, when they invested 4.4 per cent and 6.6 per cent of revenue in R&D respectively, while Tesla spent 5.1 per cent of the top line but christened just one entirely new model in 2023.

Taking all of that into account, UBS analyst Paul Gong estimates that today it would cost BYD roughly 25,000 euros to produce a car in Europe, some 25 per cent more than in China.

That is still about 10,000 euros cheaper than similar models put out by European peers. Seal sedans exported from China to Europe sell for around 45,000 euros.

That implies BYD would still earn a handsome profit per car, and also has scope to undercut EU rivals on price while remaining competitive.

There are no real-world examples to confirm the thesis, as China Inc has yet to start up its first European production lines. Nor do carmakers typically break out specific financials that quantify the value of engineering.

But Sweden-based, Chinese-owned Volvo Cars' disclosures give a hint. The recently launched EX30, its first electric car to use an underlying body developed by parent Geely for Zeekr and Polestar EVs, can achieve a gross margin of 15 per cent to 20 per cent, the company says.

That helped nudge Volvo to its highest-ever gross margin for battery-powered vehicles in second-quarter results on Thursday.

However, even careful sums could still be upset by any nasty surprises from Brussels.

The bloc could threaten fresh probes, tariffs and rules, especially if Chinese marques made in Europe fuel member states' concerns for their legacy automakers.

Evoking new regulations on sourcing and foreign subsidies would disrupt supplies of batteries or other parts, for instance. China's upstarts are formidable rivals, but they still need to test their speed limit on European roads. — Reuters

Aquaponics: Towards a sustainable food production



DR MOHAMED AL WAHAIBI

The author is a research assistant at the Centre of Excellence in Marine Biotechnology at Sultan Qaboos University

Aquaponics is a sustainable farming system that combines aquaculture (raising fish in a controlled environment) and hydroponics (growing plants in nutrient-rich water without soil) into a closed-loop ecosystem where fish and plants thrive together.

In aquaponics, fish waste, rich in ammonia, is converted by beneficial bacteria into nitrates, which are vital for plants.

The plants, in turn, filter and clean the water, which is then recirculated back to the fish tank.

This system relies on three main components: fish, nitrifying bacteria and plants, where all three living entities depend on each other to survive.

Fish, which are placed in the fish tank, produce waste, urine and fecal materials, both rich in ammonia.

Afterward, billions of naturally occurring beneficial bacteria break down waste into vital nutrients for plants.

The plant's roots absorb these nutrients and filter the water, keeping it clean, healthy, and oxygenated and ready to be returned to the fish tank.

This process is highly efficient, using 90 per cent less water than traditional agriculture, and can produce high-quality fish and vegetables year-round.



A man checks the plants in his aquaponic farm, which recycles water in fish tanks to grow vegetables, in this illustration photo. — Reuters

IN OMAN, AQUAPONICS CAN BE PARTICULARLY ADVANTAGEOUS GIVEN THE ARID CLIMATE AND WATER SCARCITY, PROVIDED APPROPRIATE ADAPTATIONS SUCH AS TEMPERATURE REGULATION AND EFFICIENT WATER USE ARE IMPLEMENTED.

Aquaponics eliminates the need for chemical fertilisers and water replacement, making it a resource-efficient and sustainable method for food production.

Aquaponics offers a sustainable solution to food security by integrating fish and plant cultivation and maximising available resources. This method allows for year-round cultivation, ensuring a steady supply of food regardless of weather conditions.

Aquaponics has a minimal environmental impact, reducing soil erosion, water pollution and excessive resource consumption by using less water, minimising waste and eliminating synthetic fertilisers and pesticides.

It conserves water by using up to 90 per cent less than traditional agriculture through a recycling system.

Additionally, aquaponics reduces chemical usage by relying on fish waste and beneficial bacteria for plant nutrition, avoiding harmful chemicals. Its space efficiency,

with vertical growth potential and a compact footprint, makes it ideal for limited spaces.

Additionally, it offers a cost-effective practice by cutting down on the need for traditional fertilisers and minimising water usage.

However, setting up an aquaponics system involves significant initial costs for equipment like fish tanks, grow beds, pumps, lighting and plumbing.

Technical knowledge is essential due to the complexity of interactions between fish, plants, bacteria and water chemistry. Maintaining system balance can be challenging, as fluctuations in water parameters can disrupt the ecosystem.

Aquaponics is limited to certain fish species and water-heavy crops, such as cucumbers and leafy greens. The system also requires considerable electricity, which can be prohibitive for some growers.

There is a steep learning curve, especially for those new to aquaponics, requiring time and effort to master.

Aquaponics can be suitable for use in Oman, given the right adaptations to local conditions.

The hot and arid climate requires temperature regulation through shading, cooling, or controlled-environment greenhouses. Water scarcity

can be managed as aquaponics is water-efficient, with options for using desalinated or treated wastewater.

Tilapia is a suitable fish species due to its heat tolerance. Plant selection should focus on heat-tolerant varieties, with additional cooling measures for sensitive plants.

However, maintaining water quality and nutrient levels is crucial. Investing in quality infrastructure and possibly using renewable energy can enhance system efficiency.

Considering economic feasibility and market demand, along with local awareness and acceptance, is also important for successful implementation.

In conclusion, aquaponics presents a highly sustainable and efficient method of food production, combining aquaculture and hydroponics into a symbiotic ecosystem.

It leverages fish waste to nourish plants, which in turn purify the water for the fish, making it a resource-efficient system that uses 90 per cent less water than traditional agriculture.

Aquaponics supports a variety of fish and plants, ensuring year-round cultivation and high-quality yields with minimal environmental impact.

While initial setup costs and technical complexity are challenges, the long-term benefits include reduced chemical usage, water conservation, space efficiency and cost savings.

In Oman, aquaponics can be particularly advantageous given the arid climate and water scarcity, provided appropriate adaptations such as temperature regulation and efficient water use are implemented.

With careful planning and investment, aquaponics can be a viable and sustainable farming solution for various regions, including Oman.

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CELEBRATION

Lights illuminate the sky and shape a heart during a drone, lights and fire-works show in front of the Eiffel Tower as part of the annual Bastille Day celebrations and ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A member of the Dar Si Hmad Foundation inspects prickly pear cacti affected by cochineals in the Sidi Ifni region along central Morocco's Atlantic coast. —AFP



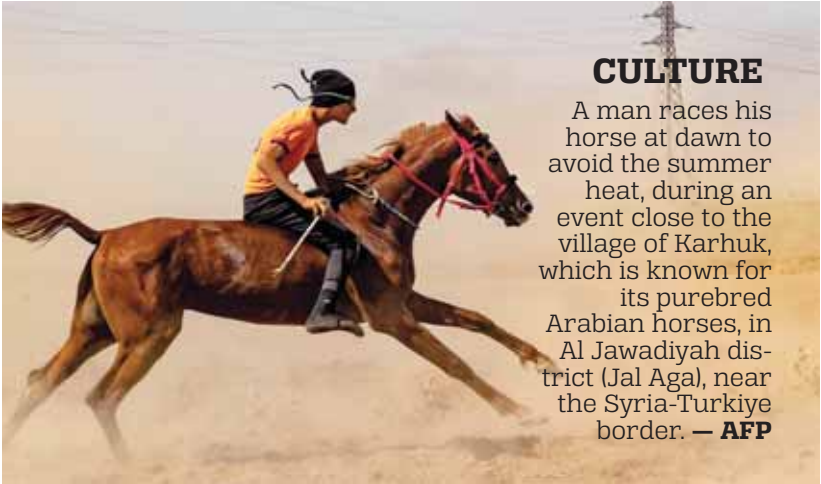
FASHION

A model presents a creation from the summer-winter collection, 'El Veleró' by designer Mayorca, during the 81st edition of Intermoda in Guadalajara, Jalisco State, Mexico. — AFP



MUSIC

Brazilian singers Thiago Castanho (L) and Marcao Britto perform during the presentation of the Charlie Brown Jr. band at the 90's Music Festival at Marina da Gloria in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP



CULTURE

A man races his horse at dawn to avoid the summer heat, during an event close to the village of Karhuk, which is known for its purebred Arabian horses, in Al Jawadiyah district (Jal Aga), near the Syria-Turkiye border. — AFP

art & life

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BEAT THE HEAT WITH THESE SUMMER ACTIVITIES

Despite the intense heat, there are still ways to enjoy summer in Oman. Other than the escaping to Dhofar, this story offers a comprehensive guide to making the most of Oman's summer season... **P20**

TRAVEL TALES

'Hope' as 60 rare Siamese crocodiles hatch in Cambodia

A GROUP OF 60 rare Siamese crocodiles have hatched in Cambodia, boosting hopes for one of the world's most endangered reptiles, conservationists said on Thursday.

Five Siamese crocodile nests were

discovered in Cambodia's Cardamom National Park in mid-May, the country's environment and agriculture ministry said in a joint statement with conservation group Fauna and Flora.

The nests contained 106 eggs, of which 66 were fertilised, and a total of 60 Siamese crocodile eggs successfully hatched between June 27 and 30, the ministry said.

"This discovery indicates that the area is a key habitat for natural crocodiles, providing hope for the species' recovery," they said in the statement.

Researchers say there are approximately 1,000 Siamese crocodiles worldwide, including around 300 individuals in the wild in Cambodia.

Their survival is threatened by poachers who supply eggs and adult reptiles to crocodile farms around the region, where their skins are turned into luxury belts, shoes and handbags.

Cambodian environment minister Eang Sophalleth said it was a source of "pride" that the country is home to some of the world's rarest species, pledging continued efforts to "preserve biodiversity."



Deforestation and poaching have devastated many species in Cambodia, one of Asia's poorest and most corrupt nations.

In its haste to develop, the government has been criticised for allowing firms to clear hundreds of thousands of hectares of forest land — including in protected zones — for everything from rubber and sugar cane plantations to hydropower dams.

The successful mass hatching shows the vital importance" of protecting the Cardamom National Park, said Pablo Sinovas, country director of Fauna and Flora Cambodia programme.

"With only a few hundred individuals estimated in the wild, the hatching of 60 new crocodiles is a tremendous boost," Sinovas added.

Siamese crocodiles grow up to three metres in length and the Mekong River basin and wetlands in Cambodia appear to hold the only remaining wild populations, according to conservation group WWF.

They are listed as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. — AFP

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WILL A MOVIE FAKING THE MOON LANDING PROPEL A DEBUNKED CONSPIRACY THEORY?

THE NEW SCARLETT Johansson-Channing Tatum vehicle, "Fly Me to the Moon," uses a long-debunked conspiracy theory as the jumping-off point for a space-race romantic comedy. At the end of the 1960s, a wary Nasa recognises the need for better public relations during the Vietnam War. The resulting campaign leads to a faked version of the Apollo 11 mission being shot on a sound stage even as the real mission is unfolding.

"Fly Me to the Moon" isn't the first movie based on the mistaken belief that the moon landing was a hoax, a conspiracy theory that first arose in the 1970s. "Capricorn One" (1978), about a faked mission to Mars, taps into Watergate-era institutional distrust, and more recently, "Moonwalkers" (2015) pairs a CIA agent with a rock band manager to fake the Apollo 11 landing.

What sets "Fly Me to the Moon" apart is its insistence on the truth. The movie's writers say they hope it will reinforce the real story of the moon landing. But is that possible in a post-Covid-19 age when conspiracy theories are amplified on social media?

The screenplay, written by Rose Gilroy and based on a story by Keenan Flynn and Bill Kirstein, plays with the theory, including a joke on some conspiracists' belief that director Stanley Kubrick supposedly had a hand in faking the historic event. But, ultimately, the film emphasises that the Apollo 11 landing did take place.

Flynn said the initial idea for the movie came in 2016. As the nation wrangled with questions about truth during a presidential campaign in which Donald Trump frequently castigated the "lying" media, the moon landing made for a perfect setting.

"That was the assignment," Flynn said. "How do you have your cake and eat it, too? You have fun with the fake moon landing, but you really bring home that truth matters by highlighting that achievement."

Gilroy said that she had read some books to better understand the conspiracy but that there was simply nothing to them. "We wanted to build a story around the idea of these people coming together to ensure that the mission is real," she said. "Not in any of my research did I ever come across one iota of a fact that made me question in any way the validity of this accomplishment."

Adam Frank, an astronomer and physicist at the University of Rochester whose work focuses on science denial, said pop culture had a responsibility to fight a nihilistic tendency to doubt science and human potential.

"It's lazy writing to say 'The government was in on the conspiracy' as opposed to 'People actually all worked together and they found the answer,'" Frank said. "They worked for 20 years and sent a probe to Mars and it did exactly what they said they were going to do. Somehow, that is less exciting than 'It didn't work and they had a conspiracy.'"

"Fly Me to the Moon" does focus on the laborious team effort that went into the landing. But now that it's easier than ever to take an image out of context and spread it online, good intentions can be lost. Fretting about the film may also be quaint at this point: Images generated by artificial intelligence showing a faked-moon-landing film set went viral earlier this year.

Lawrence Hamilton, a professor of sociology at the University of New Hampshire who studies anti-science conspiracy belief, pointed to an image used by moon-landing deniers as a cautionary tale. The photo, showing astronauts without their helmets during a training exercise at the Kennedy Space Center, has been shared repeatedly on social media over the years.

"They said, 'This is them faking the moon landing, and it's proof,'" he recalled. "And they will do the same thing with clips from this movie. They'll do whatever it takes to say, 'This proves what we've said all along.'"

For people who don't have strong memories of watching the moon landing, that influence can be strong. In a 2021 national survey, Hamilton found that only 12 per cent of respondents believed that the moon landings were faked, but that millennials were more likely than other generations to deny it happened.

Generation Zers were more likely to be unsure if it happened. A recent TikTok filter asking users to rank things on a scale of 1 to 10 based on how much they believe in them, with 1 being more likely and 10 being less likely, inspired multiple videos with people placing the moon landing below things such as God, magic and ghosts.

But a few popular videos doesn't mean Gen Zers are flocking to moon-landing conspiracies en masse, as the survey shows.

One person who isn't worried about the movie unintentionally bolstering conspiracy beliefs is actor Anna Garcia, who plays Ruby, an assistant to Johansson's character.

"I think if someone's really dumb, they'll definitely get that message," Garcia told Variety at the movie's premiere. "I think if someone is sort of dumb as rocks, they'll be like, 'It was fake.'" — **NYT**

ENTERTAINMENT

Actor Johnny Depp's new art collection is inspired by this

ACTOR JOHNNY DEPP has turned to tarot iconography to inspire an art collection that includes a tribute to his former partner, French actor and singer Vanessa Paradis, and goes on sale on Thursday.

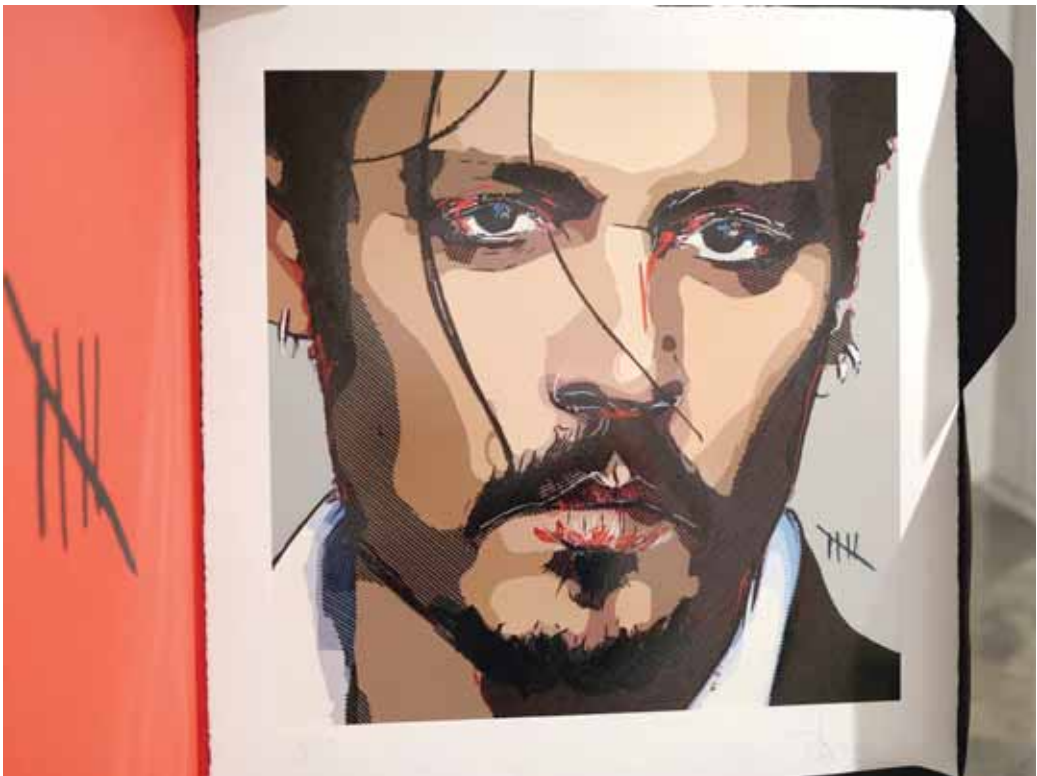
"Tarot" comprises four pieces: "The Lovers", "The Empress", "The Emperor" and "Strength", each nodding to the card imagery.

"I've always been tremendously curious about the tarot," Depp said in a video.

"There's a great art to the cards themselves, dating back to forever ago and the unseen art of reading the cards."

"The Lovers" depicts a well-dressed couple, with the male holding a red rose, while "The Empress", featuring a female figure wearing a weathered crown, pays tribute to Paradis with whom Depp was together for 14 years before their 2012 split. They have two children, and Depp said they had remained "very close".

"Strength" depicts a gazing elephant and is inscribed with the words: "Why



do you want to fight with something that doesn't want to fight with you?". It was inspired by a painting Depp made when Paradis was pregnant.

Eyeless but with made-up red lips, "The Emperor" recalls a 17th-century French monarch and was inspired by a work Depp made while filming "Jeanne du Barry", in which he played King Louis XV, in Versailles.

The movie, which premiered at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival, marked Depp's first major role since his 2022 high-profile defamation trial against his ex-wife, actor Amber Heard.

Depp's "Tarot" series, limited to 195 editions and priced at \$4,500 for an individual framed piece, follows previous collections by the actor. It will be sold by British art retailer Castle Fine Art. — **Reuters**



BY YERU EBUEN

Summer in Oman is undeniably hot, with temperatures often soaring above 40°C (104°F). The relentless heat can be daunting for visitors, but with proper planning and an understanding of where to go and what to do, the summer can be an ideal time to explore this fascinating country.

One of Oman's most unique summer attractions is the khareef season in Dhofar. From June to September, the monsoon winds transform this southern city into a lush, green paradise. The hills and valleys around Salalah become blanketed in mist and greenery, with waterfalls cascading down rocky cliffs.

Because of this, travelling to enjoy the cool, misty weather of khareef has become a yearly routine for many people from the different governorates of Oman, most especially Muscat. But not everybody has the means, time and opportunity to enjoy it every year, so we are mapping out where you can go and what you can do to still fully enjoy summer.

BEACH BLISS AND WATER SPORTS

Oman's extensive coastline along the Arabian Sea is a haven for beach lovers and water sports enthusiasts. The pristine beaches, with their golden sands and crystal-clear waters, provide a perfect setting to cool off. Beaches like Al Bustan, Al Qurum and Bandar Al Jissah are popular spots for swimming, sunbathing and picnicking.

For those seeking adventure, Oman's waters offer thrilling activities such as snorkelling, diving and jet skiing. The Daymaniyat Islands, a marine nature reserve, is a snorkeller's paradise with its vibrant coral reefs and diverse marine life. The sea breeze and refreshing waters make these activities perfect for a hot summer day.

The coastal waters around Muscat are teeming with marine life, making dolphin watching a popular activity. Early morning boat trips from Marina Bandar Al Rowdha or Al Mouj Marina offer the chance to see playful dolphins leaping through the waves. The refreshing sea breeze and the sight of these majestic creatures provide a memorable experience. Additionally, boat trips to the nearby islands, such as the Daymaniyat Islands, offer opportunities for snorkelling, swimming, and simply relaxing on secluded beaches. These excursions are perfect for escaping the summer heat and enjoying the tranquillity of the sea.

EXTREME ADVENTURES DOWN SOUTH

If you have a few hours to waste on driving, then heading towards Al Ashkharah and Masirah Island will bless you with a cooler climate that makes these locations perfect for extreme water sports and camping.

Al Ashkharah and the nearby coastal villages enjoy the same cooler climate in Dhofar during this time of the year. Because of this, the long stretch of Al Ashkharah Beach becomes host to campers looking for cooler temperatures. If you drive straight to Barr Al Hikman, you will join extreme water sports lovers not just basking in the sun but enjoying activities like surfing, kitesurfing and diving. This is simultaneously happening on some amazing beaches in Masirah.

EXPLORING CAVES

Oman's geological wonders include several impressive caves, which offer cool retreats from the summer heat. Al Hoota Cave, near Nizwa, is one of the most famous. This cave system,



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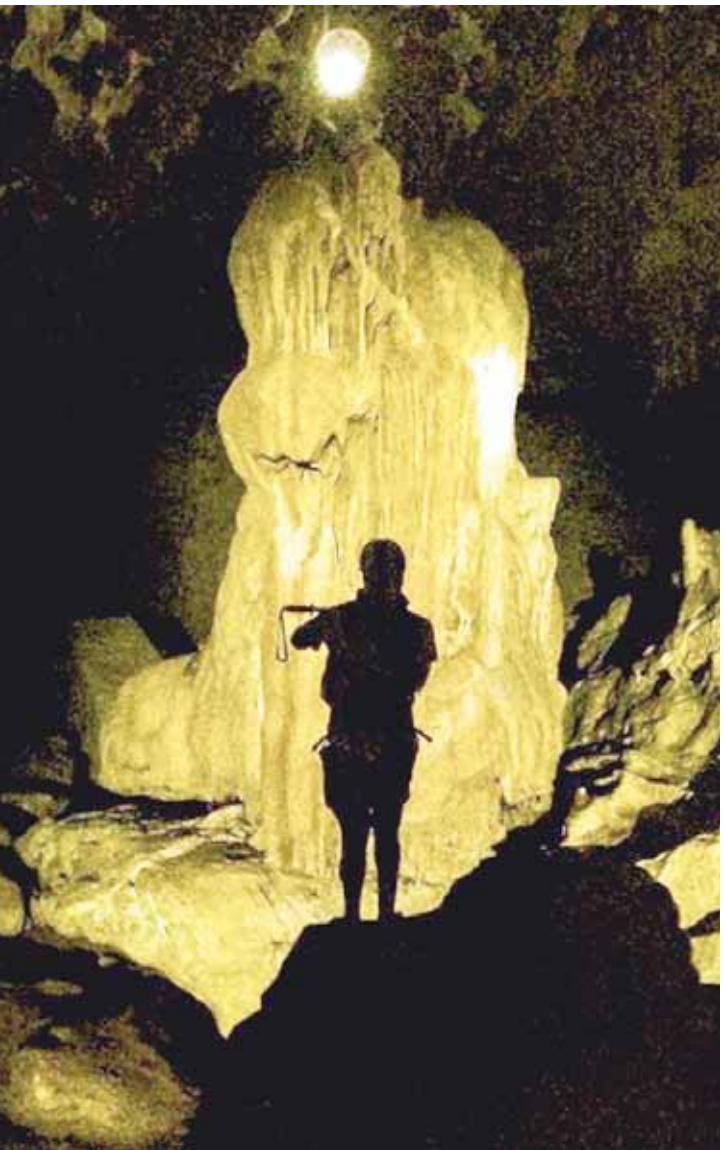
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NOT EVERYBODY HAS THE MEANS, TIME AND OPPORTUNITY TO ENJOY KHAREEF IN DHOFAR EVERY YEAR SO WE ARE MAPPING OUT WHERE YOU CAN GO AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO STILL FULLY ENJOY SUMMER.

BEAT THE HEAT WITH THESE SUMMER ACTIVITIES



with its underground lake and stunning stalactites and stalagmites, provides a fascinating and refreshing adventure. Guided tours of Al Hoota Cave take visitors through its cool, dimly lit passages, showcasing the natural beauty and geological history of the region. The constant cool temperature inside the cave is a welcome break from the outside heat.

Beyond Al Hoota and for those looking for more challenging adventures, the fascinating Majlis Al Jinn is the go-to destination. Majlis Al Jinn is a vast single chamber, approximately 310 metres long and 225 metres wide, with a domed ceiling that soars 120 metres high. It has three roof entrances, and its freestanding roof is around 40 metres thick in most areas. The cave's deepest point lies 178 metres below the highest entrance.

WADI ADVENTURES AND MOUNTAIN ESCAPES

Exploring Oman's wadis (valleys) is a must-do during the summer. These natural oases, often with flowing streams and pools, are scattered throughout the country. Wadi Bani Khalid, Wadi Shab and Wadi Tiwi are among the most popular. Wadi Bani Khalid, with its turquoise pools and shaded palm groves, offers a cool respite from the heat. Visitors can swim in the refreshing waters, explore the caves, or relax by the pools. The greenery and natural beauty of these wadis provide a serene escape from the heat of the desert.

Al Hajar Mountains, stretching across northern Oman, offer a dramatic contrast to the desert plains. With their higher altitudes, these mountains provide cooler temperatures and breathtaking landscapes. Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Jabal Shams are two prominent mountain destinations for summer escapes.

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, known as the "Green Mountain," is famous for its terraced farms, fruit orchards and rose gardens. The cooler climate makes it ideal for hiking and exploring traditional villages. Jabal Shams, the highest peak in Oman, offers spectacular views. Camping in Jabal Shams during summer allows for stargazing under clear skies and enjoying the crisp mountain air.

Within Al Hajar Mountains range, you can also explore the beautiful peaks found in Wadi Al Sahtan including Wajma. The beautiful Wakan village is also a great destination and for those who love long hikes, pushing it till Hadash offers not just amazing views but scenic paths.

GO INDOORS WITH THESE ACTIVITIES

Indoor activities provide a perfect way to make the most of your time in Muscat during the summer months.

Almost all major malls in Oman come fully equipped with kids' activity areas where they can indulge in arts and crafts activities, and fun educational programmes, learn about different underwater creatures with a visit to Oman's biggest indoor aquarium, or enjoy the freezing temperature of Snow Oman.

Fitness and wellness enthusiasts can stay active with high-intensity interval training classes in different gyms scattered all throughout the city, with different outlets offering fitness, self-defence, yoga, and other health-centric activities catering to different levels. Health and wellness activities can also include guided meditation and mindfulness workshops offered at various centres, swimming at hotel pools with day passes or public pools like the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

For those who want to relax and get pampered, standalone spas or hotel spas offer relaxation and rejuvenation packages which also include luxurious treatments in a serene and therapeutic ambience.

