



Oman backs Africa’s child welfare

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman underscored the importance of fostering international partnerships to support Africa’s development agenda at the second regular session of the Unicef Executive Board.

This came in a joint statement delivered by Shununa bint Salim al Habsiyah, Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the Unicef Executive Board, on behalf of a number of countries.

In her speech, the representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the Unicef Executive Board, praised the Unicef’s



Shununa bint Salim al Habsiyah

strategy to support Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and its implementation plan for the second decade 2024-2033 as well as the Africa’s Agenda for Children 2040 and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

She stressed that the strategy represents a pivotal step towards strengthening partnerships between governments, civil society and the private sector to achieve a sustainable impact on the lives of children in the African continent.

She called on the international community to shoulder its responsibility towards supporting the African continent, pointing to the importance of international cooperation to compensate for decades of neglect Africa has suffered. She stressed that Africa, with its young population, is a natural partner for Unicef.

Al Habsiyah commended the achievements made by African countries in improving health care, empowering women and protecting children from violence. She stressed the need to provide continued support to Africa’s children adding: “We must not fail to achieve their aspirations.” — **ONA**



The ‘Smart Sustainable and Resilient Cities’ Conference was held in Salalah.

Culturally vibrant smart cities key to sustainability

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The ‘Smart Sustainable and Resilient Cities’ Conference, held in Salalah, underscored the critical importance of integrating sustainability into urban development.

Organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and Dhofar Municipality in collaboration with the Oman Society of Engineers, the two-day event brought together experts and policymakers to discuss the future of urban living.

The conference emphasised the need for cities to be resilient, adaptable, and capable of meeting the diverse needs of their inhabitants.

In his opening address, Fouad bin Abdullah al Kindi, Chairman of the Oman Society of Engineers, highlighted the conference’s focus on the latest trends and future visions for smart cities in Oman, with particular attention on Dhofar.

He stressed the importance of developing policies that support sustainable urban growth through smart city initiatives, aiming to enhance urban life and infrastructure sustainability.

One of the key recommendations of the conference was the need for resilient infrastructure that is suitable for all sectors, including roads, buildings, military facilities, sports venues, and future cities.

“This resilience is essential for ensuring that urban environments can withstand and adapt to various challenges, from climate change to population growth,” the document noted.

The conference also emphasised the importance of considering the basic needs of individuals residing in these

The conference renewed its commitment to creating cities that are not only resilient and sustainable but also vibrant and culturally rich

cities. It was recommended that stakeholders, including academics, policymakers, and implementers, actively listen to the voices of community members.

This engagement would ensure that the development of smart cities aligns with the needs and desires of the people who live there. Communication platforms were highlighted as essential tools for fostering this interaction and collaboration.

Creativity in smart city development was another focal point of the discussions. Participants explored innovative approaches to urban planning that balance modernity with authenticity. The conference highlighted the need to preserve the cultural and civilisational identity of cities while integrating modern elements.

This includes the presence of green spaces, entertainment options, improved mobility, and enhancements to the public transportation sector.

Governance was also a key theme at the conference. The participants agreed that effective governance systems are crucial for the successful implementation of smart and sustainable city initiatives. These systems should facilitate the intelligent delivery of services, cater to the needs of individuals, and ensure the continuous improvement of urban infrastructure.

MoL reports several WPS violations

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has warned that some companies are yet to register in the Wage Protection System (WPS) and not complying with the system by not transferring the salaries of their employees as per the procedures.

Three large companies, 475 medium companies, 14,165 small and 172,174 micro firms have still not registered with the WPS. A total of 66 large companies, 536 medium companies, 10,659 small companies and 46,137 micro companies have registered under the WPS.

In July 2023, the MoL issued Ministerial Decision No (299/2023) regarding the implementation of the provisions of the Wages Protection System. Article 1 of the decision stated that WPS is an electronic system jointly implemented by MoL and CBO to ensure the electronic transfer of employees’ wages in the private sector to their designated accounts in banks authorised by CBO. It operates in compliance with the provisions stipulated in employment contracts and the timeframe by the Labour Law.

Non-compliance with the decision may result in administrative penalties, including an initial warning and suspension of services related to preliminary work permits, imposition of an administrative fine amounting to RO 50, with the fine being doubled for repeated violations.

■ RAFO CHIEF ATTENDS EGYPT AVIATION, SPACE EXHIBITION



CAIRO: Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman, participated in the opening ceremony of the inaugural Egypt International Aviation and Space Exhibition 2024, held in El Alamein City, Egypt. Accompanied by a military delegation, Al Ghafri toured the exhibition, which showcased the latest products from leading international aviation companies. The delegation was briefed on cutting-edge military technologies and innovations in the aviation and defence sectors. Several senior officers from the Royal Air Force of Oman joined Al Ghafri during the visit. — **ONA**

50 Saudi companies to take part in ‘Marhaba Dhofar’

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is gearing up to organise a series of events aimed at attracting tourists from regional and international markets. Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director-General of Tourism Promotion at the ministry, highlighted the ‘Marhaba Dhofar’ event, set to take place in the Dhofar Governorate. This initiative will feature extensive collaboration with Oman’s tourism partners and their counterparts from Saudi Arabia.

Al Ghassani revealed that the event aims to foster stronger tourism cooperation between Oman and Saudi Arabia while promoting Dhofar’s distinctive attractions, such as the ‘Sar’b season and its winter tourism offerings.

The ‘Marhaba Dhofar’ event is expected to draw 50 Saudi tourism companies and 15 top media professionals from Saudi Arabia. The event’s programme includes discussion sessions, business meetings between Omani and Saudi tourism stakeholders, and visits to Dhofar’s key landmarks and tourist attractions. — **ONA**



Oman Krishikkootam hosts 14th annual seed giveaway

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People from various walks of life passionate about nourishing and sustaining organic farming came forward with a mission spreading the value of individual farming and distributed seeds of various fruits and vegetables to the members in Muscat on Friday.

The team of ‘Oman Krishikkootam’ (Oman Agriculture Group), a dedicated community championing organic farming, aims at promoting sustainable farming practices. Oman Krishikkootam provided free high-quality seeds to its

members and urged to keep track on the growth stages of the crops, as part of their 14th annual seed distribution event.

The seeds included cucumber, spinach, drumstick, moringa, ladies finger, bottle guard, bitter guard, eggplant, baby marrow, carrot, beans, capsicum, cauliflower, mushroom, broccoli, and the like. The initiative, driven by a group of passionate agriculturists, drew enthusiastic participation from the community members keen about sustainable agriculture.

The programme was chaired by Shaiju Vethottil, while the session started with the welcome



Oman Krishikkootam provided free high-quality seeds to its members as part of their 14th annual seed distribution event.

of Anwar Chenattu. Santosh Varghese inaugurated the seed distribution by handing a packet of seeds to George Mathew, a senior member and a well-wisher. Ajish Vasu thanked the attendees for taking the bold step towards self-reliance in farming and gifting their families with pesticide-free fruits and vegetables.

Highlighting the importance of organic farming, Suni Syam, Reshmi Sandeep, Selvi Sumesh and Vidyapriya delivered insightful classes on effective organic farming techniques and the benefits of producing pesticide-free vegetables at home.

Founded by a dedicated group of ten agriculture enthusiasts in Muscat, Oman Krishikkootam has grown into a vibrant Facebook community with over 4,500 families engaged in organic farming practices.

The organisation’s mission is to educate and advocate the people about environmentally friendly farming methods, and the event marked a significant step in advancing towards the mission, according to the organisers. The group, while fostering a culture of organic farming, also honours best farmers of the year for their hardwork and dedication towards making the crops a reality.



RUPPELL'S WEAVER IN KHAREEF
DHOFAH'S SPLENDOUR



Travel blogger Corinna Hartmann from Germany captured a stunning shot of the Rüppell's weaver (*Ploceus galbula*) during her visit to Salalah. Native to Dhofar, this vibrant yellow bird thrives during the khareef season, when the landscape is transformed into lush greenery. The Rüppell's weaver has been spotted in southern Arabia, including Salalah, particularly during its migratory seasons. The sighting of the Rüppell's weaver in this coastal city, renowned for its rich bird life due to its unique monsoon climate, further adds to the governorate's remarkable avian biodiversity. Corinna describes the khareef as an endless wonder, with mountains shrouded in clouds and gentle rains persisting throughout. Having first visited Salalah in February 2021, Corinna has returned 15 times in just three years, irresistibly drawn to its natural beauty.

Arab Tourism Media Forum spotlights regional soft power

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 7

The 4th Arab Tourism and Heritage Media Forum focussed on the 'soft power' of the governorate's tourism wealth and was held at the Rotana Salalah Hotel.

Organised by the Gulf Tourism Media Association in collaboration with the Arab Union for Tourism Media, the two-day event drew tourism media professionals from across the Arab world, alongside key media and heritage institutions.

The inaugural session featured prominent figures including Lt Gen (Retd) Salim bin Musallam Qatan, Ahmed bin Mohammed al Jarwan, Ghazi bin Salem al Hamr, Dr Said al Batouti, Dr Mohammed al Araiimi, and Khalid al Dughaim.

Dr Sultan bin Khamis al Yahyai, President of the Arab Union for Tourism Media, highlighted the forum's aim to elevate media's role in promoting cultural tourism, supporting local communities, preserving heritage and fostering cross-cultural understanding. He emphasised strengthening cooperation among tourism, media and



The Arab Tourism and Heritage Media Forum drew tourism media professionals from across the Arab world

cultural entities to promote Arab tourism.

Ghazi al Hamr, Director of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Dhofar Branch), stressed the importance of tourism media in enhancing the governorate's status as a tourist destination, boosting the local economy and creating job opportunities. He noted that the Dhofar branch plays a vital role in showcasing the

governorate's natural beauty and rich traditions.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Jarwan, President of the Global Council for Tolerance and Peace, spoke on the significance of tourism media as a tool for cultural exchange and peace-building.

He pointed out that tourism helps foster tolerance by allowing direct interactions between tourists and locals, thus

enhancing mutual respect and dialogue.

Significantly, the Global Council is hosting the session to discuss the role of business people and the economy in supporting tolerance and peace. The session aims to discuss ways to enhance the role of investors in addressing worsening economic issues in many countries, which negatively impact peace stability in those countries, he noted.

Urban transformation in Dhofar: Merging tradition with modern growth

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 7

Dhofar is a where tradition and modernity coexist in harmony. Known for its ancient history and stunning landscapes, Dhofar is now undergoing a significant urban transformation, especially in Salalah. This article explores how the governorate is balancing modernisation while preserving its cultural heritage.

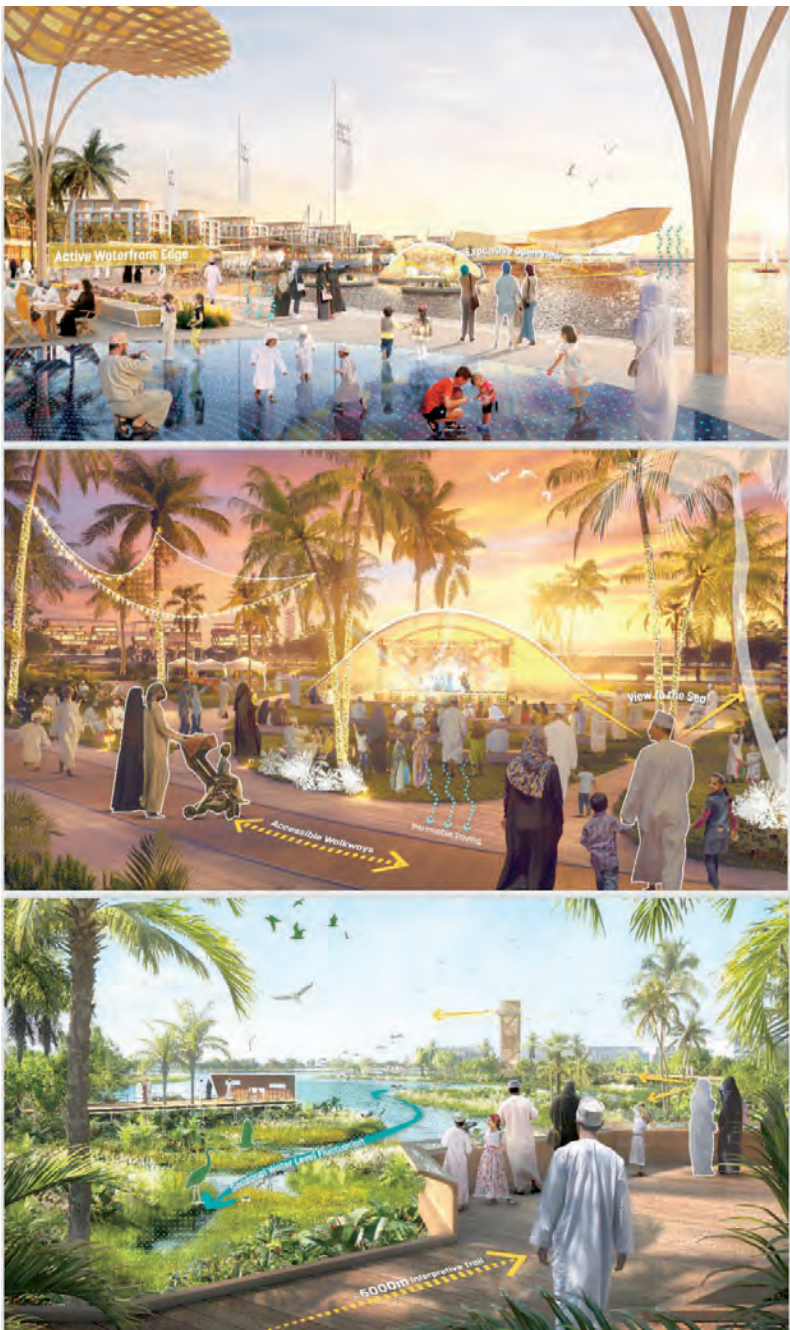
Salalah, the heart of Dhofar's urban development, has seen rapid growth driven by increased investment in infrastructure, tourism and commerce. Over the past few decades, the city has expanded with new residential areas, commercial hubs and public services that reflect a shift towards modern living.

A key aspect of this transformation is the city's well-planned infrastructure. Roads, bridges and transportation networks have been upgraded to improve connectivity.

The expansion of Salalah International Airport has enabled the city to handle an increasing number of tourists and business travellers, especially during the khareef season, when the city's greenery attracts visitors from across the Gulf.

Salalah has also seen the rise of modern residential complexes and shopping malls, catering to the needs of both locals and expatriates. Developments like Salalah Gardens Mall and the new Salalah Grand Mall offer global brands and entertainment options, bringing a contemporary urban experience to the governorate.

Urban growth in Dhofar is



Dhofar's urban transformation reflects a careful balance between tradition and progress

closely tied to efforts to diversify its economy. Traditionally reliant on agriculture, fishing and frankincense, Dhofar is now focusing on tourism and services.

The rise of Salalah as a tourist destination has been a major factor in this shift. New hotels,

resorts and recreational facilities have been built to accommodate tourists, driving economic growth and creating jobs for residents.

The Port of Salalah has also contributed to the city's development, positioning it

A key aspect of this transformation is the city's well-planned infrastructure. Roads, bridges and transportation networks have been upgraded to improve connectivity

as a key logistics hub in the governorate. The port's expansion and nearby free zones have attracted international businesses, further fuelling Salalah's urban growth.

Despite this modernisation, Dhofar has taken steps to preserve its cultural heritage. New buildings often incorporate traditional Omani architectural elements, ensuring that the city's aesthetic remains rooted in its history. Sites like the Al Baleed Archaeological Park and the Frankincense Land Museum highlight Dhofar's ancient past while blending into its evolving urban landscape.

As Salalah grows, sustainability remains a priority. The governorate is promoting eco-friendly tourism and protecting its natural reserves, such as the Dhofar Mountains, to ensure that development does not compromise its environment.

Dhofar's urban transformation reflects a careful balance between tradition and progress. By embracing modernity while honouring its heritage, the governorate is shaping a future that respects its past and seizes new opportunities.



The international conference calls for harnessing modern tech to improve kidney disease diagnosis.

Conference urges AI use in kidney disease diagnosis

SALALAH: The Second International Conference on Kidney Diseases and Transplantation, organised by the Directorate-General of Health Services in Dhofar Governorate in collaboration with the Omani Society for Kidney Diseases and Transplantation, concluded with significant recommendations aimed at improving kidney healthcare and raising community awareness on prevention and treatment strategies.

The conference's key recommendations included the establishment of an international and regional cooperation network to foster collaboration in the field of kidney diseases and transplantation.

This network would facilitate the exchange of expertise, promote therapeutic innovations and support the development of health policies for the early detection and treatment of kidney diseases.

The recommendations emphasised the expansion of kidney transplant programmes within Oman by forging partnerships with global organ transplant centres and supporting national efforts under 'Oman Vision 2040' to combat

kidney failure.

The three-day event also stressed the importance of launching public awareness campaigns, utilising various platforms such as television, social media and community workshops, to educate the public on kidney disease prevention.

The training and continuous development of medical personnel in the field of nephrology were highlighted as a priority, alongside the integration of modern technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), to enhance the diagnosis and treatment of kidney failure.

The final day's proceedings featured presentations on a range of topics, including paediatric nephrology, congenital solitary kidneys, dominant tubulointerstitial kidney disease, advancements in glomerulonephritis management, and insights into atypical haemolytic uremic syndrome.

The conference also highlighted the importance of community awareness campaigns and the use of advanced medical technologies, such as AI, to improve diagnosis and treatment methods.

— ONA



PREPARING FOR CYCLONES

TRAINING FAMILY MEMBERS IN FIRST AID AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES IS ALSO CRUCIAL. FOLLOW OFFICIAL WEATHER UPDATES TO AVOID MISINFORMATION AND MAKE TIMELY DECISIONS

**AHMED
AL KAABI**
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

With the increasing impact of climate change on Oman, enhancing readiness for cyclones is becoming crucial. Taking preventive measures to safeguard homes and property is essential as storms become more frequent and severe. Eng Mohammed al Yaarubi emphasises the importance of securing homes before a storm arrives. He advises installing wooden panels or metal barriers on windows and ensuring that all external doors are tightly closed with additional locks or beams. Double-glazed or protected windows offer added safety. Regarding roofs and gutters, Al Yaarubi underscores the need for proper maintenance. Securing roofs and clearing gutters to prevent clogging will help avoid water leaks and potential roof damage during severe storms. Osama Al Quwaiti, a resident of coastal areas frequently hit by cyclones, highlights the importance of clearing outdoor spaces. He recommends moving or securing outdoor furniture and toys to prevent them

Homes with double-glazed or reinforced windows offer better protection. Ensure that all external doors are tightly closed and consider using additional locks for enhanced security

**ENG MOHAMMED
AL YAARUBI**

from becoming dangerous projectiles. Vehicles should be relocated to high ground or a secure garage if possible and kept away from trees and poles. Al Quwaiti also advises families to have an emergency plan that includes knowledge of nearby shelters, emergency contacts and a prepared emergency bag with essentials like water, dry food, medicines, important documents and flashlights. Training family members in first aid and emergency procedures is also crucial. Insurance expert Omar al Amri stresses the importance of obtaining insurance against natural disasters. He advises ensuring that policies cover hurricane damages to protect property effectively. Authorities emphasise following official weather updates to avoid misinformation and make timely decisions. Al Yaarubi concludes by recommending the disconnection of unnecessary electrical devices to prevent short circuits or fires during the storm and advises against using electrical devices if there is a water leak inside the home.



SECURE
HOMES,
INSTALL
WOODEN
PANELS



ENSURE
ROOFS
ARE
WELL-
SECURED



CLEAR
OUTDOOR
AREAS



DEVELOP
AN
EMERGENCY
PLAN



OBTAIN
INSURANCE
AGAINST
NATURAL
DISASTERS





Sohar University organised a teaching and learning conference ‘Digital Transformation and 21st Century Skills

Sohar University hosts conference on digital transformation

SUHAR: Sohar University held its 7th Teaching and Learning Conference on September 5, focusing on ‘Digital Transformation and 21st Century Skills.’ The event, hosted under the auspices of Shaikh Mohammed al Busaidy, the Wali of Sohar, took place on the university campus and was attended by the university’s executive management.

The conference commenced with a welcome speech from Professor Hamza Idris on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor.

The keynote addresses were delivered by Dr Aisha al Harthy from Sultan Qaboos University, who spoke on ‘Transformation in Higher Education in Oman: The Strategic Potentials of Open Micro-Credentials,’ and Dr Abdel Latif Al Sellami from Qatar University, who presented on ‘Digital Transformation in Gulf Cooperation Council Education: Aspirations, Opportunities and Challenges.’

The conference included

parallel sessions covering diverse themes such as Learning Proficiency, The Role of Technology in Education Management, AI in Teaching, Student Perspectives, Learning Management and Learning Development. Additionally, workshops were held on ‘Student Success Frameworks: Integrating Employability and Graduate Attributes,’ led by Dr Kristian Rumble from the UK, and ‘Experiencing AI-Based Tools in Engineering Education,’ conducted by Professor Nael Barakat from the US.

A total of 75 researchers from Oman and countries including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain and the UAE participated. Dr Zainab al Zaghir, Chair of the Center for Educational Development, highlighted the conference as a significant platform for discussing advancements in education and the integration of technology and AI to enhance learning.

Oman is preferred top spot for impulse Indian travellers

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

The Sultanate of Oman is one of the preferred choices for 50 per cent of outbound Indian travellers who book less than 14 days before the travel date. According to a report by the popular Indian travel portal MakeMyTrip.com, the maximum last-minute flight bookings were made for Oman, Nepal and UAE.

The report also said that for outbound Indian travellers, around 56 per cent of international hotel booking trends are made 14 days before the day state. The Sultanate of Oman, Qatar and Azerbaijan made for maximum impulse hotel bookings while European destinations had higher share of longer advance purchase window.

Among Indian travellers, people from the South Indian state of Kerala are the most important impulsive bookers when it involves booking international flights, with 41 per cent of travellers from Kerala making their bookings 0 to six days before travel. Last year 55



per cent of Indians travelling abroad were for leisure, 33 per cent for visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and 12 per cent were business on trips. It also said that December is the most active months in terms of searches for international travel.

Speaking to *Observer*,

Saada bint Abdullah al Harthiyah, director of Business Development, at MoHT, said, “Over 600,000 Indian nationals visited the Sultanate of Oman last year and that number is expected to improve this year. Already, there has been a ten per cent increase until June this year. It can

be even above 700,000 in 2024.”

She added that one of the reasons for Indians coming to the Sultanate of Oman could be short flying hours (2.5 to 3 hours). It can be noted that the Muscat International Airport is connected to different Indian cities with multiple frequencies.

URGENT ACTION NEEDED AS 15,000 IN OMAN LIVE WITH DEMENTIA

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

By 2050, Oman is projected to have 124,803 people living with dementia. This September, as part of World Alzheimer’s Month, Alzheimer’s Disease International (ADI) and the Oman Alzheimer’s Society are calling for heightened awareness and a stronger response to the stigma and discrimination surrounding dementia. With an estimated 15,000 individuals currently affected by dementia in Oman, the urgency to better understand and address this condition is growing.

Globally, a startling 75 per



cent of people living with dementia remain undiagnosed. According to Dr Hamed Al Sinawi, Chairman of the Oman Alzheimer’s Society, stigma and misinformation often prevent individuals from seeking timely diagnosis and care. He emphasizes that 85 per cent of people diagnosed with dementia in Oman lack access to post-diagnostic support, which could significantly improve their quality of life and extend their independence.

Timely diagnosis, combined with appropriate post-diagnostic care, can enable individuals to live well with dementia for longer. Yet, attitudes towards dementia continue to pose challenges.

Dr Sinawi highlights the need to overcome the belief that dementia is merely a part of normal aging, which leads to delays in seeking professional

help. Recent research underscores the importance of early diagnosis, giving patients and caregivers the opportunity to access services and treatments that can slow symptom progression.

ADI and the Oman Alzheimer’s Society are urging governments, communities, and individuals to act swiftly in combating the stigma surrounding dementia. While 39 countries have developed National Dementia Plans, many remain inadequate, lacking comprehensive strategies to support those living with the condition.

Alarmingly, 155 of the 194 World Health Organization Member States that pledged action in 2017 have yet to implement a plan. ADI stresses the need for robust public awareness campaigns and inclusive community initiatives that challenge discrimination and promote understanding.

Globally, dementia is the seventh leading cause of death, and every three seconds, someone develops the condition. With over 55 million people currently living with dementia worldwide, this number is expected to rise to 78 million in

just five years, and to 139 million by 2050. These increases bring a significant economic burden; the current annual global cost of dementia is estimated at \$1.3 trillion, projected to double to \$2.8 trillion by 2030.

Paola Barbarino, CEO of ADI, stresses that low awareness levels, coupled with stigma and misinformation, remain major barriers to addressing dementia. “Timely diagnosis is crucial,” she says, “yet 85 per cent of those living with dementia are not receiving the post-diagnostic support they need. Governments must prioritize dementia awareness alongside other public health initiatives, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease prevention.”

Dr Sinawi emphasises the need for national policies to promote early intervention. He notes that every moment spent raising awareness about dementia contributes to improving outcomes for those affected. Addressing the condition now can help reduce the significant human and economic toll expected in the years to come.

Designer unveils story behind Oman Across Ages Museum’s creation

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, SEPT 7

A dialogue session titled The Journey of Designing Oman Museum Through Time, saw renowned designer Steve Woodland unveil the hidden story behind the Oman Across Ages Museum’s creation last week.

During the session, Woodland detailed the design process, explaining the symbolic meaning behind the lines, colours and shapes that reflect Oman’s terrain and cultural heritage. The museum’s design mirrors the formations of Oman’s mountains, particularly the Al Hajar Mountains, which feature prominently in the Sultanate of Oman’s landscape.



A dialogue session titled The Journey of Designing Oman Museum Through Time was held in Nizwa.

“The museum’s managers wanted the building to embody the different stages of Oman’s Renaissance while drawing inspiration from Omani culture

in a modern and distinctive style,” Woodland shared. “The shape of the Omani mountains, especially Al Hajar Mountains, influenced the design, rising from the



Designer Steve Woodland addressing the session

ground to represent stability and resilience.”

Transforming Oman’s rich history and rugged landscapes into a singular architectural

masterpiece proved to be a challenge. However, Woodland envisioned a structure where every line and curve carried a meaning. He emphasised that the museum was intended to be more than just a building—it was to be a testament to Oman’s heritage and the unrefined beauty of its landscape.

The exterior of the museum features sloping geometric lines, with all walls, including the glass, angled to reflect the shape of the Al Hajar Mountains. Designed to endure, the building was constructed with environmental considerations in mind. Its low eastern side shields the interior from direct sunlight, while windows on the west allow natural light to fill the space. The sloping walls minimise

direct sunlight, reducing energy consumption for lighting and cooling.

“The design also draws inspiration from the cooling mechanisms of ancient Omani castles,” Woodland noted. “Stones sourced from nearby governorates were used in the construction and smaller pieces were thoughtfully scattered around the garden and outdoor spaces, blending seamlessly with the surroundings.”

The museum is more than just a building—it is a story that reflects Oman’s past while looking toward its future. Just like the enduring mountains that inspired its design, the Oman Across Ages Museum will stand steadfast through time, preserving and recounting its story for generations to come.



Ireland's Prime Minister Simon Harris and Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer shakes hands inside Farmleigh House in Dublin. – AFP

UK’s Starmer begins ‘historic’ visit to Dublin

DUBLIN: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Saturday began the first visit by a British leader to Ireland in five years, vowing to “reset” damaged post-Brexit relations between the two nations.

The visit, described by Downing Street as a “historic moment for UK-Ireland relations”, signals a further warming in bilateral ties that had frayed under the UK’s previous Conservative government.

Irish counterpart Simon Harris welcomed Starmer to Dublin, with the pair shaking hands and posing for photographs before heading for talks.

“Today we’re Dublin to flesh out what a reset actually looks like... in a practical sense for our citizens on both islands,” Harris said at the beginning of the talks. “And I certainly know that it has to be embedded in things like peace, prosperity, mutual respect and friendship.” Starmer added that the reset was “really important to me and my government”. “It can

be meaningful. It can be deep,” he said. Both leaders stressed the importance of their joint roles as guardians of the Good Friday Agreement, the landmark peace accord brokered in 1998 that ended decades of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.

Boosting economic growth was also due to be high on the agenda, as well as the joint response to international crises, where Harris said the two leaders “were aligned in so many ways”.

Harris, who became taoiseach (prime minister) in April, was the first international leader hosted by Starmer in the UK after his landslide election win in July. The pair chatted over pints of Ireland’s national drink, Guinness, at the British prime minister’s country residence, Chequers, northwest of London, before a larger meeting of European leaders.

The focus on “resetting” Anglo-Irish relations marks a notable shift in language after the last few years saw tensions rise between Dublin and London. — AFP

Israel targets displaced Gazans

CAIRO: Israeli military strikes across the Palestinian Gaza Strip killed at least 61 people in the space of 48 hours, local medics said on Saturday, as Israeli forces battled Palestinians in the territory.

Eleven months into the war, numerous rounds of diplomacy have so far failed to clinch a ceasefire deal to end the conflict and bring the release of Israeli and foreign hostages held in Gaza as well as many Palestinians jailed in Israel.

An Israeli air strike on the Halima Al Sa’diyya school compound serving as a shelter for displaced people in the Jabalia urban refugee camp killed at least eight people and wounded 15 others, medics said.

The Israeli military said the strike had targeted a Hamas command centre inside the compound. It accused the Palestinian group of repeatedly exploiting civilians and civilian infrastructure for military purposes, an allegation Hamas denies. Five more people were killed in a strike on a house in Gaza City.

Later on Saturday, an Israeli strike killed four people and wounded 25 others at Amr Ibn Alaas school, which also houses displaced families in the Sheikh Radwan suburb of Gaza City, Palestinian medics said.

The Israeli military said the air strike targeted a command centre operated by gunmen in the compound that had previously served as a school.

Palestinian health officials said Israeli military strikes had killed so far 28 people across the Gaza Strip on Saturday.

The two warring sides continued to blame one another for the failure of mediators,



A man holds a sign during a demonstration in support of Palestinians in Gaza, in London, Britain. – Reuters

An Israeli air strike on the Halima Al Sa’diyya school compound serving as a shelter for displaced people in the Jabalia urban refugee camp killed at least eight people and wounded 15 others

including Qatar, Egypt and the United States, to broker a ceasefire. The US is preparing to present a new proposal, but the prospects of a breakthrough appear dim as gaps between the sides remain large. CIA Director William Burns, the chief US negotiator, told an event in London that a

more detailed proposal would be made in the coming days.

Despite the deadlock, the United Nations, in collaboration with local health authorities, has pursued a campaign to vaccinate 640,000 children in Gaza after its first polio case in around 25 years. Limited pauses in the fighting

have allowed the campaign to proceed. US officials said they were making progress, having reached over half of the children needing the drops in the first two stages in the southern and central Gaza Strip.

Israel’s subsequent assault on the enclave has killed over 40,900 Palestinians, according to the local health ministry, while also displacing nearly the entire population of 2.3 million, causing a hunger crisis and leading to genocide allegations at the World Court, which Israel denies. — Reuters

Kyiv hits Russian ammo depot as Moscow advances in east

KYIV: Ukraine’s security services said on Saturday they had struck a Russian ammunition factory in a border region, as Moscow’s forces claimed yet another advance on the battlefield.

Ukraine also said it had thwarted a “massive” overnight Russian aerial attack that saw drones launched towards the capital Kyiv.

The attacks come after a week of intense Russian bombardments across Ukraine that killed at least 55 in the central city of Poltava, and seven in Lviv -- hundreds of kilometres from the frontlines

and close to Ukraine’s western border with EU and Nato members.

A large fire and several explosions were reported overnight in the Russian region of Voronezh, which borders Ukraine, prompting officials to evacuate locals living near the blaze.

Kyiv was targeting “military airfields, ammunition depots and infrastructure facilities” in order to “create a demilitarised zone in the regions of Russia adjacent to Ukraine.”

Ukraine’s air force said Russia fired 67 drones at the country overnight, adding that it shot



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky walks as he attends the European House-Ambrosetti Forum, in Cernobbio, Italy. – Reuters

down 58 of them. Reporters in Kyiv heard loud explosions overnight.

“There are almost no nights when Russian attack drones do not attack the territory of Ukraine. And today was another night, massive drone attack,” the Kyiv city administration said in a social media post on Saturday.

In the east of the country, three people were killed in Russian shelling on Kostyantynivka -- in the Donetsk region where Russian troops are advancing -- the local governor said.

Russia’s military said on Saturday it had seized the

village of Kalynove, around 25 kilometres southeast of the key logistics hub of Pokrovsk, which Russia is seeking to capture.

Meanwhile, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni reaffirmed her strong support for Ukraine on Saturday after talks with President Volodymyr Zelensky, as he visited allies to press for more weapons to fight Russia.

“We must not give up on Ukraine,” Meloni said after the meeting on the sidelines of an economic forum in Cernobbio, northern Italy, which focused on reconstruction and efforts to end the war with Russia. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ALGIERS

Algerians vote as Tebboune eyes re-election

Algerians headed to the polls on Saturday in a presidential election widely expected to bring a second term for incumbent Abdelmadjid Tebboune. On Saturday morning, the streets were generally quiet, with more than 24 million Algerians registered to vote.

Algerians abroad have been able to vote since Monday, and ANIE on Saturday put that turnout at 14.5 per cent. Campaign rallies have struggled to generate enthusiasm in the nation of 45 million, partly



because of the summer heat. With young people more than half the population, all three candidates have courted their votes with promises to improve living standards. — AFP

PARIS

Thousands protest after Macron picks Barnier

Thousands of people took to the streets across France on Saturday to protest President Emmanuel Macron’s decision to appoint centre-right Michel Barnier as prime minister with left-wing parties accusing him of stealing legislative elections. Barnier faces the daunting task of trying to drive reforms and the 2025 budget, as France is under pressure from the European Commission. In response to the appointment of Barnier, whose centre-right Les Republicains party is only the



fifth bloc in parliament with less than 50 lawmakers, left-wing party leaders, unions and student bodies called for mass protests on Saturday ahead of new action. — Reuters

FRANKFURT

German emergency services tackle massive fire

Firefighters and aircraft on Saturday ramped up efforts to tackle a massive forest fire in the mountains of central Germany that has reportedly forced the evacuation of hundreds of people. Several blazes began in the Harz Mountains on Friday, and by the evening had joined together to form a huge forest fire. Around 150 firefighters, planes and helicopters were deployed on the Brocken mountain and the surrounding area was closed off, according



to authorities in the district of Harz. But it was still raging on Saturday, and a plane and helicopter were sent out again to support firefighters, they said. — AFP

Trump urges police to watch for voter fraud



Nick Corasaniti

The writer is a New York Times reporter covering national politics



Michael Gold

The writer is a political correspondent for The New York Times

Trump has promised to push for legislation strengthening protections for police officers if he is elected, and in May, he pledged to give officers immunity from prosecution.

Former president Donald Trump urged the board of the nation's largest police union on Friday to “watch for voter fraud” across the country, an appeal that, if followed through on, could run afoul of multiple state laws and raise accusations of voter intimidation.

Invoking his widely debunked claims of voter fraud in 2020, Trump suggested that the only way he could lose in November was if Democrats cheated. “Watch for the voter fraud, because we win without voter fraud,” Trump said at a meeting of the national board of the Fraternal Order of Police in Charlotte, North Carolina. “We win so easily.”

Trump added that he believed police could effectively scare some voters. “You can keep it down just by watching, because, believe it or not, they’re afraid of that badge,” Trump said. “They’re afraid of you people. They’re afraid of that more than anything else.”

Trump’s comments follow his repeated statements raising doubts about the integrity of the upcoming election before a vote has been cast. But though Trump has previously urged his supporters to monitor voting activity — particularly in Democratic cities in battleground states — his entreaty to the police union heightens concerns that he is encouraging voter intimidation at the polls.

Trump has a habit of urging police to take more aggressive approaches and has long spoken admiringly of officers who do so. He has promised to push for legislation strengthening protections for police officers if he is elected, and in May, he pledged to give officers immunity from prosecution.

In Friday’s speech, Trump pledged to give “hundreds of millions of dollars in federal grants” to cities that returned to the policing strategy of stop-and-frisk, an aggressive practice that has drawn legal challenges, as well as to so-called broken-windows policing. Criminal justice reform advocates have said both practices disproportionately targeted people of colour.

Trump’s address to the Fraternal Order of Police board came hours after the group, which has more than 370,000 members, announced that it would endorse him for president. The union, which last backed a Democratic presidential candidate in 1996, also endorsed Trump in 2016 and 2020.

Trump has for years tried to portray Democrats as too lax on crime, presenting himself as a law-and-order candidate, even as he faced four criminal indictments and was convicted on 34 charges in New York City.

During his speech, he celebrated that the sentencing in that trial had been postponed, falsely claiming that the decision was made because “everyone realises that there was no case.”

The statement from the police union endorsing Trump did not acknowledge his convictions or other criminal cases, nor did it address his pledge to consider pardoning those charged in the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the Capitol, some of whom attacked police



Former president Donald Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, delivers remarks at Trump Tower, in New York. – NYT

officers.

Trump spent the bulk of the speech portraying himself as tougher on crime than his Democratic opponent, Vice-President Kamala Harris, a former San Francisco district attorney and California attorney general. Promising to always “back the blue,” he called Harris a “defunder” who wanted to end financial support for police.

Though Harris in 2020 voiced some support for the principles of police reform that underpinned that movement, including the need to reexamine police budgets and divert resources to other programmes, she told The New York Times that year: “We’re not going to get rid of the police. We all have to be practical.”

Trump also cited Harris’ time as a prosecutor and

attorney general as evidence that she was soft on crime. Misrepresenting a California law, he claimed that she was responsible for a statute that allowed shoplifters in the state to steal, without consequence, up to \$950 worth of merchandise.

In his remarks, Trump continued to stoke fear around urban crime, repeatedly insisting that there had been a surge in violent crime despite data showing a decrease in killings and assaults in major US cities.

But even as he deplored violent crime and blamed Democrats for it, Trump also made light of the 2022 attack on Paul Pelosi, the husband of Rep. Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat and former House speaker, at the couple’s home in California. The attacker had said that he had sought out Nancy Pelosi.

Georgia tests a novel tactic in school shootings



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In a landmark criminal case in Michigan this year, James and Jennifer Crumbley became the first parents convicted in connection with killings carried out by their child in a mass shooting.

Now, in the first mass school shooting in the United States since those convictions, Georgia officials appear poised to try the same tactic. On Thursday, prosecutors filed charges, including two counts of second-degree murder, against the father of the suspected gunman, saying he had provided a gun to his son “with knowledge that he was a threat to himself and others.”

Such charges were all but unheard of before the Michigan case, and the Georgia prosecution will test the emerging push to hold parents responsible for mass shootings by young people.

The bigger test may be whether the prospect of criminal prosecution spurs parents to do more to seek help for troubled children and to keep them away from guns in a country awash in firearms.

Proponents of such prosecutions have said that charging parents can help prevent young people from carrying out such shootings. But critics say it’s a misguided effort that scapegoats parents while lawmakers fail to act to reduce gun violence. And its effectiveness as

a deterrent may be limited by the deep dysfunction at play in the families of some of the young people implicated in mass shootings.

The prosecution of the Crumbleys, after their 15-year-old son killed four people in 2021 at a high school outside Detroit, was seen as a long shot. But in separate trials, the Crumbleys were convicted of involuntary manslaughter and were sentenced to 10 years in prison.

In the Georgia case, the shooting at Apalachee High School in Winder on Wednesday left two students and two teachers dead. Hours later, a 14-year-old student was charged as an adult with four counts of felony murder. The next day, his father, Colin Gray, was arrested and charged with two counts of second degree murder, as well four counts of involuntary manslaughter and eight counts of cruelty to children.

As mass shootings have continued and the Supreme Court has expanded gun rights, some gun safety advocates have turned to the courts, pursuing civil cases against gun manufacturers and sellers and urging wider criminal charges in shootings like the ones in Georgia and Michigan.

“The facts of this case beg for criminal charges to be brought against Colin Gray,” said Nick Suplina, senior vice president



Flowers left at a makeshift memorial at the flagpole, where the flags were flying at half staff, outside Apalachee High School in Winder. – NYT

The bigger test may be whether the prospect of criminal prosecution spurs parents to do more to seek help for troubled children and to keep them away from guns

for law and policy at Everytown for Gun Safety. “Prosecutors are waking up to the fact that these are actual crimes that need to be charged.”

Investigators have not divulged the evidence that informed the charges against Gray or why they believe he knew that his son was a threat. In May 2023, a sheriff’s deputy interviewed him and his son after the FBI had received tips that posts on Discord, a social media site, included threats to shoot up a middle school.

At the time, the son denied having posted the threats and told his father that he had deactivated his Discord account because it was too easy to hack, Gray said.

He also said that if his son had made the threats, “I’m going to be mad as hell, and then all the guns will go away.”

The deputy concluded that he could not determine whether the son was the author of the threats.

The following December, Gray gave the gun used in the shooting to his son for Christmas, according to three law enforcement officials.

Since the shooting at Apalachee High School, police have found evidence that the younger Gray was interested in mass shootings, particularly the 2018 massacre at a high school in Parkland, Florida, according to two law enforcement officials briefed on the investigation.

Alzheimer’s drug breakthrough: Cautious optimism



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

Last week several news channels reported about the newly approved medication for Alzheimer’s with titles such as ‘No more Alzheimer’s’ and ‘New Hope for people with Alzheimer’s.’

A few people sent me on WhatsApp asking if such medications will be available in Oman and how to get them prescribed for their loved ones who have Alzheimer’s.

I had to structure my response to be more realistic without killing any glimpse of hope or sounding ‘anti-science’. It has been over 20 years since the last medication for Alzheimer’s was approved and several clinical trials for medication that could alter the lives of over 50 million people around the world were deemed unsuccessful so it’s understandable that patients and their caregivers would be excited about such a news.

Some organisations started demanding this medication to be made available to patients with Alzheimer’s and started accusing health authorities who were reluctant to discriminate against this group of patients.

Some family members were prepared to get it

from other countries and have it administered to their loved ones and pay for it but before getting too emotional.

Let us examine a few scientific facts about such medications.

First, according to scientific research, the newly approved medication targets particular chemical changes in the brain that are believed to cause the symptoms of Alzheimer’s. Yet this applies only to people who are confirmed to have Alzheimer’s disease and not other dementia and only to those in the early stages of the disease before further damage occurs.

The drug, while showing promising results in delaying the progression of the disease, is by no means a ‘cure for Alzheimer’s’. It also has serious side effects and it costs around \$32,000 per year (just under Riyal Omani 1,000 per month).

Alzheimer’s disease is the most common type of a group of conditions known as dementia ‘or more scientifically, cognitive disorders.’

These conditions usually affect people over the age of 60 but in some cases, people can get it in their forties.

SOME ORGANISATIONS DEMANDED THAT MEDICATION FOR ALZHEIMER’S BE MADE AVAILABLE TO PATIENTS AND ACCUSED HEALTH AUTHORITIES WHO WERE RELUCTANT TO PROVIDE IT OF DISCRIMINATING AGAINST THIS GROUP OF PATIENTS

It is a devastating condition that causes distress to patients and their close family members. While most people associate dementia with memory loss the symptoms include memory loss that disrupts daily life, poor judgment, leading to bad decisions, losing track of dates or knowing the current location, and taking longer to complete normal daily tasks such as eating or getting dressed.

As the disease progresses the person becomes more dependent on others and may exhibit behaviour such as agitation, aggression and refusing care.

Eventually, the person becomes bedridden needing full care. In most Middle Eastern countries, a family member such as a spouse, a son or a daughter becomes the main caregiver.

A recent survey conducted by Alzheimer’s Disease International showed people around the world still have negative attitudes toward Alzheimer’s which hinders people from getting early diagnosis and support. This is why September is World Alzheimer’s Month and is dedicated to raising public awareness and urging governments to provide better service for people with Alzheimer’s and their caregivers.

Old satellite to burn up over Pacific in ‘targeted’ re-entry first

BENEDICTE REY

After 24 years of diligently studying Earth’s magnetic field, a satellite will mostly burn up over the Pacific Ocean on Sunday during a “targeted” re-entry into the atmosphere, in a first for the European Space Agency as it seeks to reduce space debris.

Since launching in 2000, the Salsa satellite has helped shed light on the magnetosphere, the powerful magnetic shield that protects Earth from solar winds — and without which the planet would be uninhabitable.

According to the ESA, Salsa’s return home will mark the first-ever “targeted” re-entry for a satellite, which means it will fall back to Earth at a specific time and place but will not be controlled as it re-enters the atmosphere.

Teams on the ground have already performed a series of manoeuvres with the 550-kilogramme satellite to ensure it burns up over a remote and uninhabited region of the South Pacific, off the coast of Chile.

This unique re-entry is possible because of Salsa’s unusual oval-shaped orbit. During its swing around the planet, which takes two and half days, the satellite strays as far as 130,000 kilometres, and comes as close as just a few hundred kilometres.

Bruno Sousa, head of the ESA’s inner solar system missions operations unit, said it had been crucial that Salsa came within roughly 110 kilometres during its last two orbits.

“Then immediately on the next orbit, it would come down at 80 kilometres, which is the region in space already within the atmosphere, where we have the highest chance (for it) to be fully captured and burned,” he told a press conference.

When a satellite starts entering the atmosphere at around 100 kilometres above sea level, intense friction with atmospheric particles — and the heat this causes — starts making them disintegrate. But some fragments can still make it back down to Earth.

The ESA is hoping to pinpoint where Salsa, roughly the size of a small car, re-enters the atmosphere to within a few hundred metres.

Because the satellite is so old, it does not have fancy new tech — like a recording device — making tracking this part tricky.

A plane will be flying at an altitude of 10 kilometres to watch the satellite burn up — and track its falling debris, which is expected to be just 10 per cent of its original mass. — AFP

Embracing ESG; A pathway for Oman’s sustainable future



Ahmed al Mukhaini

The writer is a well known expert with Financial Services Authority and a global citizen

As the global business landscape shifts towards more sustainable and responsible practices, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles have emerged as a critical framework for companies and governments alike.

For Oman, embracing ESG is not just a strategic imperative but a pathway to align with international standards, attract investment and drive sustainable development in line with Oman Vision 2040.

This was the most poignant message of the recent Climate Dialogue that was organised by the Environment Society of Oman (ESO), Sohar International Bank, and ASYAD and involved the Financial Services Authority (FSA) and the National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Capital Market Development (Estidamah).

ESG principles offer a holistic approach to evaluating the broader impact of business and government activities beyond financial performance. In Oman, the adoption of ESG can play a pivotal role in addressing key challenges such as economic diversification, environmental sustainability and social development.

By integrating ESG principles, Oman can enhance its appeal as a destination for sustainable investment, foster resilience in its economy, and ensure the well-being of its people.

From an environmental stewardship perspective, Oman’s unique natural landscapes, biodiversity, and coastal ecosystems are invaluable assets that require careful management.

Adopting ESG principles can help Oman address environmental challenges, including water scarcity, desertification, and the impacts of climate change. For example, investing in renewable energy, promoting energy efficiency, and adopting sustainable practices in industries such as oil and gas, fisheries, and tourism can reduce environmental footprints and preserve the country’s natural heritage.

Implementing robust corporate governance standards, combating

corruption and ensuring that business operations align with legal and ethical norms are essential steps towards building investor confidence and achieving sustainable growth.

To fully integrate ESG principles into Oman’s economic and social fabric, a multi-faceted approach is needed. First and foremost, Oman should develop a comprehensive ESG framework that sets clear guidelines and standards for businesses and government entities. This framework should align with international best practices while being tailored to the unique context of Oman’s economic and social landscape.

The framework can provide a road map for companies to report on ESG metrics, encouraging transparency and

EMBRACING ESG IS NOT JUST AN OPPORTUNITY BUT A NECESSITY FOR OMAN AS IT SEEKS TO BUILD A RESILIENT, DIVERSIFIED AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

accountability. Estidamah has been working closely with all stakeholders to ensure such a framework is developed and implemented.

The next step is raising awareness and building capacity around ESG is crucial. Oman can invest in education and training programmes to enhance understanding of ESG principles among business leaders, policymakers, and the general public. Universities and professional institutions can play a key role in integrating ESG topics into curricula, ensuring that the next generation of leaders is well-versed in sustainable practices. To that effect, the FSA has earmarked certain areas and institutions and has already started its capacity-building and awareness initiatives to serve this purpose.

Establishing green financing mechanisms, such as green bonds or sukuk, would also channel capital towards projects that contribute to environmental and social goals. It would also tap into an enormous source of socially responsible capital. The FSA has been pivotal in supporting developments in this track.

The most recently published regulations governing bonds and sukuk paved the way to facilitate access to such resources ushering the possibility of issuing green, sustainable and other innovative bonds and sukuk. In addition, the Ministry of Finance issued the national framework for sustainable finance setting the country on the right foot.

Coupled with required regulatory frameworks, Oman should encourage companies to adopt standardised ESG reporting practices, providing stakeholders with clear and consistent information on their environmental and social impact. The FSA has been working closely with Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), a key FSA’s partner and stakeholder in the financial sector, to mandate ESG disclosures for publicly listed companies, ensuring that businesses are held accountable for their commitments to sustainable practices. MSX’s commitment to ESG has been unwavering at all levels of strategic and executive management.

Embracing ESG is not just an opportunity but a necessity for Oman as it seeks to build a resilient, diversified, and sustainable economy. By integrating environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and strong governance into its development agenda, Oman can position itself as a leader in sustainability in the region.

The path forward requires commitment, collaboration, and a long-term vision, but the rewards — enhanced investment, improved quality of life, and a more sustainable future — are well worth the effort. As Oman takes steps to embed ESG principles into its core, it will not only meet the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040 but also contribute to a more sustainable and equitable world.

Adrenaline junkie or sloth? Which are you?

“Adrenaline junkies give leisure a bad name,” said a colleague last week, and I had to smile wryly, as while I have known, and seen hundreds, I have rarely felt the need to become one.

Taking part in exciting, intense and dangerous activities is not for me, being more ‘into,’ the sedentary activities of reading, writing and watching sports, and rather than feeling any compunction at not being intense or dangerous, I almost proudly see myself as a fully committed couch potato, for whom a walk on the wild side is to eat my usual bog standard ‘Ready-Salted’ potato crisps, instead of some ‘you never know what’s in them’ varieties like ‘Jalapeno and Dill,’ or ‘Seafood Chilli and Lime.’ I’m not ready for such absurdity!

The best things about me in this, my couch potato phase, according to my long-suffering wife, are first that I usually do the outstanding ‘jobs around the house’ done, so I can’t be dragged away from my sports-watching later in the day, and second, that she always knows where I am when the All Blacks, Black Ferns, or Highlanders, are playing rugby, the NZ7s are playing, the All Whites or Newcastle United are playing football, the Black Caps are playing cricket, sailing, like the America’s Cup or Sail GP, when Horseracing, IndyCar, or Formula 1 are on, or there is a good golf tournament on.

And, of course, new James Bond movies, old John Wayne movies, and historical dramas like Shogun, but none of those Academy Award-winning movies... they tend to be long, woke and mind-numbingly boring!

My couch potato experience is an emotional roller-coaster, as I live vicariously through the deeds of ‘my combatants.’ Not for a minute do I suggest that I have any form of ownership of ‘my’ teams, but almost exactly the opposite... they own me! But I love it! Feet up in the lounge, on my favourite part of the sofa, with crisps and some, salami or meat cold cuts, something to drink, and even with adverts regularly punctuating the experience, I find it so incredibly easy to put in a solid shift of up to 6 hours of wall-to-wall sports. Considering I can’t



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RESEARCH SAYS PARACHUTISTS AND ROCK CLIMBERS ARE DRIVEN BY THE CLOSENESS BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH, AND THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL SENSE OF SENSATION IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO MOTIVATION

usually concentrate for five minutes... it’s a miracle of fish and loaves proportions!

Anyway, the other side of the coin is the adrenaline junkie. Now whether it’s bungy-jumping, parachuting, mountaineering, white-water rafting, wing-walking, storm-chasing, zip-lining, or anything in between, the adrenaline rush must be something! I mean, get it wrong and you could die!

Makrowski, Makrowski, and Kaminski (2016), produced research saying that parachutists and rock climbers are not only intense, but are driven by that closeness between life and death, and their psychological sense of sensation or stimulation, is directly related to motivation, with the most highly motivated craving the ‘rush’ like an addict does a drug.

The neurobiological processes are so incredibly complex, with psychological and physiological factors seriously influenced by dopamine and serotonin deficiencies. This, according to Dr Elizabeth Scott, creates a thirst for heightened impulsivity, intolerance of risk, a need for the dramatic a need to invent crises, to implement what has been called the ‘warrior gene,’ because it’s not enough to see something dangerous, but to feel highly motivated to do something about it!

I know. Some of you are looking at this trying to figure out if you are a potential ‘adrenaline junkie.’ Well maybe, as I’ve learned that some of you just can’t do without a rush, but have no wish to endanger yourselves! While ‘thrill-seekers’ rarely consider the consequences and can be a danger to themselves. Some are just bored, and others are compulsive, doing stuff without thinking.

Others seek an escape from the pressures they are under, and a game of squash or a swim just won’t do it for them anymore. Occasionally it’s not genuine, but the result of peer pressure, and being ‘bullied’ into it, while being desperate for peer approval or self-esteem can see one feeling like they have no other option.

I like Bert Kreischer, though, saying, “If there’s an adrenaline rush I’ll find it. If there’s an anxiety attack, I’ll find that too.” Anyway, I’ve gotta go, F1 is on, and it’s as much excitement as my ticker can handle...

HISTORIC HIGHLAND ATHLETIC TRADITION



■ A competitor takes part in the heavy weight throwing competition during the annual Braemar Gathering in Braemar, central Scotland. The Braemar Gathering is a traditional Scottish Highland Games which predates the 1745 Uprising, and since 1848 it has been regularly attended by the reigning Monarch and members of the Royal Family. – AFP

The high cost of the Netherlands’ Mpox vaccine hoarding

In the lead-up to this historic election year, many feared that Europe’s rightward shift would undermine international cooperation and jeopardise decades of social progress. These fears have now materialised in the Netherlands, where the governing Dutch Party for Freedom, led by the far-right populist Geert Wilders, refuses to send mpox vaccines to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where the disease is spreading rapidly.

Despite the World Health Organization’s urgent call for Western countries to send unused mpox vaccines to Africa, Dutch Health Minister Fleur Agema, a member of Wilders’s party, has flatly refused to release any of the Netherlands’ 100,000 doses.

Agema’s refusal is baffling, given that many of these doses are set to expire by 2025 and could be destroyed without ever being used. The Dutch National Health Institute has made it clear that containing the outbreak in Africa is the most effective way to prevent it from spreading to Europe.

Even the centre-right New Social Contract party has advocated a



Gordon Brown

The writer is former prime minister of the UK, is UN Special Envoy for Global Education and Chair of Education Cannot Wait.

pragmatic approach, urging the government to “do what we can to contain the mpox outbreak at the source.” Yet, Agema insists that the country might need the vaccines, disregarding both expert advice and parliamentary support for donating the doses.

Meanwhile, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) has reported that 20,000 people have been infected across the continent after the virus mutated into a faster-spreading strain. Outbreaks have been confirmed in 12 African countries, including Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda, as the disease continues to spread from the DRC, where it has claimed the lives of 615 people to date. Alarminglly, cases have now been reported in distant countries like Thailand and Sweden.

Even before the Dutch announcement, Western countries were slow to respond to the mpox outbreak. Stella Kyriakides, the European Union’s Health Commissioner, has urged member states to donate more mpox vaccines. In response, the

European Commission’s Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority has delivered more than 215,000 doses to African countries. But with the virus spreading rapidly, DRC Health Minister Samuel-Roger Kamba has called on European countries to increase their pledges.

The international community must do more. So far, Japan has pledged more than three million doses of its LC16m8 vaccine, which is also recommended for children, and the United States has committed to donating 50,000 doses to the DRC.

In Europe, it is the Spanish government leading the way, with Prime Minister Pedro Sánchezpledging 500,000 vaccine doses — 20 per cent of the country’s stock — and proposing that all EU members states donate the same proportion of their supplies. Germany and France have each promised to deliver 100,000 doses, and Austria has offered part of its 34,000-dose stockpile.

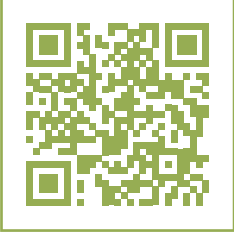
But with the Africa CDC estimating that up to ten million

doses may be required to contain the outbreak, much more must be done. The failure to demonstrate greater solidarity risks further straining EU-Africa relations, already damaged by Europe’s reluctance to supply vaccines to developing countries during the Covid-19 pandemic, insufficient humanitarian aid to tackle the ongoing food crisis, and repeated delays in meeting the bloc’s long-term climate-financing commitments.

As South African President Cyril Ramaphosa recently reminded Western leaders, during the mpox emergency in 2022, global efforts focused on curbing the spread in the US and Europe, leaving Africa behind. To correct the “unfair treatment” of previous health crises, the response to the current outbreak “must be different.” To be sure, affected countries must also step up their efforts to combat the virus. Stopping transmission requires governments to engage local communities, strengthen health systems, invest in infrastructure, and ensure workers are trained to

administer vaccines. The WHO’s Emergency Use Listing for mpox vaccines could streamline approval and access, enabling Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to procure approved vaccines and distribute them more efficiently.

But combating the mpox epidemic will be impossible without enhanced international support. With the two-dose vaccine priced at \$70-100 per dose — prohibitively high for the world’s poorest countries — the financial burden of eradicating the disease must be shared. The recent establishment of Gavi’s \$500 million First Response Fund, which aims to provide low-income countries with financing for vaccine distribution during public-health emergencies, represents an important step in the right direction. In the longer term, Western vaccine manufacturers must facilitate technology transfers to African countries to help boost local production capacity and ensure a more effective response to future outbreaks.



AFC ASIAN QUALIFIERS

Coach Silhavy confident as Oman faces South Korea

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

Red Warriors are looking to fight back against South Korea on Tuesday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in the second games of AFC Asian Qualifiers — Road to 26 after the loss against Iraq 1-0 last Thursday.

Oman national team players reported back to the daily training sessions at Royal Court Affairs stadium in Al Khoudh on Saturday night under the watchful eyes of head coach Jaroslav Silhavy.

The Czech coach is busy finding a suitable replacement for the middle player Arshad al Alawi who received two yellow cards in the Iraq game besides the injuries of Mohammed al Musallami and Ahmed al Khamisi who are under direct medical team supervision to decide on their readiness and participation on Korean game. It is expected that Arshad will be replaced by Abdullah Fawaz.

Oman team is relying on the home crowd in the upcoming game after the disappointing start in the opening game. It will not be an easy game considering that South Korea was held to a goalless draw against Palestine in Seoul city. The visitors will have the same aim to bounce back in Tuesday's clash which is expected to be very tough between both teams.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman Football Association (OFA) under the national campaign “We are all with you” sent many messages in the social media requesting for crowd support for the key match.

On the other side, South Korea team arrived in Muscat and commenced their training sessions in Muscat at Seeb Stadium.

Oman team is looking to rekindle the memories of the last game between both teams in Muscat in 2003 during the Asian Cup qualifiers as Oman had won by 3-1.

Coach Silhavy affirmed in his latest comments to the media that he will work hard for a better show in the forthcoming game. “Thanks to the players for their hard-fighting performance during the opening game and we are looking for a better show in the next match against South Korea,” he said.



OBA partners with Credit Oman for 3rd edition of Basketball Cup

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

The Oman Basketball Association (OBA) has signed a new partnership agreement with Credit Oman to support the third edition of the Credit Oman Basketball Cup for clubs.

The signing ceremony took place at the company's headquarters, with the association represented by Mohammed al Hassani, Secretary-General, and Sulaiman al Shaibani, Senior Sales Manager, who signed on behalf of Credit Oman. The ceremony was attended by Shaikh Khalil al Harthi, CEO of Credit Oman, and Hanif al Balushi, Chairman of the Competitions Committee of the Oman Basketball Association.

Sulaiman al Shaibani in his address said the support comes

within the framework of the company's social responsibility, which aims to support and develop sports among young people in Oman.

He also stressed that supporting sports initiatives contributes effectively to spreading the game of basketball and increasing its popularity, expressing Credit Oman's pride in continuing to support these events that contribute to enhancing the sportsmanship among young people.

Al Shaibani explained that investing in sports is not limited to the financial aspect only, but is considered an investment in the future of Omani youth, which reflects the company's strong commitment to society. It is expected that this partnership will contribute to organising a variety



of sporting events that contribute to enhancing the position of basketball as one of the leading sports in Oman.

Khalfan al Naabi, Chairman of the Oman Basketball Association, explained that renewing the partnership with Credit Oman represents a strategic step that enhances the

continuity of the projects and programmes implemented by the association. He pointed out that the partnership was mutual commitment towards achieving long-term goals that seek to make basketball one of the main games in Oman.

He explained that the association was working

intensively to spread the game by organising tournaments in residential and commercial complexes, which aims to attract the largest possible number of fans, and expand the base of young players who can engage in the game and develop their skills.

Al Naabi also stressed the importance of the pivotal role played by the private sector in supporting national sports, noting that the partnership with Credit Oman opens the doors for further cooperation with other companies that wish to contribute to pushing the wheel of sports forward.

He added, “We believe that the sustainability of these partnerships contributes directly to the development of the sports infrastructure which enables the association to organise

tournaments at high levels in line with international standards.”

Al Naabi also said that they aim to prepare national teams in a way that enables them to compete in international forums and represent Oman. “Supporting the private sector enhances the chances of success of these efforts, and gives us the ability to develop clubs and teams, whether through providing financial or technical support, which enable us to face regional and international challenges.”

Al Naabi extended an invitation to the private sector to invest in sports, stressing that supporting basketball and other sports is an investment in future generations, as sports play a vital role in developing young people and preparing them to face life's challenges.

OMAN EXCELS IN EQUESTRIAN EVENTS: 'SAWARIM' TAKES SECOND IN FRANCE

K H A R E E F E V E N T S C O N C L U D E A H E A D O F K A Z A K H S T A N T O U R N E Y

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, SEPT 7



The endurance race for 100 km in Salalah

The Royal Cavalry's mare, 'Sawarim', secured second place in the fifth round over a distance of 2,100 metres, which was allocated to Purebred Arabian Horses aged four years. The race took place at the Toulouse racecourse in France, under the leadership of jockey Michael Forrest and the supervision of trainer Frederic Sanchaz.

The Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation concluded the equestrian events of Dhofar Khareef 2024 at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex in Salalah, under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, and in the presence of Sayyid Munthir bin Saif al Busaidy, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation.

The horse 'Ghazi Al Ghawazi' was crowned champion of the 100 km endurance race, ridden by Noah al Balushi, and owned and trained by Hussein al Balushi. The horse 'HM Love Kuwait' secured second place, ridden by Mohammed al Fouri and trained by Sarah al Hanai. The horse 'Aida' finished third, ridden by Mohammed al Shamsi and trained by Mohammed al thuhli.

Sultan of Oman's Armoured (A) and (B) teams were crowned champions of the tent pegging competition, while third place was claimed by the Fursan Oman School.

In the general ranking of the horseback archery competition, knight Mohammed al Attar claimed first place with a total of 42.5 points. Hilal al Jabri took second place with 32.44 points, and Sami al Hadeedi finished third with 30.98 points.

The Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation is participating in the draw of the fifth edition of the World Nomadic Games, Astana 2024, in Kazakhstan, with 100 riders from 21 countries. The Oman team will compete in three games from September 7 to 13 in Astana.

The Oman national horseback archery team will be represented by Asaad bin Salim al Badri (team manager), rider and trainer Mohammed bin Najib al Attar, knight Hilal bin Sultan al Jabri, knight Sami bin Ali al Hadeedi, knight Mahmoud bin Suleiman al Sharani, and knight Saif bin Issa al Maamari.



The ceremony Dhofar Khareef 2024



The draw of the 'Astana 2024'



Mohammed al Attar during horseback archery competition



The Royal Cavalry's 'Sawarim'(L) crossing the finish line.

England have Sri Lanka struggling in third test

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, SEPT 7

England have taken early control of the third Test with Sri Lanka struggling in their first innings – at the time of going to press at tea – on the second day on 142 for five in response to England's 325 all out.

Resuming their first innings on the second morning on 221 for 3, Ollie Pope, having already completed his seventh Test hundred on the previous evening shortly before bad light had ended play, he, along with Harry Brook had an eventful start. Brook, on 10, was given out caught behind off the edge but the decision was overturned.

Then on the first ball in the

second full over of the morning, Brook on 12, was dropped at deep point off Milan Ratnayake. Brook had tried to loft the ball on the off side and Asitha Fernando, having got himself in perfect position let the ball go through his hands.

The batsmen went on to add 40 runs in addition to their 30 of the stand from the first day, before Brook, on 19, was dismissed with a brilliant catch at short cover. He had struck the ball firmly but Kamindu Mendis did well to take the catch inches off the ground and England were 261 for four.

With Jamie Smith at the wicket with Pope, England had the last pair of specialist batsmen but there wasn't going to be a pile of runs to come. They added 29 for the fifth wicket before, Smith,



England's Ollie Stone (L) celebrates after dismissing Sri Lanka's Dinesh. – AFP

flicked at Vishwa Fernando and Kusal Mendis, at mid-wicket got both hands to hold the ball above his left shoulder. Pope had moved along to 144 at that point from 142 balls playing his strokes freely.

Then followed an extraordinary collapse. Having lost half their wickets for 290, England proceeded to lose the other half for just 35. It came as a result of some cavalier batting as they went for unnecessary big hitting.

Chris Woakes stepped out of his crease and chipped Dhananjaya de Silva to Ratnayake at short cover for 2. Gus Atkinson, after his maiden Test century at Lord's in the previous Test, slogged to leg and

once again Ratnayake held the catch running from mid-wicket. Atkinson had 5 and England were 307 for 7.

On the same total, Pope's big innings came to an end. He hooked a short ball from Vishwa Fernando to deep square leg and was held by Karunaratne. His 154 had come from 156 balls with 19 fours and two sixes. It was his seventh Test century, each one of those, interestingly had been scored, against seven different oppositions. Quite a unique feat.

Test debutant Josh Hull went for 2 after splicing his shot to square leg on 318 and seven runs later England were dismissed with Shoaib Bashir giving Ratnayake, the pick of the bowlers, his third wicket for 56.

BRAZIL DOWN ECUADOR, SUAREZ FAREWELL ENDS IN STALEMATE

THE FIVE-TIME WORLD CUP WINNERS
MOVED UP TO FOURTH PLACE WITH
10 POINTS FROM SEVEN GAMES
AFTER THEIR THIRD WIN OF THE
QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN, BUT
REMAIN EIGHT POINTS ADRIFT
OF LEADERS ARGENTINA

Brazil's forward Rodrygo celebrates after scoring. — AFP

CURITIBA, Brazil: Real Madrid forward Rodrygo scored the only goal as Brazil boosted their lacklustre 2026 World Cup qualifying campaign with a 1-0 victory over Ecuador on Friday.

Rodrygo's deflected 30th-minute strike was enough to secure all three points for Brazil, who were languishing in sixth place in the South American qualifying standings before Friday's result in Curitiba.

The five-time World Cup winners moved up to fourth place with 10 points from seven games after their third win of the qualifying campaign, but remain eight points adrift of leaders Argentina.

With the 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico expanded to include 48 teams, the top six finishers in South American qualifying will be guaranteed a place at the tournament. The seventh placed South American team enters an inter-confederation play-off.

Brazil have struggled in recent international tournaments, losing in the quarter-finals of the 2022 World Cup and failing to progress past the last eight at this year's Copa America.

The lack of fluency that has

characterised their recent form was back in evidence against Ecuador on Friday, where despite dominating possession for long periods they created little in the way of clear-cut scoring chances, with only three shots on goal.

The breakthrough came on the half-hour mark, when Rodrygo collected the ball on the edge of the area, took a touch and then shot from 25 yards. The Real Madrid attacker's strike appeared to clip Ecuador defender Willian Pacheco before flying in off the post.

FRUSTRATING FAREWELL

In other South American qualifiers on Friday, Luis Suarez bade a frustrating farewell to international football as Uruguay were held to a 0-0 draw by Paraguay in Montevideo.

Suarez, 37, announced on Monday he was stepping down from international duty after a glittering 17-year career for Uruguay that saw him finish as the country's top scorer with 69

goals from 143 appearances.

Suarez was feted in a pre-game ceremony which saw him gathered on the field with his family to receive tributes from fans, as well as a video message of congratulations from close friend Lionel Messi.

"Uruguay is bigger than any player. Starting tomorrow I will be another fan," an emotional Suarez told fans in an address to the stadium.

But the former Barcelona and Liverpool star, who now plays in Major League Soccer with Inter Miami, was unable to add a 70th goal to his international tally in Friday's farewell game at the Estadio Centenario in Montevideo.

Despite enjoying 65 per cent possession, Uruguay were unable to

find a way through a dogged Paraguay defence in a disjointed match littered with some 24 fouls.

Suarez, whose career at international and club level was dogged by controversies such as his ban for biting Italy's Giorgio Chiellini at the 2014 World Cup, was one of four Uruguay players to be shown a yellow card in a fractious encounter.

The result left Uruguay in second place in the standings with 14 points from seven games, four points behind leaders Argentina.

In Friday's other qualifying game, third-placed Colombia needed a late goal from Liverpool's Luis Diaz to salvage a 1-1 draw with Peru in Lima.

Alexander Callens had fired Peru into a shock lead on 68 minutes, but Diaz headed in from close range eight minutes from time to give Colombia a share of the points.

The result leaves Colombia in third place in the standings with 13 points from seven games. — AFP

BUSINESS

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AIMING HIGHER

MUSCAT AIRPORT WELCOMES SIX NEW AIRLINES



SHAIKH AYMAN BIN AHMED AL HOSNI
CEO, Oman Airports

MUSCAT: Oman Airports is intensifying efforts to expand the number of international airlines operating at Muscat International Airport and other airports across the Sultanate of Oman, aiming to increase passenger traffic and solidify Oman's role as a key aviation hub. Shaikh Ayman bin Ahmed al

Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports, announced that six new international airlines are expected to start operating flights to Muscat International Airport in 2024. Of these, four airlines have already begun operations, while two others are scheduled to launch later this year.

In 2023, Oman Airports successfully attracted five new airlines, two of which are European carriers, enhancing direct flight options from Europe to Oman. As part of a broader strategy, the company is also exploring the "transit" market, targeting European travelers who transit through Oman en route to destinations in Asia, a segment that has become highly competitive in the region.

Thanks to the collaborative efforts between Oman Airports and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, it is projected that the number of European tourists arriving in Oman via its airports will exceed 500,000 by the end of 2024, compared to nearly half a million tourists in 2023. Shaikh Ayman added that Oman Airports is working closely with tourism stakeholders to explore new markets and further boost inbound tourism.

Muscat International Airport now accommodates 36 airlines, connecting Oman to over 80 regional and international destinations. This expanding network is expected to significantly enhance Oman's global connectivity and bolster tourism, trade, and investment. — ONA



Salalah Free Zone attracts RO 4.6 bn in investments

THE SALALAH FREE ZONE, a key driver of economic growth under Asyad Group, has attracted significant investment, reinforcing its position as a crucial player in Oman's national development strategy. The zone's cumulative investment reached over RO 4.6 billion by June 2024, reflecting its growing importance as a regional hub for diverse industries.

Dr Ali bin Mohammed Tabuk, CEO of Salalah Free Zone, stated that the zone's strategic location and multiple investor incentives have spurred a strong influx of projects. Salalah's prime positioning offers logistical advantages by reducing time and costs for companies looking to access markets in the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, and East Africa.

In the first half of 2024 alone, Salalah Free Zone secured RO 68 million in new investments. The number of companies operating in the zone has reached 143, with 64 active projects. Industrial activities dominate the zone's portfolio, accounting for 57% of total projects, followed by logistics (15%) and commercial ventures (28%).

During the first six months of 2024, the zone attracted 13 new projects, including the production of frankincense-based products,



In the first half of 2024 alone, Salalah Free Zone secured RO 68 million in new investments.



DR ALI BIN MOHAMMED TABUK
CEO,

Salalah Free Zone

air conditioning manufacturing, textiles, and potassium fertilizer packaging.

The free zone continues to diversify its industrial base with a mix of petrochemical, mineral processing, and manufacturing activities.

Dr Tabuk emphasised the growing range of services provided to investors, including land leasing, warehouses, and office spaces. Salalah Free Zone also facilitates streamlined procedures for permits, visas, and registrations

through the "Invest Easy" system, offering investors a seamless business environment.

As part of the Asyad Group's network of free and economic zones, Salalah Free Zone plays a pivotal role in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). Its integrated logistics solutions, proximity to the Port of Salalah, and state-of-the-art supply chain infrastructure make it an ideal destination for global investors looking to expand into regional and international markets.

OIA GROWS GLOBAL PORTFOLIO WITH SUCCESSFUL INVESTMENTS IN ROTARY & ENTREVIAS

MUSCAT: Minister of Energy and Minerals, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi (pictured), confirmed that the Sultanate of Oman is steadily advancing towards producing no less than 30 per cent of electricity or consuming electricity from renewable energy sources by 2030.

He added that the oil and gas sectors are currently working to stop routine burning operations, while some industrial areas and cities are seeking environmentally friendly energy alternatives,

giving more competitiveness to local products in global markets. Al Aufi pointed out that studies are being conducted on alternative energy, its costs, and the changes factories need to adopt modern technology to keep up with it, clarifying that the sectors producing carbon emissions by around 95 per cent are industry, electricity production, oil, gas, transportation, and others.

He explained that some governmental institutions

have made efforts as part of Oman's plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, while others are still searching for projects to reduce carbon emissions. Several electricity production projects have been announced, including the Manah 1 and Manah 2 stations, preparations for the Ibri 3 station, in addition to announcing 5 new wind power stations: Dhofar 2 station, Sadah station, Duqm station, Mahout station, and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali station.

Khazaen's Pharma City zone boosted by new \$50 million investment

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

Avicen Group, a leading player in Oman's healthcare sector, has announced its maiden debut in the country's rapidly expanding pharmaceutical manufacturing industry

Last week, the Oman-based group's subsidiary, Avenzo Pharma, pledged an investment of RO 20 million (approx. \$50 million) in the establishment of a pharmaceuticals manufacturing plant specializing in the production of generic drugs at Khazaen Economic City in South Al Batinah Governorate.

Underscoring the government's support for the initiative, Health Minister Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti was



Khazaen's Pharma City cluster has attracted over \$350 million in investments to date, picture for illustration only.

in attendance at the signing of a lease agreement for a 20,000 m2 plot on which Avenzo Pharma will set up its project at Khazaen.

Representing the promoters were Nissan Edathum Chalil, Managing Director – Avicen Group, who in a statement said: "This development not only addresses the growing local demand but also underscores Oman's emerging prominence as a top investment destination in the pharmaceutical sector."

Avicen Group, described as the second-largest retail chain group in Oman's healthcare sector, operates a chain of pharmacies and polyclinics across the country. Annual turnover is around \$30 million, according to a company post, generated via the im-

port and distribution of pharmaceutical products, equipment and related consumables.

Significantly, the latest investment bolsters Khazaen's positioning as a destination for pharmaceutical and healthcare related investments as well. Its Pharma City – a dedicated zone for medical-related investments – is already home to over \$350 million in pharma-related projects that are in various stages of planning, development and operation.

As of the end of 2023, the Pharma City cluster was ranked only second to Khazaen's Manufacturing & Industrial Zone as the biggest draw for investment, totaling around \$300 million. The largest of these projects – Opal Bio Pharma – is progressing the develop-

ment of a high-tech health sciences complex with a focus on the production of vaccines and pharmaceuticals. Total investment is around \$150 million, with a second phase under planning as well.

Covering an area of 500,000 m2, Khazaen's Pharma City provides an optimal integrated environment for investors in medical industries ranging from producers of vaccines and drugs, to medical laboratories and advanced research centres. It also comes with a central hub for the import, storage and distribution and medicines and medical equipment. At least 10 other pharma related projects are in various stages of development at Khazaen's Pharma City.

QUICKTAKES



OMAN’S OIL EXPORTS REACH 179 MILLION BARRELS BY JULY 2024

MUSCAT: Oman exported 179.036 million barrels of crude oil by the end of July 2024, with an average price of \$82.50 per barrel, according to preliminary figures from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

These exports accounted for 84.5% of Oman’s total oil production, which totaled 211.589 million barrels during the same period. Despite a slight 0.05% rise in exports, total oil production saw a 5.2% drop. Crude oil production fell by 7.1%, reaching 162.2 million barrels, while oil condensate production increased by 1.6%, recording 49.68 million barrels. Oman’s average daily oil output reached 994,800 barrels through July 2024, reflecting the country’s efforts to maintain stable production levels despite global volatility.

China continued its dominance as the largest importer of Omani oil, purchasing 171.078 million barrels — an increase of 4.8% from the previous year. Japan, Oman’s second-largest buyer, imported 3.455 million barrels, but this represented a 40.9% decrease compared to 2023. Meanwhile, South Korea’s imports grew by 28.1%, reaching 2.5 million barrels. These figures underscore Oman’s ongoing commitment to maintaining strong oil export volumes amid fluctuations in production levels. — **ONA**

MADAYN SEES 30% SURGE IN REQUESTS

MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has reported impressive growth across its industrial cities, with a significant 30% rise in investment requests during the first half of 2024. Eng Dawood bin Salem al Haddabi, CEO of Madayn, highlighted that the number of investment requests reached 184 by June 2024, compared to 141 during the same period last year. This surge reflects the growing investor confidence in Oman’s industrial landscape.

The total volume of investments in Madayn’s industrial cities climbed to RO 7.6 billion, marking a 2.3% growth compared to RO 7.4 billion at the close of 2023. This equates to an additional RO 177 million in investments. Of this, industrial investments alone accounted for RO 151 million, with non-industrial projects contributing RO 62 million. Sohar Industrial City recorded the highest jump, adding RO 53 million in new investments.

The number of investment contracts stood at 2,310 as of June 2024, reflecting a modest 0.65% increase from the end of 2023.

50 years of ties between Oman and South Korea

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS of diplomatic relations, the Sultanate of Oman and South Korea mark their golden jubilee with a robust economic and strategic partnership. In an exclusive interview with the Oman Daily Observer, Kiejoo Kim, South Korean Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman highlighted the profound ties between the two nations, particularly in the energy and trade sectors. Over the past five decades, South Korea has become Oman’s third-largest trading partner, with a trade volume reaching \$5.8 billion as of 2023.

ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP AND ENERGY COLLABORATION

Ambassador Kim emphasised the depth of their economic relationship, noting, “Korea is now Oman’s third-largest trading partner, with a trade volume reaching \$5.8 billion as of last year.” This significant growth is largely driven by the energy sector, a cornerstone of their bilateral cooperation. Historically, liquefied natural gas (LNG) has been a key area of collaboration. “The long-term LNG contracts have been mutually beneficial, supporting Korea’s economic operation and Oman’s LNG sector development,” he remarked.

Looking to the future, both nations are focusing on renewable energy, particularly green hydrogen. Ambassador Kim stated, “Green hydrogen offers great potential for mutual benefit, aligning with our shared commitment to decarbonisation and net-zero emissions by 2050.”

Beyond energy, the construction and infrastructure sectors have flourished, with Korean firms bringing their expertise to major projects in Oman. The maritime industry has also been a significant area of collaboration. “Korean shipbuilders have been instrumental in enhancing Oman’s maritime capabilities with high-quality vessels,” noted Ambassador Kim.

The institutional framework supporting these business ties has been continuously enhanced. Key agreements, such as those for investment protection and avoiding double taxation, have solidified their economic exchanges. The Korea-GCC Free Trade Agreement concluded last year further strengthens this foundation, promoting greater trade and investment. Additionally, the Trade and Investment Promotion Framework (TIPF) between Korea and Oman serves as a guide for increasing mutual support and exchanges.

In terms of trade, LNG remains the top import from Oman to Korea, with \$5.3 billion in imports. Korea also imports crude oil, petrochemical products, steel, and



Kiejoo Kim, South Korean Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman and guests during the celebration of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Oman and South Korea.

non-ferrous metals from Oman. Meanwhile, Korea exports steel products, automobiles, heavy construction equipment, and household electronics to Oman. The introduction of Korean electric vehicles into the Omani market underscores a shift towards environmentally sustainable products.

SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS AND STRATEGIC FORUMS

The Korean Embassy in Oman, along with the Korea Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), plays a crucial role in supporting Korean businesses in Oman. Ambassador Kim explained, “Information and networking are vital in business collaboration. The green hydrogen strategic forums that the embassy hosted in 2022 and 2023 have fostered strong partnerships in this sector.” Looking ahead, the energy transition presents vast opportunities for Oman-Korea business relations. Beyond energy, sectors such as environmental technology, agriculture, water resources management, and ICT are set for growth. The embassy plans to organise forums and B2B engagements to capitalise on these opportunities.

EDUCATION AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE INITIATIVES

Education and technology transfer are also pivotal for long-term partnerships. The Global Korea Scholarship (GKS) programme has supported Omani students, and exchange programmes are in place. Ambassador Kim expressed enthusiasm for these initiatives, saying, “Education exchange is crucial as it benefits the future generation and enhances engagement.”

Cultural and sports exchanges further enrich the ties between Oman and South Korea. A number of cultural events, includ-

ing last year’s K-pop festival held in Muscat, have strengthened people-to-people connections. These initiatives, alongside economic engagements, highlight the multifaceted relationship between the two nations.

Ambassador Kiejoo Kim expressed optimism about the future, stating, “As we celebrate this milestone, we look forward to exploring new opportunities in renewable energy, technology, and other promising sectors.” The embassy is keen to leverage the 50th anniversary as a watershed, organising a variety of economic, cultural, and sports events to deepen the bilateral ties further.

One such event is a forum planned for later this year, where experts from both countries will collaborate on renewable energy projects. Additionally, a delegation of Korean firms specialising in water resources management will visit Oman to engage in business-to-business meetings, aiming to enhance cooperation in this critical area.

Cultural exchanges to be held in commemoration of the 50th anniversary will also play a significant role in strengthening the partnership. A musical performance on September 25 will feature a Korean traditional music band alongside Omani artists, fostering cultural understanding and appreciation. Furthermore, a Taekwondo Championship, organised in partnership with the Oman Taekwondo Committee, will take place from October 24 to 26, with participation from the World Taekwondo Headquarters in Korea.

These efforts underscore a commitment to not only consolidating economic ties but also enhancing cultural and social connections, paving the way for a vibrant and dynamic partnership between Oman and South Korea in the years to come.

MoCIIP begins evaluating smart production factories

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 7

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), in collaboration with the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting (GOIC), has started the first phase of the smart production factories project, which aims to enable Omani industry to adopt advanced technology and Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies.

This phase includes a detailed field evaluation of the participating factories based on specific criteria outlined in the evaluation matrix, which is based on the Smart Industry Readiness Index (SIRI).

The matrix is structured around three main pillars, divided into 16 dimensions, with each dimension offering an accurate assessment of the factories’ readiness to adopt 4IR technologies and providing recommendations for available development opportunities.

Highlights

The goal is to transform 30% of the factories into smart factories by 2026. A specialized technical team from the GOIC, which includes a certified and licensed evaluator from the International Centre for Industrial Transformation



The evaluation process aims to begin enabling five factories to adopt 4IR applications.

In its current phase, the evaluation process aims to begin enabling five factories to adopt 4IR applications and undergo digital transformation, selected from 20 targeted factories as part of the first phase during the year 2024.

The goal is to transform 30% of the factories into smart factories by 2026. A specialized technical team from the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting (GOIC), which includes a certified and licensed evaluator from the International Centre for Industrial Transformation, will work with a team from the

Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion to visit the targeted factories and meet with their teams to assess their current status using the specific criteria from the Smart Industry Readiness Index (SIRI).

The initiative to empower Omani factories with 4IR technologies and automation is part of the ministry’s efforts to implement the outcomes of the Industrial Strategy 2040. This initiative aims to enhance the competitiveness of the industrial sector by facilitating the transition to smart production factories.

The initiative seeks to modernize technology, create new production lines, reduce costs, increase factory efficiency, and create specialized jobs that align with educational outcomes.

The ministry also notes that the participation is open to factories interested in digital transformation to improve their operational processes, competitiveness, and efficiency.

How a taxi driver in El Salvador got rich with Bitcoin



NAPOLEON OSORIO

IS PROUD of being the first taxi driver to have accepted payment in bitcoin in the first country in the world to make the cryptocurrency legal tender: El Salvador. He credits President Nayib Bukele's decision to bank on bitcoin three years ago with changing his life.

"Before I was unemployed... and now I have my own business," said the 39-year-old businessman, who uses an app to charge for rides in bitcoin and now runs his own car rental company.

Three years ago, the leader of the Central American nation took a huge gamble when he put bitcoin into legal circulation in a bid to revitalise El Salvador's dollarised, remittance-reliant economy.

He invested hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer money in the cryptocurrency, despite warnings about volatility risks from global institutions.

Highlights

Napoleon Osorio now has

21

drivers working for his Bit-Driver brand and has made enough profit from the currency's rise to be able to buy four rental vehicles

Osorio credited the US founder of the NGO My First Bitcoin, John Dennehy, with encouraging him to accept payment in the cryptocurrency.

He now has 21 drivers working for his Bit-Driver brand and has made enough profit from the currency's rise to be able to buy four rental vehicles.

A divorced father of two teenagers, he also no longer struggles to pay for their education.

Launching bitcoin as legal tender on September 7, 2021, Bukele said he wanted to bring the 70 per cent of Salvadorans who do not use banks into the financial system and promptly began plowing public money in cryptocurrencies.

To spur Salvadorans to use bitcoin he created the Chivo Wallet app for sending and receiving bitcoin free of charge and gave \$30 to each new user.

His grand ambitions for bitcoin fell foul of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which hesitated to grant El Salvador a \$1.3-billion loan because of its official use of the cryptocurrency.

In August, however, the IMF announced a preliminary loan agreement with El Salvador, while saying it needed to mitigate "potential risks."

OFFERED AS 'OPTION'

While Osorio has grown relatively wealthy with bitcoin, a study by the University Institute for Public Opinion showed that 88 per cent of Salvadorans had yet to use it.

"From the beginning... it was clear that it was clearly an ill-advised measure that the population rejected," the director of the institute, Laura Andrade, said.

One-quarter of Salvadoran GDP comes from remittances sent home by family members, mostly from the United States.

But in 2023, only one per cent of the transfers were made in

cryptocurrencies.

In an interview with Time magazine in August, Bukele acknowledged that while "you can go to a McDonald's, a supermarket, or a hotel and pay with bitcoin" it had "not had the widespread adoption we hoped for."

He added that "the positive aspect is that it is voluntary; we have never forced anyone to adopt it. We offered it as an option, and those who chose to use it have benefited from the rise in bitcoin."

He also confirmed that he had around \$400 million in bitcoin that is kept in a public "cold storage wallet" — a way of storing bitcoin offline.

BITCOIN'S FORTUNES HAVE BEEN MIXED.

This week it was trading at around \$52,000, down from a peak of \$73,616 on March 13. In November 2022, it fell as low as \$16,189.

Independent economist Cesar Villalona said that Bukele himself had hobbled bitcoin's take-up by stripping it of the usual functions of a currency.

"Bukele... said: there will be no salary in bitcoin, there will be no pensions in Bitcoin, there will be no savings in Bitcoin and there will be no price in bitcoin, and in so doing took away the three functions of money," Villalona said.

Luis Contreras, an instructor at My First Bitcoin, said many Salvadorans were simply afraid of making the switch.

The organisation has taken cryptocurrencies into public schools, teaching around 35,000 students to use bitcoin so far.

Contreras says the hardest thing about training people on bitcoin "is their fear of new things, which creates a fear of technology" as well as "the fear of moving from a classic currency in the current economy to one that is totally digital and decentralised." — AFP

OPINION

US jobs report triggers market volatility and crypto downturn



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of the International Press Association

RECENT US employment data has triggered mixed reactions from macro investors. While the unemployment rate dipped slightly from 4.3% to 4.2%, the slower-than-expected job growth of 142,000 jobs in August, falling short of the 160,000 forecast, and signs of softening labor demand have raised concerns.

This uncertainty has led to volatile market reactions, with an initial rally quickly fading into a sell-off. Key market indicators reflect this anxiety: major US stock indices like the S&P 500 experienced declines of over 0.3%, mirroring a market downturn in early August.

Additionally, safe-haven assets like US government bonds saw increased demand, pushing the 10-year Treasury yield down to 3.73%, and the Japanese yen strengthened significantly against the US dollar. Speculation is rife about potential interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve, with officials like Fed Governor Waller publicly advocating for proactive and potentially aggressive cuts to address the changing economic landscape.

The cryptocurrency market also experienced a significant downturn on Friday, triggered by the release of the August jobs report which fell short of analyst expectations. Major cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and Ethereum saw substantial drops, underscoring the market's sensitivity to macroeconomic factors. The underwhelming job growth figures have ignited concerns about the health of the US economy, impacting investor confidence and prompt-

ing a sell-off in both crypto and traditional markets.

This heightened fear is reflected in the Crypto Fear and Greed Index, which currently sits at a low 22, indicating "extreme fear."

The index ranges from 0 to 100, with 0 representing "Extreme Fear" and 100 representing "Extreme Greed." On-chain data further reveals a shift in investor sentiment, with a notable decline in the percentage of Bitcoin holders in profit. This decline is partly attributed to the decrease in the percentage of Bitcoin Unspent Transaction Outputs (UTXOs) in profit.

UTXOs represent a specific amount of Bitcoin that remains unspent after a transaction. The drop in profitable UTXOs suggests that many investors are now underwater on their Bitcoin investments, further contributing to the market's fearful atmosphere.

The underwhelming job growth has also raised questions about the Federal Reserve's monetary policy decisions. Investors are closely watching for any signs of interest rate cuts, as a slowing job market could prompt the Fed to intervene to stimulate economic growth. Such a move could have a ripple effect on the crypto market, potentially impacting its trajectory.

Despite these challenges, some analysts see potential for a rebound, pointing to historical patterns that suggest a price surge could follow the recent drop in Bitcoin's UTXOs in profit. They argue that the current market downturn presents a buying opportunity for long-term investors. How-

Highlights

The unemployment rate dipped slightly from 4.3% to 4.2%, the slower-than-expected job growth of 142,000 jobs in August, falling short of the

160,000

forecast, and signs of softening labor demand have raised concerns.

ever, others remain bearish, predicting further declines in Bitcoin's price.

The market's current state clearly shows the inherent volatility of cryptocurrencies and their susceptibility to broader economic trends. While the short-term outlook may seem uncertain, the crypto market's resilience and potential for long-term growth remain key factors for investors to consider. The interplay between macroeconomic factors, investor sentiment, and on-chain data will continue to shape the trajectory of the crypto market in the coming weeks and months.

Against the backdrop of global market fluctuations, exacerbated by the looming US elections, discerning investors are turning towards sustainable innovation with long-term viability. While the initial excitement surrounding AI investments appears to be waning, possibly due to over-saturation, DePIN (Decentralized Physical Infrastructure Networks) has emerged as a promising and resilient sector within the decentralized tech sphere.

DePIN represents a novel approach to building and managing infrastructure in a decentralized manner. It leverages blockchain technology and token incentives to enable individuals to contribute resources like computing power, storage, or even physical assets like energy grids or wireless networks. In return for their contributions, participants earn rewards in the form of cryptocurrency tokens, fostering a more inclusive and participatory model for infrastructure development.

TRUMP’S SWF SIZE ENVY NOT GROUNDED IN REALITY

NEW YORK: Presidential candidate Donald Trump lamented on Thursday in a speech at The Economic Club of New York that the United States does not have a sovereign wealth fund unlike other nations. So he proposed creating the “greatest” one of all, which would approach, or exceed, a \$2 trillion pot. At the center of this idea, however, is half-baked goo.

Sovereign wealth funds ideally turn budget surpluses and other windfalls into stable long-term income for a country. Take Norway, which has accumulated a \$1.7 trillion war chest thanks to prodigious gas and oil exports. The country’s overall budget surplus, including petroleum revenue, was 16% of GDP last year according to Fitch. Because oil fields will eventually go dry, the country needs to have a method to fund itself. Generations to come should reap dividends.

The US economy is hardly in the same position. Sure, it’s the worlds’ biggest oil producer. The trouble is that the country also consistently spends way above its means. Last year the deficit of \$1.7 trillion equaled about 6% of GDP. It has contributed to around \$36 trillion of total debt, making it equivalent to more than 120% of gross domestic product in total. Trump has intentions to get the budget in check. He wants to increase tariffs and do “other intelligent things”, like adopt Tesla chief Elon Musk’s plan to cut extraneous spending. But he also plans to significantly reduce taxes. Researchers at the Wharton School of Business estimate Trump’s proposals already would add \$4 trillion to the deficit. Additional debt would potentially stoke inflation and raise borrowing rates.

And sovereign wealth funds aren’t necessarily everything Trump cracks them up to be. They often create honey pots for administrators to siphon off sweetness for themselves, or politicians to reward the connected. Norway is the fourth-least corrupt country according to nonprofit Transparency International’s annual perceptions index. But Angola has oil wealth and ranks 122 on Transparency’s corruption scale – that government said in 2019 that \$3 billion had been stolen from its fund. Trump’s sovereign wealth fund envy isn’t grounded in reality. — Reuters

Highlights

Researchers at the Wharton School of Business estimate Trump’s proposals already would add \$4 trillion to the deficit. Additional debt would potentially stoke inflation and raise borrowing rates.



QASIM AL MAASHANI



OMAN, A NATION rich in natural resources, is embarking on a transformative journey toward a sustainable energy future, with green hydrogen at the forefront of this transition. As a clean and versatile energy carrier, green hydrogen has the potential to reshape Oman's energy landscape, presenting both significant opportunities and challenges. This report delves into the strategic efforts underway in Oman's green hydrogen sector, examining its economic and environmental impacts.

Oman's commitment to green hydrogen is driven by several key factors. Foremost is the country's wealth of renewable energy resources, particularly solar and wind, which are crucial for green hydrogen production. As the global energy sector shifts away from fossil fuels, Oman sees diversifying its energy mix as a strategic imperative, aiming to reduce carbon emissions and enhance energy security. Additionally, green hydrogen presents the potential to create new industries, generate employment, and open up lucrative export markets.

A central player in this initiative is the Oman Hydrogen Company (Hydrom), tasked with spearheading the nation's green hydrogen ambitions. Hydrom is responsible for the development and execution of green hydrogen projects, attracting investment,

and establishing the necessary infrastructure. The company has been proactive in forming partnerships with international investors and technology providers, an essential step in accelerating the deployment of green hydrogen initiatives.

Oman has already made considerable progress in its green hydrogen journey, with several large-scale projects either underway or in planning. Notable among these are Hyport Duqm, Green Hydrogen and Chemicals, and Amnah Energy, among others, which aim to produce green hydrogen and its derivatives for domestic use and export.

The success of these projects is contingent on substantial investments in renewable energy generation, hydrogen production facilities, and supporting infrastructure. Oman is actively courting foreign direct investment to finance these ventures, seeking to leverage international expertise to bring these projects to fruition.

However, transitioning to a green hydrogen economy presents formidable challenges. Chief among these is the high cost of green hydrogen production compared to traditional fossil fuels. To overcome this, technological advancements and economies of scale are crucial to making green hydrogen more economically viable. Additionally, the establishment of a robust hydrogen infrastructure, including storage and transportation systems, is critical for

OMAN’S GREEN HYDROGEN AMBITIONS

integrating green hydrogen into the broader energy framework.

Despite these challenges, the opportunities presented by green hydrogen are vast. Green hydrogen can play a pivotal role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating climate change. The technology promises to foster new industries and create jobs, particularly in the renewable energy and clean technology sectors. Moreover, Oman's strategic geographical location positions it as a potential regional hub for green hydrogen production and trade, offering the nation a chance to emerge as a key player on the global energy stage.

Economically, the development of green hydrogen projects in Oman is poised to stimulate investment, create jobs, and invigorate domestic industries. On the international front, the export of green hydrogen and its derivatives could become a significant source of foreign exchange, supporting Oman's economic diversification efforts.

Environmentally, green hydrogen offers a promising path to significant carbon emission reductions. By replacing fossil fuels with green hydrogen across sectors such as transportation, industry, and power generation, Oman can substantially lower its greenhouse gas emissions, making a vital contribution to global climate goals.

International cooperation and strategic partnerships will be crucial to Oman's success in fostering a green hydrogen economy. Collaborating with other nations and international organizations can facilitate knowledge exchange, technology transfer, and access to global markets. Oman has been actively pursuing partnerships with countries and companies that possess expertise in green hydrogen production and utilization, recognizing that global collaboration is essential to achieving its green hydrogen aspirations.

The future of green hydrogen in Oman is undeniably promising. With its abundant renewable energy resources, strategic location, and strong government support, Oman is well-positioned to become a global leader in green hydrogen production and export. However, realizing this vision will require sustained investment, continuous technological innovation, and effective policy implementation.

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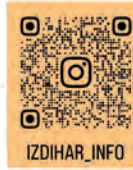
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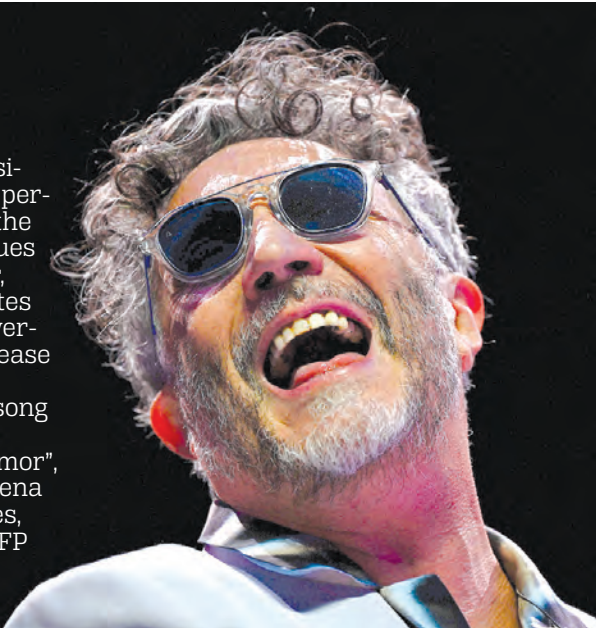
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TRAVEL

Farmers crack walnuts at home in Bayatis town west of Armanaz in Syria's Idlib province. The perennial walnut tree, cultivated around the Mediterranean since Roman times, has become a traditional crop in Syria. —AFP



MUSIC

Argentine musician Fito Paez performs during the "El amor despues del amor" tour, which celebrates the 30th anniversary of the release of his seventh album -and a song hit- "El Amor Despues del Amor", at Movistar arena in Buenos Aires, Argentina. —AFP



FASHION

A model prepares backstage before the Am/Jasmine collection by Chen Liang during the China Fashion week in Beijing. —AFP



LIFESTYLE

An Iraqi farmer climbs a palm tree during date harvest season in a field in Janjah village in Iraq's Al Qasim district south of Babylon. —AFP



FILM

Actress and singer Lady Gaga attends the red carpet of the movie 'Joker : Folie a deux' presented in competition during the 81st International Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido. —AFP

art & life

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HOW OMAN'S ROCKS COULD HELP SAVE THE PLANET

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A LOOK AT THE ACADEME

DR ZAINAB AL AJMI

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

New Academic Year: The Psychological Impact of Returning to School

ACCORDING TO THE ANNUAL Educational Statistics Book (2023/2024, p. 75), over (773,806) students are set to return to the classroom on Sunday as schools reopen for all pupils. While many children will be looking forward to seeing their friends and teachers, returning to school after an extended break can elicit a range of emotional responses in students, from excitement and eagerness to anxiety, stress and even depression.

Research indicates that these psychological effects are influenced by factors such as the student's age, personality, prior academic experiences, and social context. Ghandour et al. (2019) found that approximately (20%) of students experience increased anxiety at the beginning of the school year, often manifesting as sleep disturbances, irritability, or reduced academic performance.

It can be said that the beginning of any new academic year is a pivotal moment for students, teachers, and parents alike, characterised by excitement, anticipation and anxiety. This transition is more than just a return to classrooms and textbooks; it involves psychological adjustments that can significantly affect students' mental health and academic performance. The attitudes, behaviour, and actions of school staff, teachers and principals are important aspects of a welcoming school environment. First encounters during registration, responding to needs and questions, appropriate information and emotions from all staff member's matter.

For Parents: An initial impression, along with social-emotional factors and school climate variables, significantly influence their sense of being welcomed when they first enter a school. Educational research further suggests that when parents feel trusted, valued, and connected to school staff, they are more likely to engage actively in their children's education. Once an initial rapport is established, continuous efforts are necessary to sustain the school-parent partnership (Siegel et al, 2018).

What's more, students' psychological responses to the start of a new school year are influenced by several factors, including age, previous academic experiences, family environment and socio-economic status. Younger children may experience separation anxiety, while adolescents may struggle more with social pressures and academic expectations. Past academic experiences also shape students' attitudes, with those having faced prior challenges often feeling apprehensive, whereas those with positive experiences tend to feel more confident.

The family environment plays a crucial role, as supportive and communicative family dynamics can alleviate stress and foster a positive outlook, whereas high-conflict or unstable home environments can exacerbate anxiety symptoms. Parental involvement, particularly in helping children establish routines and manage their time effectively, has been shown to significantly reduce back-to-school.

Additionally, socio-economic status affects access to resources and extracurricular activities, as families may struggle to afford necessary school supplies, uniforms, or extracurricular fees. On the other hand, some strategies can help students mitigate negative psychological impacts for a successful academic year: 1. Establishing Routines: Consistent routines provide structure and help students manage their time effectively. 2. Goal Setting: Encouraging students to set academic and personal goals can motivate them to take ownership of their learning. 3. Encouraging Social Connections: Building friendships and maintaining positive relationships with peers is crucial to a student's social and emotional well-being. Programmes that promote social skills, such as group projects and peer-assisted learning, can help students develop these connections.

In conclusion, the start of a new academic year brings a range of psychological challenges that can impact students' well-being and academic success. By addressing the psychological impacts, emphasising preparation and creating positive learning environments, schools can set the stage for a successful year. The involvement of educators, parents, and students is essential in this collaborative effort to make the school year a positive and enriching experience.

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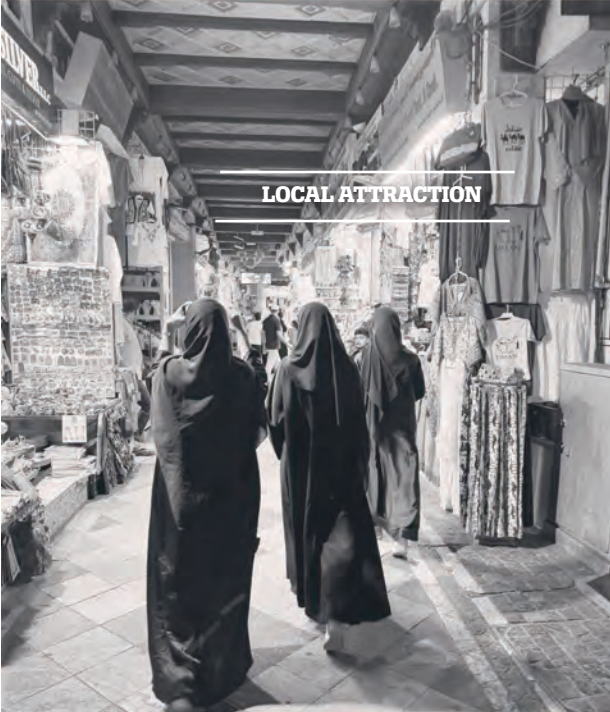


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CYCLING THE WESTERN BALKANS: A WILD, YET WELCOMING, MOUNTAIN TOUR

"HEY MATE!" A CYCLIST called to us in an Australian accent as he pedaled by on the rocky dirt road that serves as the main street of the village of Theth deep in Albania's Dinaric Alps. Along with my friend and travel companion, Dave, I had not seen another bikepacker in four days.

and steep rock faces, some of the terrain looks strikingly similar. In France and Italy, there are cyclists on every switchback of popular climbs, bike repair shops in most towns and a decades-old cycling culture. In Albania and Montenegro, Dave and I went days without seeing a single bike shop and

Montenegro. We had packed a water filter, repair kit and GPS, and both of us had gravel bikes with 38-millimetre tires. We planned to pedal a 200-mile loop with lots of elevation gain and cross through mountains from Montenegro to Albania. We picked a route that offered breathtaking climbs into the high mountains, with quiet roads and a balance of asphalt and gravel so that we could cover a lot of ground everyday but still enjoy car-free, empty sections.

Our loop started from Podgorica, with a climb above the Moraca canyon and views of the Mala Rijeka viaduct, the highest railway bridge in Europe. We left early, enduring a hot sun, but we met cooler temperatures after 7,200 feet of climbing into the mountains. After a short descent into a high elevation valley, we stopped at Restaurant Ribnak, a log cabin where the river flows directly beneath the deck, and the waiters catch the fish served for lunch next to your feet. It was too early in the day for lunch, but we had fried potatoes and baklava before continuing on.

The next day started with a long, steep, chunky gravel descent to the town of Andrijevisa and the valley along the Lim River below. (A nearby

hosting triathlons and the Skyrunning European Championships, in which runners navigate steep ridges, all above 6,600 feet.

It's a 4-mile ride from Gusinje to the Albanian border, where we had our passports stamped in a small wooden building by a border agent who seemed surprised to see anyone at all, let alone two cyclists. Over the border, we dunked ourselves in the clean waters of the Vermosh River, a reprieve from the afternoon heat. Our day's last climb had views of the Tamara Gorge on the Cem River, one of Europe's last free-flowing rivers.

With the temperatures over 90 degrees Fahrenheit, the descent felt like riding through a blow dryer, but we were greeted by a friendly host and excellent air conditioning at Guesthouse Rireyiana in the village of Tamare. Across the town square, the staff at the newly opened Ujevvara restaurant were more than happy to serve us an excellent and early 4:45 pm dinner of local trout and Greek salad.

TAMARE TO SHKODER

From Tamare to Theth would be another big day of climbing, with nearly 7,000 feet of elevation gain over 50 miles, and after the previous afternoon's heat, we decided to leave early. Waking at 5 am for a breakfast of cookies, bananas and peach juice — grocery store options were, shall we say, limited — we ascended some very beautiful switchbacks and then a more gradual climb to Boge, the last outpost before Theth. Not so much a town, Boge does offer accommodation options and small rest stops with cold water and other beverages. It was only 9:30 am, but with temperatures rising, we paused only briefly before the last long-ascent, which brings you into Theth National Park, which has most of Albania's peaks above 6,500 feet.

A long-descent found us at Theth, a small village mainly composed of guesthouses and several restaurants. We were done riding that day, and celebrated with a three-hour lunch of lamb, Fergese (a traditional Albanian dish with roasted red peppers, tomatoes and cottage cheese), cornbread, Greek salad and local beer at Bar Restaurant Jezerca. We shared a table with a couple who were hitchhiking and backpacking from Austria to Greece. Theth is a popular hiking destination with a 400-year-old "lock-in tower," which historically offered shelter to people engaged in blood feuds.

After a night at Kompleksi Zorzi, a family home transformed into a guest-house, we started our final day climb-



In June, Dave and I rode a section of the new 2,500-mile Trans Dinarica cycling route that connects Albania and the other countries in the Western Balkans through the Dinaric Alps, known as the "Accursed Mountains." The route starts in Slovenia, crossing through remote parts of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia on public roads with a mix of gravel, dirt and asphalt. By covering so much terrain, the Trans Dinarica is able to offer something for different types of cyclists, regardless of experience and skill.

As we quickly learned, biking the Trans Dinarica is not like cycling in the French Alps or the Italian Dolomites, although with limestone

long-stretches without even a grocery store. But the scenery is breathtaking, the roads are calm, and this rural zone is eagerly transforming into a tourist destination.

"The idea is to present the Balkans positively and to inspire people to see the Balkans from a different perspective and in a sustainable way," said Jan Klavara, a Slovenian and one of the creators of the Trans Dinarica. "It is an economical route because it brings business to an area that needs it. It is also cultural because it brings together areas that were divided by war and connects them all."

PODGORICA, MONTENEGRO TO TAMARE, ALBANIA

With limited time, Dave and I headed into the heart of the Dinaric Alps in



paved road is an alternative option, but to us, the panoramic views were worth the slightly spicy descent. I took my only fall of the trip when I bailed into a bush to avoid skidding out of a switchback. I was fine. Wildflowers were blooming, and even with smoke from wildfires in Greece, the view of Kucki Kom, the highest peak of the Komovi massif, was spectacular.

After rejoining the asphalt 9 miles later, we rode through the valley for a gentle climb then a descent into the village of Gusinje. Once at the intersection of the Ottoman trade routes between northern Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo, today Gusinje is transforming, with a renovation of its central bazaar and a push to become a sporting event hub —

ing back up the same descent and headed down toward Shkoder, an important city in northern Albania with nearly 2,200 years of recorded history that sits between Lake Skadar (known also as Lake Scutari, Lake Shkoder and other names) and the foothills of the Albanian Alps. Completing the loop, we took a taxi back across the border to Podgorica for 60 euros (\$65) with a driver who had spent 40 years in the Albanian police before retiring. We stopped at his house on the way to unload 15 3-gallon water jugs for his family. I wished I spoke Albanian, because he seemed to have excellent stories.

"They said it's the wildest part of Europe, and it never once disappointed," Dave said as we loaded our bikes into the taxi. —**NYT**

FILM



Dark, music-filled 'Joker' sequel brings Lady Gaga star power to Venice

A DARK AND music-filled "Joker" sequel brought Lady Gaga to Venice on Wednesday, playing the star-crossed love interest of the DC Comics-inspired anti-hero in one of the year's most anticipated films.

The megastar was the main attraction at the world premiere of "Joker: Folie à Deux" at the Venice Film Festival, one of 21 films vying for the top Golden Lion prize at the prestigious competition.

Todd Phillips's 2019 film starring Joaquin Phoenix subverted the codes of superhero films in a disturbing commentary on alienation in American society, with the film going on to win at Venice that year and handing a Best Actor Academy Award to Phoenix.

On the red carpet, Lady Gaga drew screams from fans, where she showed off an elaborate mask that suggested two pointy Batman ears draped with a swathe of Venetian lace, paired with a black velvet gown with a generous taffeta skirt.

Ahead of Wednesday's premiere, the pop star and actress confessed to having been "deeply moved" by the original film, in which an ignored, mocked and mentally ill stand-up comic, Arthur Fleck (Phoenix), is driven to violence.

"The first film really deeply moved me. I loved it so much," Lady Gaga told a press conference, calling Phoenix's performance one that "set the bar extremely high."

"I think sometimes when stories are told about people that are maybe misunderstood by society, the director gives you a chance... to really take a hard look at that world in a deeper way," Lady Gaga said.

"I felt like when I watched the first film I got to understand something I may not have seen before, that's why I did this movie."

The sequel heavily relies on musical numbers to express the inner feelings of Fleck, in dark, brooding renditions of classics such as "Get Happy" or "For Once in My Life".

Phoenix told journalists how he "had this dream that I was performing as Joker doing songs and I just called Todd because I thought there might be something there."

That idea took flight, and Lady Gaga was the next piece of

the puzzle, Phillips said.

Both actors sang live on set, Phoenix said, an element that created a "necessary" energy.

"Early on she was like 'Oh, we're going to sing live' and I was like 'No, we're not. You can sing live if you like.' And ultimately we did it and it was really the only way," Phoenix told journalists.

The film's music was a vehicle to "give characters way to express what they need to say," Lady Gaga said.

"We worked really hard on the way that we sang. For me it was a lot about unlearning technique and forgetting how to breathe, allowing the song to completely come out of the character," she said.

Lady Gaga later announced on Instagram that the first single on her next album called "LGT" would be released in October.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

In her return to the big screen after 2021's "House of Gucci", Lady Gaga plays Harley Quinn, the partner in crime and love interest of the Joker, with whom she becomes obsessed as he awaits trial for his murder spree.

The film — loosely based on the DC Comics characters and set in a gritty Gotham City — was wildly successful, grossing \$1 billion at the box office but sparking criticism for its nihilistic violence.

Phillips said he was happy to return to Venice, but "a little more nervous" this time around.

"I think it's a lot easier to come in to something as the insurgent as opposed to coming in as the incumbent," he said.

"There's a lot more expectations on a second film so there's definitely a sense of more nervousness than I had with the first one."

In co-writing the screenplay with Scott Silver, Phillips said he knew it would have to be as daring as the original in order for Phoenix to sign on again.

"If we really were going to do it, it had to scare him in the same way the first one did. It had to feel audacious," he said.

This year's festival has been awash in Hollywood pizzazz, with a long roster of A-listers taking a twirl on the red carpet, from Daniel Craig and Angelina Jolie to Nicole Kidman and Michael Keaton. —**AFP**

How Oman's rocks could help save the planet

IN THE ARID VASTNESS of this corner of the Arabian Peninsula, out where goats and the occasional camel roam, rocks form the backdrop practically every way you look.

But the stark outcrops and craggy ridges are more than just scenery. Some of these rocks are hard at work, naturally reacting with carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and turning it into stone.

Veins of white carbonate minerals run through slabs of dark rock like fat marbling a steak. Carbonate surrounds pebbles and cobbles, turning ordinary gravel into natural mosaics.

Even pooled spring water that has bubbled up through the rocks reacts with CO₂ to produce an ice-like crust of carbonate that, if broken, re-forms within days.

Scientists say that if this natural process, called carbon mineralisation, could be harnessed, accelerated and applied inexpensively on a huge scale — admittedly some very big “ifs” — it could help fight climate change. Rocks could remove some of the billions of tonnes of heat-trapping carbon dioxide that humans have pumped into the air since the beginning of the Industrial Age.

And by turning that CO₂ into stone, the rocks in Oman — or in a number of other places around the world that have similar geological formations — would ensure that the gas stayed out of the atmosphere forever.

“Solid carbonate minerals aren’t going anywhere,” said Peter B Kelemen, a geologist at Columbia University’s Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory who has been studying the rocks here for more than two decades.

Capturing and storing carbon dioxide, is drawing increased interest. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says that deploying such technology is essential to efforts to rein in global warming. But the idea has barely caught on: There are fewer than 20 large-scale projects in operation around the world, and they remove CO₂ from the burning of fossil fuels at power plants or from other industrial processes and store it as gas underground.

What Kelemen and others have in mind is removing carbon dioxide that is already in the air, to halt or reverse the

gradual increase in atmospheric CO₂ concentration. Direct-air capture, as it is known, is sometimes described as a form of geo-engineering — deliberate manipulation of the climate — although that term is more often reserved for the idea of reducing warming by reflecting more sunlight away from the earth.

Although many researchers dismiss direct-air capture as logistically or economically impractical, especially given the billions of tonnes of gas that would have to be removed to have an impact, some say it may have to be considered if other efforts to counter global warming are ineffective.

A few researchers and companies have built machines that can pull CO₂ out of the air, in relatively small quantities, but adapting and enhancing natural capture processes using rocks is less developed.

“This one still feels like the most nascent piece of the conversation,” said Noah Deich, executive director of the Centre for Carbon Removal, a research organisation in Berkeley, California. “You see these sparks, but I don’t see anything catching fire yet.”

Kelemen is one of a relative handful of researchers around the world who are studying the idea. At a geothermal power plant in Iceland, after several years of experimentation, an energy company is injecting modest amounts of carbon dioxide into volcanic rock, where it becomes mineralised. Dutch researchers have suggested spreading a kind of crushed rock along coastlines to capture CO₂. And scientists in Canada and South Africa are studying ways to use mine wastes, called tailings, to do the same thing.

“It’s clear that we’re going to have to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere,” said Roger Aines, who leads the development of carbon management technologies at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California and has worked with Dr Kelemen and others. “And we’re going to have to do it on a gigaton scale.”

If billions of tonnes of CO₂ are to be turned to stone, there are few places in the world more suitable than Oman, Sultanate of Oman with a population of 4 million and an economy based on oil and,

increasingly, tourism.

The carbon-capturing formations here, consisting largely of a rock called peridotite, are in a slice of oceanic crust and the mantle layer below it that was thrust up on land by tectonic forces nearly 100 million years ago. Erosion has resulted in a patchy zone about 200 miles long, up to 25 miles wide and several miles thick in the northern part of the country, including here in the outskirts of Ibra, a dusty inland city of 50,000. Even the bustling capital, Muscat, on the Sea of Oman, has a pocket of peridotite practically overlooking the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos’s palace.

Peridotite normally is miles below the earth’s surface. When the rocks are exposed to air or water as they are here, Kelemen said, they are like a giant battery with a lot of chemical potential. “They’re really, really far from equilibrium with the atmosphere and surface water,” he said.

The rocks are so extensive, Kelemen said, that if it was somehow possible to fully use them they could store hundreds of years of CO₂ emissions. More realistically, he said, Oman could store at least a billion tonnes of CO₂ annually. (Current yearly worldwide emissions are close to 40 billion tonnes.)

While the formations here are special, they are not unique. Similar though smaller ones are found in Northern California, Papua New Guinea and Albania, among other places.

The rocks here may be capable of capturing a lot of carbon dioxide, but the challenge is doing it much faster than nature, in huge amounts and at low enough cost to make it more than a pipe dream. Kelemen and his colleagues, including Juerg Matter, a researcher from the University of Southampton in England who was involved in the Icelandic project, have some ideas.

One possibility, Kelemen said, would be to drill pairs of wells and pump water with dissolved CO₂ into one of them. As the water travelled through the rock formation carbonate would form; when it reached the other well the water, now depleted of CO₂, would be pumped out. The process could be repeated over and over.

There is a lot that is unknown about

such an approach, however. For one thing, while pumping water deep into the earth, where temperatures and pressures are higher, could make the process of mineralisation go tens of thousands of times faster, so much carbonate might form that the water flow would stop. “You might clog everything up, and it would all come to a screeching halt,” Kelemen said.

Experiments and eventually pilot projects are needed to better understand and optimise this process and others, Kelemen said, but so far Omani officials have been reluctant to grant the necessary permits. The researchers may need to go elsewhere, like California, where the rocks are less accessible but the state government has set ambitious targets for reducing emissions and is open to new ways to meet them.

Kelemen and Aines have had preliminary discussions with California officials about the possibility of experimenting there. “We would certainly be a willing and eager partner to help them with it,” said David Bunn, director of the state Department of Conservation.

Perhaps the simplest way to use rocks to capture carbon dioxide would be to quarry large amounts of them, grind them into fine particles and spread them out to expose them to the air. The material could be turned over from time to time to expose fresh surfaces, or perhaps air with a higher CO₂ concentration could be pumped into it to speed up the process.

But a quarrying and grinding operation of the scale required would be hugely expensive, scar the landscape and produce enormous CO₂ emissions of its own. So a few researchers are asking, Why not use rocks that have been quarried and ground up for other purposes?

Such rocks are found in large amounts at mines around the world, as waste tailings. Platinum, nickel and diamonds, in particular, are mined from rock that has a lot of carbon-mineralisation potential.

Gregory Dipple, a researcher at the University of British Columbia who has been studying mine tailings for more than a decade, said early on he found evidence that waste rock was forming carbonate without any human intervention. “It was clear it was taking CO₂ from the air,” he said. —NYT